Higher education and the future challenges

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SUMMARY

The University has been providing for centuries of traditional functions associated to progress, knowledge construction and transmission of knowledge, it has been set as one of the engines of economic development of society and one of the poles of education throughout life. Today the universities are in a process of transformation and radical changes as they represent a transcendent activity that requires a significant time investment of human and financial resources to adapt and be competitive in domestic and international markets, considering the globalized world in which higher education is.

Nowadays, university education has characteristics that define it as the educational process of higher education that takes place in an institution that acts in the search, acquisition and construction of scientific knowledge, as well as constant critic intellectual process knowledge. Traditionally, at the university, as in many other educational institutions, the teacher is the one who knows and the student who must assimilate this knowledge responsibly.

With the current global trend of competency-based approach, it becomes more complex and demanding process of educational planning in higher education and requires a specialist teacher training, enabling those learning tools and technical procedures to ensure that curricula possess a higher degree of validity and reliability in meeting the training needs.

INTRODUCTION

In the complexity of the classroom different communication processes take place, therefore, the teacher must be a good communicator (López, 1989).

1. Education

At present, education takes a prominent place in national and international debates. We live in a globalized and interconnected world, in which competition is increasingly fierce, and it is not seen in the short term, when this situation changes, therefore, we must know how to face that reality, that implies that the product offered by the educational institutions, and especially universities (professionals), are competitive, efficient and with a humanistic sense.

Today's education faces many challenges. One of them is to respond to the profound social, economic and cultural changes that are envisioned for the information society.

Training our young people in anticipation of the future has become a challenge, maybe the greatest challenge facing humanity and today's teaching. This generation of young people will have to live a completely different world from the current one, which poses new demands to education in our days.

What education? For what future? They are questions that introduce us to analyze different scenarios: Do we want an education for productivity and for competition or for solidarity? Do we want to form Nicaraguans or in some cases people for the globalized world? Educate for freedom or for social justice? Educate for competition or for coexistence in diversity? (Cordero, 2015).

The term «education» is commonly used in everyday life because it affects us all in some way. Everyone would dare to give a definition of education. Although there are different ways of conceiving it, and even more to carry it out, the idea of perfection, linked to an ideal vision of man and society, is given as a common denominator. Education appears precisely as a facilitator of human ideals (Lopez, 1989).

The concept of education is extremely complex when it pretends to be exhaustive of all its meanings and implications, and cannot be otherwise since, as it has been indicated, it implies the totality of the human being and the social context. Mialaret (1977, quoted by Lopez, 1989) argues that, in the broad sense, education is as old as man. In fact, since his appearance, man was concerned with raising and caring for his children until they could fend for themselves (p.1).

Education means the only possible realization of the human being, but it cannot be a mere external imposition, but, in order to reach his noblest goals, it needs the voluntary cooperation of the subject himself. This idea also includes delimitation, so that education can achieve its goals by itself (López, 1989).

Immanuel Kant (1977, quoted by Gallego, 2012) expresses that, speaking of Education, we inevitably approach the human being. He adds that reflecting on education without mentioning man is impossible, since all education refers to something unique and exclusive to human nature. The human being is born biologically indeterminate and needs to receive the influence of others to pass from the natural state of humanization to that of humanization. It will be the educational activity responsible for it. *"Man is nothing more than what education does for him"* (page 24).

At present three general meanings can be applied to it:

1. To speak of education often means referring to a social institution: the educational system. This is how we talk about Western education, Spanish education, modern education and others, giving it a historical-comparative or socio-political content.

2. The word *"education"* is also used to designate the result or product of an action. This is what is called a *"good"* or *"bad"* education, an education adapted or not to the demands of time, a conservative or progressive education and others.

3. The third meaning refers to the process that relates in a predicted or unforeseen way to two or more human beings and places them in a situation of exchange and reciprocal influences.

It is in this third sense as it is often used in formulating a scientific theory about education.

The three interpretations are closely linked. The theoretical conceptions of the educational process find their generalized materialization in educational institutions, which achieve certain results according to how they are organized and according to how they conceive the educational process (López, 1989).

Education as a human, social, cultural and economic process in which its full potential is activated, translated into people prepared to share life, well-being and common development, constitutes an immense stream that carries very important previous original components and generates the ability to swell them quantitatively and qualitatively. Education generates development and development innovates education, all passing through the human person in its individual, social and citizen dimension (Arrien, 2012).

2. Constituent elements of Education

- Education as an Action

There are two key elements in the definition of education: the subject being educated *(the pupil)* and the subject that educates *(the educator)*. However, as the subject agent of education personalizes all the social context that intervenes in the process of conformation of the student, hence it can be said that there is an educating subject and an educating society.

The situation produced is always dynamic, according to which the subject is made personally by the influences he receives from the outside and that act on his capacities, developing them and crystallizing them. That is why it is stated categorically that "man is not born, but is made".

At the same time, the subject acts on the external environment thus contributing to its transformation and evolution; Hence society is not static and immovable, but with greater dynamism the greater the possibility of individual influence on it.

One or another aspect of this dynamic interaction between individual and society can be emphasized. Thus, there are those who pay special attention to the "development" of the subject, emphasizing "natural needs" and trusting that the improvement will be achieved in respect of the initiative of "mother nature", to which educational action must be subjected (López, 1989).

Traditionally, education has been considered as a process in which the main protagonist was the teacher, only carrier and guarantor of knowledge, and in which the communicative relationship established in the classroom was purely transmissive, hierarchical and unidirectional. A process in which the students had nothing to contribute, nothing to say, nothing to opine, nothing to question.

We all have the image of the serious teacher, the gesture, speaking wisely before an audience of students, who sit in silence, trying to accumulate the greatest amount of information that is brought to them, which do not question and whose main importance is to reproduce it with the greatest possible reliability, in a future examination.

3. The University today: Challenges and Questions

At present, university education has characteristics that define it as the educational process of higher education that takes place in an institution that acts in the search, acquisition and construction of

scientific knowledge, as well as a constant critical intellectual process of that knowledge.

Traditionally, in the University, as in many other educational institutions, the teacher is the one who knows and the student must assimilate that knowledge. The expectations created around the world are based on the student's ability to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the knowledge transmitted by the teacher (Noguero, 2007).

The University is at a crossroads of difficult solution: on the one hand, it is an institution that has reached the threshold of the knowledge society with a great prestige, the fruit of centuries of work; And on the other, their own structures and methodologies of work that are outdated and stagnant, since many of them come from the Middle Ages and do not respond to the challenges of today's society, conducive to a better construction and transmission of knowledge.

Although there is a great need in the world for high-level qualified personnel such as engineers, scientists, technical staff and others, the number of students entering these studies is still low. Despite considerable advances in the psychology of learning and university pedagogy, teaching methods in Higher Schools have been stuck in empiricism and are characterized by their scarce efficacy and possible stimulating capacity. Teaching is one of the main tasks of a teacher, a mission that he can practice for more than 30 years, the criterion of almost exclusive selection is his capacity as a researcher and he does not receive any pedagogical training before or after his entry in function (Noguero, 2007).

4. Teaching at the University does not need specialized training

The practice of teaching does not require specialized training and, moreover, it is not necessary for an upgrade or permanent training in many universities. The exercise of university teaching, which is still mainly empirical, carried out by experts from different professions who do not have specific training in Didactics of Higher Education, has generated in tertiary education institutions a series of limitations in terms of Planning, curriculum design, teaching-learning, assessment, achievement of competencies, validity, reliability and accreditation.

With the current global trend of the competency-based approach, the process of educational planning in higher education becomes more complex and demanding, and specialized training is required for teachers to enable them to learn the tools and technical procedures that ensure that Curricula have a greater degree of validity and reliability, in order to meet the training needs of future professionals as well as the needs of employers, companies, the market, society and globalized citizenship (Maldonado, 2012).

5. From knowledge to competencies

To compete in the knowledge society, it is not enough to know the rules of spelling, the theorem of Pythagoras or the fundamental dates of history. It is not enough to write well, handle mathematical operations, and know historical processes.

The society of the XXI Century requires something more complex than mere 'knowledge': it requires Competences. Today we ask the school not only to know, but 'skills'. What are competencies? A competition is a 'know-how', with 'knowing' and 'conscience'.

The term 'competition' refers to a set of properties of each of us that is constantly being modified

and has to undergo the test of solving concrete problems, whether in daily life or in work situations, that contain some uncertainty and some technical complexity.

The big difference is that the competence comes not only from the approval of a curriculum (curricula), but from the application of knowledge in practical circumstances. Knowledge needed to solve problems cannot be transmitted mechanically; Are a mixture of previous technological knowledge and the experience that is achieved with practice, often achieved in the workplace (Aguerrondo, 2009).

The competences are in the middle, between the 'knowledge' and the 'skills'. Thus, competences, as a set of unstable properties of persons, which must be tested permanently, are opposed to the qualifications that were measured by a diploma and by seniority in the task. The important thing today is to be competent, that is to say, to know how to do things, to solve situations.

6. The quality of university education

The current movement in favor of raising the quality levels of Higher Education proposes, firstly, a clarifying effort on the concept of quality and its implications. The first specific approach to educational quality, in addition to the permanent and traditional, reference to a "good education", a "good curriculum" or a "good university", corresponds historically to the period of planning and developmental euphoria centered in the decade of the sixties, and the concept is used without clear theoretical connotations.

Quality is attributed to the action of qualitative factors, that is, those elements that cannot be expressed quantitatively or present serious difficulties to the quantification. These elements are fundamentally related to the processes that determine the so-called Internal Efficiency of the System or Quality of Education (Vega, 2015).

6.1. Future Challenges

The characterization of the concept of "University quality" requires overcoming the tendency to consider in itself the specific characteristics according to the context, input, process, product and purpose of education in each institution and try to identify common features in all. It seems obvious that, if two or more university institutions with different cultures and values are considered high quality, it is not possible to link the quality of education with values, goals and objectives, programs, teacher training, specifics of each institution.

Quality must be based in some common characteristic to all the institutions, beyond these elements in which they differ. Consequently, in order to conceptualize the quality of education, it is necessary to overcome the isolated consideration of the specific characteristics of the different elements or components and to focus attention on the relationships between them.

The improvement effort must be made in search of an integral education as a process that assures the acquisition of significant knowledge and the development of capacities that allow the university student to conceive himself as immersed in a social reality of which he is an active part and, which is not only a knowledge expert in a specific field, but also a competent citizen. That is to say, the quality of education should be understood as the interrelationship between updated curricula and curricular contents oriented to participatory methodology.

The global tendency to promote accreditation mechanisms, given the globalization of markets, goes from being "voluntary" to being indispensable for the subsistence of the university, therefore, this subject must be of special interest to the academic community. The project of a new university is being developed within the framework of policies and social ones (Vega, 2015).

Faced with the processes of globalization and the formation of large economic blocs, it is necessary to increase the competitive capacity of the human resources of the countries. Competitiveness implies knowledge, technology, information management, but above all, acquisition of skills and abilities, development of creativity and the potential to propose solutions to new problems.

To be a student today, to be inserted in a process of teaching-learning at any level, basic, medium or superior, requires rethinking the demands of the new educational systems, in order to prevent failure and maladaptation to them. Traditional learning schemes, based on the reception of knowledge, the assignment of the main role to the teacher, and the delegation of responsibility in learning to factors other than the student, should disappear (Santos, 2008).

The process of expansion of universities is an undeniable trend in Latin America and the world; however, its expansion, often in disorder, is not free from constraints generated by obeying the pressures of the commodification of education rather than the assurance of quality (Maldonado, 2012).

Education in today's world and according to the new demands of quality in education, is based on competencies and challenges, both academic and curricular, with the aim of improving the quality of learning and making universities more competitive and everyday producing more research on topics of interest to both the student and the teachers who demand more knowledge, but they demand it with a maximum of knowledge and skills empowerment in the classroom with different approaches to knowledge and methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, and those put into practice with different tools of strategies in the classroom that allow innovation with quality in teaching (Galvez, 2015).

Teachers should be in constant training on new knowledge and with new strategies or methodological tools to make the student enthusiastic, interested in the subject in question, and provide more teaching-learning. Universities must contribute more resources to the innovation and training of their teachers to be more competitive and provide greater contributions to the scientific knowledge of both the student and teachers and the entities that every day demand from professionals with greater knowledge and abilities of innovation and skills (Galvez, 2015).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

No one doubts today, that university education is in a moment of transformation and search for a new sense of knowledge, urged by social reality and the demand for quality. Universities are taking steps towards a more open and flexible space that prepares personally and professionally for life and that responds to the problems that today's society has, the processes of change that affect society in general and education in particular, the unstoppable march of economic globalization and socialization of knowledge.

Creativity is the soul of innovative strategies oriented to learning, because it is the student who has to go showing the acquisition of the skills agreed in each of the careers. The sense of globalization

of learning is an immediate consequence of this transformation.

A professional is a competent person in their field capable of analyzing and solving problems and proposing improvements (innovate). The university teacher must be an innovative, creative professional with mastery of the training content and didactic strategies, capable of making students enthusiastic about learning. This would be the key to raising the teaching action in the university towards the future.

Education in today's world and according to the new demands of quality in education is based on competencies and challenges, both academic and curricular, with the aim of improving the quality of learning and making universities more competitive and everyday producing more research on topics of interest, both for the student and for teachers who demand more knowledge, but they demand it with a maximum of knowledge and skills empowerment in the classroom, with different approaches to knowledge and methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, and those put into practice with different tools of strategies in the classroom that allow innovation with quality in teaching.

With the current global trend of the competency-based approach, the process of educational planning in higher education becomes more complex and demanding, and specialized training is required to enable teachers to learn the tools and technical procedures that ensure that the curricula have a greater validity degree and reliability in meeting the training needs.

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