Internationalization in university teaching strategies: a proposal

Propuesta de internacionalización desde las estrategias didácticas universitarias

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Abstract

This paper aims at integrating internationalization in university teaching strategies to improve high learning through "internationalization at home" activities that permit the development of students' skills and values. This would allow for an internationalized vision of the alumni for their professional performance in a globalized, competitive world. Indeed, internationalization should not be viewed as a series of isolated events through which a limited number of people lives an experience abroad but as way for a larger number of individuals to perceive its benefits by means of an educational plan; that is, an international perspective from teaching strategies in higher learning. To do this, a three-phase analysis process is proposed: diagnosis, planning/development and evaluation. In addition, different possible activities with an international component are mentioned to make them part of the teaching strategies according the students' levels and course objectives. Throughout the analysis for the present proposal, it has been possible to conclude that with the work done in the classroom very valuable skills can be developed in university students for their academic and professional growth, which would fit the current demands of the new millennium.

Keywords: Internationalization, university, strategies, teaching, intercultural education, innovation.

Resumen

El presente trabajo propone la incorporación de la internacionalización desde las estrategias didácticas universitarias para la mejora de la docencia mediante actividades de "internacionalización en casa" que permitan el desarrollo de valores y competencias en el estudiantado y faciliten esa visión internacional a los egresados de distintas carreras, para su desenvolvimiento en el globalizado y cada vez más competitivo mercado laboral. La internacionalización no debe verse como una serie de hechos aislados por medio de los cuales un número limitado de individuos tiene la experiencia de vivir fuera de su país; sino que, sus beneficios puede expandirse a más personas a través de actividades que formen parte del planeamiento educativo; esto es, una perspectiva internacional desde las estrategias didácticas a nivel de educación superior. Para esto, se propone que el docente pase por un proceso de auto-reflexión de tres fases: diagnóstico, planeamiento/ejecución y evaluación. En el desarrollo de la propuesta se mencionan distintas posibles actividades que pueden

ejecutarse como parte de dichas estrategias y que también pueden adaptarse a diversos niveles según los objetivos de cada curso universitario. A través del análisis efectuado para esta propuesta se concluye que se pueden desarrollar competencias valiosas en el estudiantado desde el contexto áulico acordes con las demandas del nuevo mileno, para su desarrollo académico y profesional.

Descriptores: Internacionalización, universidad, estrategias, didáctica, educación intercultural, innovación.

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, the advance of the technology makes borders between the countries diminish, allowing a constant exchange of information among the inhabitants of the planet in a more agile way, and showing the globalization from which humans are part and the changes experienced by it. Education is part of this transformation. In fact, "higher education has transcendental challenges in the current globalized world" (León, 2004, p. 345), for González (2007) "It is precisely the institutions of higher education one of the main areas in which knowledge is generated, disseminated and transferred" (p. 1).

In this sense, visualizing an academic formation as something limited to the context of the immediate reality is to deny the transcendence of the globalized society. Thus, the new generations of professionals meet the demand for a broader education and the current demands, which are not limited to the local context but take into account trends and values around the world; hence, the internationalization of higher education.

Internationalization can be approached from very broad perspectives, for Sittenfeld *and Muñoz (2012),* from internationalization "the multiple forms of exchange and the opportunities that promote and propitiate the universities of the world are rescued" (p. 2).

However, when referring to this concept it is important to note that internationalization can be addressed from different perspectives, even within the classroom, incorporating it as part of the didactic strategies developed by teachers, giving the students a look to the rest of the world. According to Knight (2004), one of the perspectives of the internationalization adopted by many has to do with the inclusion of an international, intercultural and/or global dimension in the curriculum and the teaching and learning process.

The aim of this research is to demonstrate some ways to integrate internationalization in the didactic strategies in the university classes by means of activities that do not imply the mobilization of students to other countries but that would allow the approach to other nations and cultures, fostering tolerance and the destruction of stereotypes from the classrooms to bring the global vision up to all university discourses.

2. Theoretical frame

2.1. Definition of internationalization

According to the International Association of Universities (2012), internationalization is an evolutionary process that changes according to the current social context, and is precisely globalization the most important contextual factor that governs the internationalization process nowadays, because it is characterized by the interdependence between the nations and it is manifested in the cultural, political, economic, social and educative areas. This association also points to the accelerated mobility of people, goods and services as well as the use of information and communication technologies.

In accordance with the definition provided by the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, *International* refers two or more nations, or pertains or relates to countries other than its own. Internationalization can therefore be applied to different areas: enterprises, laws, art or education. In this case, it will focus on the

internationalization of higher education from activities performed in the classroom, since "an integrative view of internationalization includes other strategies that can be incorporated into the curriculum and that do not necessarily imply the inter-country mobility " (Trigos, 2016, p. 13).

2.2 Internationalization in Institutions of Higher Education

According to Theodoridis (2015), in times of increasing technological changes and intense tendencies of globalization, it would be unnatural not to pursue changes in higher education. However, the work of internationalization in the university is not something that results from the reality of these days. For Cantu (2013) one of the first visions of international education is given with the Nobel Peace Prize Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who mentioned that it was precisely through internationalization that it was possible to develop the mutual understanding between people and cultures. This author says that internationalization is an effort to create global competencies in response to diversity and multiculturalism.

According to Knight's definition (2006), cited in Zolfaghari, Sabran y Zolfaghari (2009), internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service of an institution, it requires to be a dynamic process and not isolated activities. (p. 2). In other words, it is used in order to improve all the elements that constitute a university.

However, it is worth keeping in mind that globalization and internationalization are related but do not mean the same because:

> The internationalization of higher education can be defined as a transversal axis of institutional policy, from which projects and strategies are generated, and the programmatic and management articulation of it is aimed at contributing with a better visualization of what constitutes the project of academic

development in the higher education in the present (Muñoz, 2005, p. 17).

Internationalization gains value from globalization but are not parallel; internationalization functions as a transversal component in education, in order to respond to the demands of the globalized society of these times.

Undoubtly, this process of internationalization is known for the university, there are several spheres in the institutions of higher education (IHE) that generate policies around the internationalization in all its areas that allow the development of cooperation agreements, which in turn promote the formation of academic networks (Moctezuma and Navarro, 2011).

In teaching, this contributes to the purpose of the university to train professionals with the capacity to "attend to the changes that are exposed at the regional and international level" (Aguilar and Riveros, 2015, p. 100). Thus, internationalization can be used in order to improve educational processes, including the educational field in the new demands of modern society.

There are different reasons that justify internationalization for the improvement in IHE. According to Guido and Guzmán (2012), among these reasons are political, economic, academic, cultural and social. As for political reasons, Guido and Guzmán (2012) point to the role of the country in the world, "where higher education plays an important role in the global positioning of the country" (p. 6).It is from this perspective that the scholarships offered to students are considered as a "political investment" as it is invested in their education and academic improvement, which in turn enriches the institution by returning the student with a scholarship with a greater knowledge of other cultures as well as a greater empathy towards the country that welcomed them; this without belittling the country of origin or the host country, but rather developing an atmosphere of tolerance between different nations and cultures.

On the other hand, there are economic reasons. Internationalization in universities can mean economic benefits if students from foreign countries who finance their tuition are received, this economic generation allow capital to be injected into other important projects. Also, the academic reasons "that relate to the achievement of international academic standards for teaching, research and social action, which are also important in the accreditation processes and national and international recognition" (Guido and Guzmán, 2012, p. 6) are one of the most important in trying to include strategies that strengthen the teaching and learning process through a component that increases the quality of education.

Finally, cultural and social reasons have to do with respect and appreciation for the own culture as well as for foreign cultures and languages. In fact, one of the points that constitute more attention when proposing internationalization as a transversal axis of a curriculum is that in the desire to understand new languages and values, people do not neglect their own values or national culture, but rather, strengthen them and project them to the other countries of the world. In this regard, Qiang (2003) points out as a key element the notion between national and cultural identities, referring to the unique history of a country, its indigenous culture, resources and priorities which shape its response and relations with other countries, therefore, the culture and national identity are key elements in the internationalization of higher education.

Trigos (2016) refers to the four perspectives of internationalization on higher education presented in Qiang (2003): *The perspective of activity, competence, ethos and process.* The first is the exchange of student and teacher and the reception of international students, which is the most popular. The second, as its name implies, encourages the development of competencies in the graduates to have knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be right-handed in international and intercultural dynamics.

On the other hand, ethos perspective emphasizes the establishment of a culture of support for international and intercultural initiatives. As Trigo says: "This approach implies considering internationalization far beyond the mobility or use of English as a second language to generate a change in institutional cultural practices" (2016, p. 8). Finally, the perspective of the process "emphasizes the integration of the international dimension into teaching, research and service through the combination of different activities, policies and procedures that are part of a process" (Trigo, 2016, p. 8).

Specifically, this didactic proposal is more inclined towards a competence perspective, through the implementation of methodologies that favor the topics from this more global and tolerant perspective, to form a professional in coherence with current demands. Competencies are understood as the "combination of skills, knowledge, and attitudes, and the inclusion of the willingness to learn in addition to knowing how" as defined by the General Head Office for Education and Culture of the European Commission (2004) cited by Garcia (2011, p. 4). It is also intended that through the proposed practices, teachers improve through the incorporation of international elements that do not currently use in their classes and that systematize those used, which will contribute to the transformation of the object of study of the careers in their different spaces. What is proposed in these lines is a vision of the internationalization from the daily work done in the classroom but that could materialize in other projects in the future.

2.3. Teaching strategies

The university teaching is living a process of constant transformation, especially from the entry into this new millennium, the changes must be contemplated in the work of the university teacher because they are of great importance to be product of the Dynamics of the social reality in which it is immersed. From this perspective,

we must contemplate new visions of the world, the advancement of technology, for example, makes the generation of knowledge that is produced from the universities, have to be given at a faster pace, according to the emergence of new advances Technology as well as another series of challenges in the different fields of academia, all different but complementary. Similarly, Ferreiro (2006) referred to the students of the new generations, specifically the generation N, also known as the millennium or digital generation, which represents the people born from the decade of the 80, which are influenced by the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in their growth and teaching process. These students have peculiar pedagogical implications while "it is impossible to keep them attentive in a traditional classroom, with a seated professor exposing a content that can perfectly consult on the Internet" (Ferreiro, 2006, p. 78). Under this framework, the didactic strategies that correspond to this transformation are explained.

De la Torre and Violant (2013) define the didactic strategy as a dynamic concept, as an "adaptive procedure or set by which are organized sequentially the action to achieve the desired purpose or goal" (p. 6). This process is dynamic as it admits changes and adapts to the various contexts, the didactic strategies are flexible, "and act as a bridge between goals or intentions and actions to achieve them" (De la Torre and Violant, 2013, p. 6), hence the importance of its good planning.

Likewise, Tobón (2006) says the strategies represent a set of techniques and activities that facilitate the scope of a learning goal; therefore, the didactic strategies are of great importance in the obtaining of objectives in the classroom because by means of well thought out strategies students have successful results in their learning.

In this regard, Delgado and Solano (2009), emphasize that a didactic strategy is composed of: professor, students, content and context of learning. It is necessary to take into account all these elements when planning a certain strategy

and not losing sight that "these components are led by an academic objective carefully composed taking into account this distinction" (López, 2012, p. 6), each activity, technique and strategy must have a clear academic objective.

Specifically, in university education:

> The preparation and development of educational leaders is essential, not only through programs to provide knowledge and skills that allow to function effectively and efficiently but to offer vision, attitudes and perspectives that provide a solid basis for transforming everyday practice (Prieto, 2007, p. 11).

In this sense the well elaborated didactic strategies at the university level have a vital function, because "the university teaching task is so complex that it requires the professor to master some pedagogical strategies that facilitate the teaching process" (Sánchez, s.f, p. 1). In addition, "university students from all over the world demand from their teachers a pedagogical training that allows them to orient and conduct the best way of teaching" (Mata, 1999, p. 160), so the creation of didactic strategies fulfill functions that pursuit an integral formation that include aspects according to the change of the society for an innovative teaching, since "Innovation is considered linked not only to the learning processes of the students but also to the processes of personal and professional development of the professors" (García-Varcárcel, 2003, p. 42).

3. The proposal

3.1. The internationalization in the university teaching strategies

This incorporation is done through activities with some international component; in this sense, internationalization is seen beyond the isolated fact of the exchange of certain discourses and teachers, because even though this is an important effort, it is limited to a restricted number of individuals. By means of the international-

ization in the didactic strategies, it is intended to reach a greater number of people, regardless their economic condition; thus, generating a greater impact. For this, teachers must not comply with any particular requirement because every teacher can develop it, whatever their area; rather, a process of self-reflection composed of three phases: diagnosis, planning and evaluation is proposed.

Trigos (2016) mentions that "internationalization as a teaching and learning strategy is not an isolated activity but a set of strategies to foster international and local understanding, as well as the development of Intercultural Competencies" (p. 15) and that is precisely the objective. In addition, Fernandez (2004) points out that "Participation in the teaching-learning process requires to take into account some issues that are generators of knowledge, such as culture" (p. 1) and not only the culture in which the society is immersed but other cultures.

In this sense, ICTs play a vital role because if the resources that come from ICTs are used, it is not necessary to create conventions or reforms the institutional laws to include internationality in the classrooms, since ICTs "as a transversal effect are contributing to the internationalization of education, allowing to shorten distances, expand education beyond frontiers and network education and viable new pedagogical practices" (Siufi, 2009, p. 138). Therefore, the contribution that can be obtained from the technologies is extremely valuable for these purposes.

The followings are the phases of self-reflection to incorporate internationalization at home:

3.1.1. Diagnosis

A diagnostic evaluation should be initiated by the teacher, on his or her own knowledge not only of his/her subject but also on the methods to apply on his/her pupils and the values or transversal subjects to be included in a curriculum. As stated by Avolio de Cols e Iacolutti (2006, p. 137), the purpose of the diagnostic evaluation is "to obtain information on the situation of the subjects, in terms of knowledge and capacities deemed necessary to successfully initiate new learning processes", it seems optimal to apply this reasoning to teachers so that they can analyze what knowledge and skills will help them to begin in their inclusion process of internationalization in the classroom.

Therefore, this diagnosis is proposed as a stage of teaching self-evaluation on its knowledge in the internationalization field in the curriculum as a transversal axis. It is pointed out as a transversal axis since it will not be explicitly taught in the lessons, nor will it modify the objective pursued in the subject, but rather it will expand it with a view of what happens in other cultural fields.

A diagnosis may or may not take a long time as it may imply a rethinking of knowledge; however, the time of this reflection will be of great benefit to the desired end. Rodríguez (2009) points out that "the university professors are challenged to become researchers of their own teaching task" (p. 3) and this requires an update of their knowledge and reflection on their practices according to the social and technological demands.

As far as internationalization is concerned, Mestenhauser (2000) mentions that the existing literature seems to answer questions about what international programs or projects the universities have while the question should be addressed to whether the students are taught to face the challenges of the 21st century and it is in this direction that this diagnostic self-evaluation should go.

3.1.2. Planning and execution

In this specific case are detailed different activities that can be part of the educational strategies of university courses with the internationalization component. It is not a question of teaching lectures on internationalization, but it is addressed as a transversal axis for achieving class, course and career objectives. Therefore,

transversality refers to "a curricular strategy by which some axes or subjects considered priority in the training of students, permeate the entire curriculum, that is, are present in all programs, projects, activities and study plans" (Velásquez, 2009, p. 36). This is precisely what is proposed in this work, internationalization to be conceived like subject of interest and therefore that would permeate in all the university courses independently of the area of knowledge to face the future professional challenges. In any case, Rodríguez (2014) says that "the university has been and will be inherently international; consequently, internationalization will be transversal at each academic stage and process" (p. 149).

In the first instance, it is important that this component be viewed from the approach of the class objectives. Rodríguez (2009) points out that this objective should clarify what the teacher wants to happen in the classroom and "This phase of didactic planning is considered essential for the rest of the actions to undertake" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 6). Since the didactic strategy is a set of steps to follow to achieve a goal, planning becomes vital.

Evidently, in foreign language courses, it is much more common to develop strategies that include an international component, initiating by teaching a language of a foreign country, which implies the knowledge of other culture. In these cases the challenge is for the teacher to apply activities other than the one the professor usually uses.

Particularly, the role of technologies is vital in this regard, "it is important to mention the importance of information and communication technologies as complementary and supportive resources for the implementation of didactics for higher education" (Moreno, 2011, p. 43), different places in the world can be reached by technology without leaving the house, technological advances have become very valuable resources to internationalize didactic strategies; In fact:

> One of the strategies that has changed in recent years by the increase in the use of technologies in information and communication

is mobility, which has gone from being mostly in-person to virtual modalities, or "internationalization at home (Verdejo and Valdés, 2016, p. 24)

3.12.1. Activities with international components

Below are some activities that could be incorporated into the teaching strategies, as a way to carry out this "internationalization at home" referred by Verdejo and Valdés (2106):

- To use didactic material in other languages and according to the level of the students.
- To present and analyze foreign documentaries.
- To interact with foreign students who are part of different academic programs available in the country or region.
- To interact with community cultural groups.
- To make video conferences with students/professionals in other countries.
- To do academic tours to foreign companies with offices in the country.
- To create material by the students in which they project their own reality and present it on the Internet, preferably international.
- To program talks about customs of different Latin American countries and their applicability in their field.
- To work with news from other countries: essays, case studies, problem solving through which peer evaluation and collaborative work are also carried out.
- To interact with students of their careers in other universities through web pages or social networks.
- To invite professors or foreign professionals who inhabit the country either permanently or limited, to lecture a specific lesson or talk about the subject under study.
- To discuss and analyze scientific articles.

- To read theses corresponding to related careers in foreign universities.
- To participate in international congresses or symposia carried out in the country.
- To motivate students to publish research work at advanced levels and in native or foreign language.
- To analyze study programs of foreign universities, equivalent to their course or career.

This last point is especially important and requires a particular motivation and guidance on the part of the faculty, who should ideally support the student to complete his/her work until becoming suitable for a publication "in order to achieve the specialized communication with the international professional community" (Verdejo and Valdés, 2016. P. 26).

It is demonstrated that internationalization can occur from different branches of knowledge (Priego, 2016; Trigos, 2016; Farfán and Durán, 2016; Verdejo and Valdés, 2016; Barbosa-Chacón *et al.,* 2016) using various strategies to incorporate this element according to the discipline. Evidently, since it is the development of didactic strategies, the activities cannot be isolated; hence, the importance of conscientious planning on the part of the teacher, since each activity should be carefully thought out to become a step towards the scope of the objective, so it should also be given along to another series of actions to meet the requirements of the course and the purposes of the class.

3.1.3 Evaluation

Once the didactic strategy has been carried out, it is important to know the perception of the students through an evaluation activity; as Forés and Trinidad (s.f) point out, "any self-respecting formative action contains an element that legitimate; that element is the evaluation" (p. 1). The evaluation should be carried out considering that the effects of the implementa-

tion of the strategies will not necessarily happen immediately, but rather will develop over the time, but this process can serve as a reflection to improve what professors do in the classroom. This is because:

> Participation is not enough but is accompanied by a introspection and reflection process on the experience and incorporation of the international elements in the professional and personal practice of the students (Verdejo and Valdés, 2016, p. 28).

In other words, the efforts made to improve university teaching through the introduction of internationalization would be insufficient if it is not viewed from an integral and reflective process.

Also, an assessment activity can be carried out in different ways, according to the creativity and practicality of the professor, the relevant idea is to have information that comes from the students so that the professor measures somehow, and analyzes, the effectiveness degree of the strategy. However, in order to have more rigorous information for the purpose of an eventual disclosure, it is important to use a structured instrument to document the pedagogical experience, given that "evaluation is a process that makes possible fundamental decisions in the educational area" (Neuser, 1989, p. 245), hence the importance of the inclusion of an evaluative stage in the process.

In addition to the importance of knowing the effect of these strategies on students, the professor should also evaluate themselves to know the results of this teaching process. According to Fraile (2010), the self-evaluation is "the evaluation that a person performs on himself/herself or on a process and/or personal outcome", and continues saying that in education "most of the times this term is used is to refer to the self-evaluation of the students, but teachers can and should also evaluate themselves" (p. 7), certainly something valid and necessary after this process. Of course, the effects on education are not

immediate, but a reflection on each strategy used is necessary.

In general, the planning of carefully elaborated strategies, which correspond to the demands that the current society demands of the new professionals, is a task of the university professor.

4. Conclusions

The incorporation of an international component in the development of the university didactic strategies allows the students to approach to the rest of the world; and as part of the activities that emerge from this scenario the international component allows the inclusion of all in this process.

The increase of tolerance, the reduction of stereotypes, the development of competencies in cohesion with the reality of today's society, the recognition of their own value are some of the benefits of such incorporation for the improvement of teaching University.

As stated by Steiner (2000), if taken into account that universities are agents of change for individuals and societies, an internationalized higher education institution has great responsibility to the various parties involved as well as to citizens at local, international and global levels.

In addition, having constant contact with other languages and/or cultures opens the students mind and curiosity to participate in processes that involve the mobilization, like scholarships or internships, something that sometimes is not used to the maximum in some universities, sometimes due to ignorance of students or even lack of motivation. The constant contact from the classroom to the knowledge of what happens outside the country, from an academic and humanist perspective, would contribute to the desire to participate in international opportunities "away from home".

In this sense, what is proposed in this paper is not a question of imparting a certain course with a purely international approach, but

to contemplate this component in the course of some of the didactic strategies; is to determine which activity allows this international or intercultural approach and that at the same time corresponds to the educational purpose intended with the didactic strategy used.

The responsibility of the university professor is vital in society, and so is the role played by today's professionals in the various disciplines, each time with more working competency but at the same time with a commitment to be up to date in their knowledge and skills with a tolerant tone, respectful of the world and all people.

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