

Cooperation as a strategy for the internationalization of education

La cooperación como estrategia para la internacionalización de la educación

A cooperação como estratégia para a internacionalização da educação

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Abstract: Internationalization is a substantive function of higher education institutions that allows educational interactions to be carried out in search of relevance, quality and coverage, through various strategic actions related to the curriculum under quality standards so that academic programs are shared and generated with the corresponding recognition of degrees. This process of internationalization interaction is essential to encourage the participation of members of the academic community. An important element is the development of exchange and research activities through collaboration and innovation networks that allow expanding coverage using educational models with the use of information and communication technologies.

Keywords: University internationalization; University cooperation; Technologies and internationalization.

Resumen: La internacionalización es una función sustantiva de las instituciones de educación superior que permite llevar a cabo interacciones educativas en búsqueda de pertinencia, calidad y cobertura, mediante diversas acciones estratégicas relacionadas con el curriculum con estándares de calidad de manera que se compartan y generen programas académicos con el correspondiente reconocimiento de los títulos. En este proceso de internacionalización la interacción es fundamental para fomentar la participación de los miembros de la comunidad académica. Un elemento importante es el desarrollo de actividades de intercambio e investigación mediante redes de colaboración y de innovación que permita ampliar la cobertura empleando modelos educativos con uso de tecnologías de información y comunicación.

Palabras clave: Internacionalización universitaria; Cooperación universitaria; Tecnologías e internacionalización.

Resumo: A internacionalização é uma função substantiva das instituições de ensino superior que permite que interações educacionais sejam realizadas em busca de relevância, qualidade e abrangência, por meio de diversas ações estratégicas relacionadas ao currículo com padrões de qualidade para que os programas acadêmicos sejam compartilhados e gerados com o correspondente reconhecimento de titulações. Nesse processo de internacionalização, a interação é essencial para incentivar a participação de membros da comunidade acadêmica. Um elemento importante é o desenvolvimento de atividades de intercâmbio e pesquisa por meio

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de redes de colaboração e inovação que permitam a ampliação da cobertura utilizando modelos educacionais com o uso de tecnologias de informação e comunicação.

Palavras-chave: Internacionalização universitária; Cooperação universitária; Tecnologias e internacionalização.

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Introduction

Internationalization in the academic world is linked to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which gives rise to the concepts coined by UNESCO as education without borders and transnational education. González (2007) mentions that globalization is an action that affects higher education and internationalization is “one of the ways in which higher education reacts to the possibilities and challenges of globalization.” In this sense, internationalization is defined as the diversity of policies and programs that governments and universities implement to respond to globalization.

The internationalization policy should focus on different levels of development, which considers the diversity of HEIs, their legal nature, their local or regional and their institutional educational project.

To remain current, HEIs have had to take into account the impacts of social changes associated with scientific and technological advances, having to visualize how they want to be recognized in the short, medium and long terms, where internationalization must be considered. which implies a process of transformation of its organization and operation.

The internationalization of education is a topic in constant evolution, where collaboration between educational institutions has been fundamental, both to offer joint programs, to carry out academic exchanges of content and materials, to carry out research, to promote the search for enriching academic experiences by students. and teachers, commonly called mobility, access to specialized educational programs and learning about other cultures, are elements that are unique to it.

Collaborating is working together, in a symmetrical and supportive way, cooperating allows HEIs to do better what they already do by themselves, or achieve something that they could not do if they tried it in isolation or independently, so associating and networking for the generation of communities that interact and support each other are necessary, and even indispensable.

With the increasing incorporation of technology into education, it has been possible for students from all over the planet to access online educational courses and programs from institutions located in various countries around the world. Which has favored the development of more and varied distance programs with opportunities and challenges of a more global education, which has led educational institutions to include international perspectives and intercultural approaches in their study plans.

International cooperation and collaboration also allows the creation of unconventional study modalities, where non-face-to-face education favors the generation of educational models of pedagogical innovation, flexible didactically and technologically, in addition to contributing to inclusion and social relevance.

Although when we talk about internationalization it is associated with stays at a national or international level. Nowadays, it can also be done remotely when there are no conditions to move or live somewhere else.

This is considered an opportunity to form global citizens in a changing world, so that integration, cooperation and collaboration provide students the possibility of having a relevant social, cultural and educational experience in a context of globalization, although in a different or non-traditional, since through information and communication technologies, they meet people from other countries, with whom they can interact, study and generate learning networks.

The pandemic taught the world to visualize that it is possible to redefine and expand the coverage of quality education through virtual means, and that it is beneficial in many aspects: coverage, flexibility, technicalization of methodologies, openness and access to new audiences (Rubio , 2023).

Challenges of internationalization

Internationalization is part of the transition from national education to globalized education, and the basis of a change in education that, from being exclusively a good at the service of the country, becomes a social and service good with increasingly international components, he points out. Roberto Antelo (2016).

Among the mechanisms that are closely related to internationalization is the issue of strategic and operational planning as a transversal axis . When it comes to linking countries, exchanging programs or supporting mobility, whether virtual or physical, close collaboration between educational institutions is required, being clear about the

purposes, objectives and goals that are expected to be achieved, that includes resources and strategies to be able achieve them.

The process of internationalization of education in turn requires taking into account some circumstances or conditions that can become challenges, for example, linguistic and cultural barriers, which is key to overcome to have clear and fluid communication in addition to facilitating integration in a new social and cultural environment.

The recognition of degrees in different educational systems and countries is often complicated and can affect the mobility of students and the exchange of teachers in each country. Although there are various initiatives aimed at the development of international strategies, where they even have points of agreement, there is no valid sharing with recognition for the majority of them, in terms of the curricular value of the programs, which makes it in another great challenge.

In this sense, student mobility is a reality in the international context, with academic credit being the instrument that has allowed greater recognition of learning and has been established as a transfer unit between Higher Education Institutions (Sánchez and Martínez, 2004) hence the importance of having a common understanding in the region to strengthen quality and encourage collaboration.

Another element that must be considered is accessibility; if it is physical mobility, there may be limitations to its cost. Once all the admission requirements have been met and even with scholarships, a minimum of financial resources is required. This situation decreases to the point of almost disappearing in an online modality, although presential interaction is lost. However, a well-designed educational program, regardless of the educational modality taken, must consider the standards from one country to another due to that these may vary.

Therefore, quality assurance is essential; in the case of carrying out joint programs, these aspects are taken care of during their development, with respect to the academic load, as well as in their registration and the corresponding instrumentation.

UNESCO points out that students become internationally mobile when they temporarily reside in a country other than the one in which they are studying, with the aim of carrying out academic activities; it is then that the most implemented internationalization strategy of HEIs is student mobility (Gómez-López, 2020).

Technology and international distance education

In recent years, information and communication technologies (ICT) have generated a technological impact on education. Studies suggest that technologies applied to education have improved teaching (Sangrá (2020), García-Aretio (2021), Hodges, et al. (2020)). Students learn in less time and classes are more attractive when they use tools.

Nowadays, when talking about education it must be done with a broad vision. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to review concepts and reflect on the importance of open, distance and mixed models in higher education in Mexico and the world. It is not just a matter of thinking about the effects of attendance or not to the physical spaces traditionally designated for formal education, but in the challenges that arose regarding the interactions of teaching practice and student learning (Agüero, et al 2021)

In a health crisis situation like the one that occurred, the use and application of technologies, as an emerging educational policy, became a first-order need. ICTs were used as an alternative to save school cycles at all educational levels throughout the world.

The evolution of digital technologies as communication resources, approaches to knowledge and as means for learning, came to support education as a whole.

This scenario is presented as an opportunity to generate changes, investigate, innovate and intervene after studying and analyzing the situation, to promote educational development and obtain better learning in a search process to improve higher education in a relevant way, with the purpose to develop more open and flexible study plans and programs (Pardo and Cobo, 2020).

Digital technologies are not the solution to the challenges of education, at all its levels, of teaching practice and the different ways of learning, but they are part of the solution to the challenges faced by teachers and students (Mateo and Lee, 2020; Reich, 2020).

Even though most HEIs use technologies in their training processes, the internationalization of higher education must also go through an adaptation process when different and innovative models or strategies are tested in order to achieve better levels of quality and efficiency, hence the need to strengthen alliances to reinforce cooperation.

It is clear that internationalization strategies have changed, the distances with ICT have been shortened and this favors the promotion of exchanges of good practices in areas such as double degrees and mirror classes, summer schools and other options that help promote and promote the implementation of flexible models adapted to each context.

In this sense, joining efforts and sharing knowledge, institutions and companies can create cutting-edge joint educational programs. International collaboration provides benefits that translate into a diverse educational offer adapted to the needs, in addition to strengthening relationships between actors and generating opportunities for rapprochement between HEIs from different countries and cultural contexts.

Collaboration between educational institutions

The role of HEIs as promoters of development is clear to generate proposals for solutions to social problems, the development of science and technology, as well as the application of innovative models in training and dissemination, through research. joint inter-institutional, interdisciplinary and international actions, which is reflected in the improvement of processes where the articulation and convergence of educational systems is necessary.

Internationalization has different manifestations, if we look inside the institutions at the issue of quality and relevance taking into account international standards, it includes elements such as the educational offer and its teaching methods, research, extension and management.

Looking outwards, what is sought is the projection of that offer, the recognition of the institution and its scope of action, it is useful to review the areas of opportunity to guide internationalization strategies (Sebastián, 2005).

It is appropriate to recognize that there are already actions in this sense, and therefore joint and articulated work must be consolidated. To achieve this, instruments and conditions are required that facilitate it and guarantee the quality of higher education at the national and international level. Some ways to achieve this are, for example:

Actively participate in networks and research projects, other things being equal, it must promote student and teaching mobility, carry out professional internships in international or transnational companies, organize and carry out academic activities and events of an international nature, promote teaching and student participation. in international academic activities.

It is also necessary to incorporate teachers from foreign higher education institutions, manage double degrees and joint degrees for undergraduate and postgraduate programs, offer joint training and continuing education programs, teach foreign language courses with their own or joint certification (Chalup, et al., 2021). These and other actions carried out through

strategic alliances bring benefits to both the students and the institutions involved and many of them can also be carried out remotely.

If we take into account that the mobility and exchange of students is one of the expressions of face-to-face education that mostly identifies internationalization, we must take into account that with the increasing use of information and communication technologies, new areas are opening up. of operation at the national, regional and international level because ICTs offer other opportunities and forms of cooperation in transnational strategies.

These must be included in the institutional development plans. In this order of ideas, international mobility can be transformed into distance education programs, giving the opportunity to expand coverage to the extent that access to studies does not depend on economic, spatial and temporal conditions.

International cooperation, symmetrical and supportive, is therefore a privileged instrument to increase inter-institutional relations, and the areas of action are very varied. It is not only about what is related to mobility, since there is also the case of institutional organization and management, curricular updating and educational offer. International activity is also very valuable for the expansion of teachers and their professional updating, as well as for the development of joint research.

In the case of distance education, internationalization shares some characteristics with face-to-face education, but it also has certain particularities, especially related to the incorporation of developments in information and communication technologies.

The effectiveness of cooperation is associated with two conditions: the precise definition of objectives and the appropriate selection of participants. It is advisable, from an institutional perspective, to concentrate cooperation and avoid its dispersion. The objectives determine the modalities of cooperation, which implies evaluating alternatives.

It can be seen that, when talking about the internationalization of education, it is not limited to a single way of conceiving it, it also encompasses quality assurance systems, where the internationalization of accreditation agencies and the licensing processes of programs and of professionals shows a significant expansion (Rama, 2015).

It is important to look at internationalization as an opportunity for exchange and participation in thematic networks with a multicultural, metalinguistic and inclusive vision, as well as for the creation of mechanisms that promote virtual collaboration and the recognition of studies.

Conclusions

Higher Education Institutions have learned and developed new visions, and are aware of the importance of adapting to continue fulfilling their responsibilities in training, research and with society.

The pandemic marked the definitive leap to testing various educational models, with hybrids being the ones that have mostly been accepted because students have the option and opportunity to learn from home and attend the university campus only to do work in laboratories and interact with study groups or projects.

This variant includes activities, programs and courses, both virtual and in-person or combined, and adaptive training routes, according to the personal, professional and work aspirations of each student.

And something fundamental, they must be very flexible. It's not that everything should be virtual or all presence, or fifty/fifty. It is about adapting to the conditions that each science requires and the objectives that each training or research program has defined.

Another important lesson learned from social isolation is the revaluation of the internationalization of educational programs, the recognition of studies and the validation of degrees, as well as the importance of academic mobility which is indicative of the quality of the networks in which their students and teachers participate.

Mobility today has a broader perspective than the traditional one, since the pandemic gave us the opportunity to experiment and evaluate the potential of using technology.

Consequently, universities must open themselves to another way of promoting mobility, as a vehicle to achieve the necessary international cooperation, including both in-person and virtual mobility (e-mobility) (León, 2021).

This includes incorporation of global content, interaction with students from different countries through technology, foreign visiting teachers or those who are teaching online courses, that is, programs with participants and teachers from different nations. Although it is recognized that this already happens in certain institutions, it still does not exist as a generalized practice with official recognition or validity.

With the promotion of internationalization, the learning objectives in the study plans, contents and experiences must allow the educational community to develop a diverse, competitive and global perspective so that, from an interdisciplinary vision, shared solutions to problems are found as a result of cooperative efforts.

International student mobility, according to Villanueva (2021), should be considered essential to enrich the multicultural and plurilingual training required by contemporary

professionals and feeds the multi-ethnic configuration of higher education institutions, combining face-to-face, virtual or mixed modalities.

In this way, a globalized scenario can be generated and the generation of strategic alliances between which mobility is not only towards HEIs in a traditional way, but also helps to generate good practices and educational quality.

Promoting internationalization through agreements that favor cooperation and academic support is essential if we hope to establish multilateral processes of training, linkage, exchange, mobility and research, from a diverse and global perspective (LGES-Mx, cited by Casanova et al., 2023)

“Higher education has reaffirmed and integrated the values and principles of internationalization such as the promotion of intercultural learning; inter-institutional cooperation based on mutual benefit, solidarity and respect; the commitment to support the concept of higher education as a global good based on integrity, academic quality, equitable access, reciprocity, the development of the skills of global citizenship, the advancement of international collaboration in research, as well as have the solution of global problems at the center of their efforts” (Gacel-Avila, 2021), but also local, regional and countries and regions.

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