

En Himmet Karadal, *10th EMI Congress Proceeding*. Estambul (Turquía): EMI Congress.

Internationalization, Curriculum and Integration of Higher Education in South America.

Quiroga, Sergio.

Cita:

Quiroga, Sergio (2024). *Internationalization, Curriculum and Integration of Higher Education in South America*. En Himmet Karadal *10th EMI Congress Proceeding*. Estambul (Turquía): EMI Congress.

Dirección estable: <https://www.aacademica.org/sergio.ricardo.quiroga/249>

ARK: <https://n2t.net/ark:/13683/pgPS/pT2>



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10th International EMI Entrepreneurship & Social Sciences Congress,
10-13 September 2024, Targoviste / Romania

10th International EMI
Entrepreneurship & Social Sciences Congress

PROCEEDINGS E BOOK

Editors:

Prof.Dr.Himmet KARADAL
Dr. Neslihan DUMAN
Asst.Prof.Dr. Menekşe ŞAHİN KARADAL

Proceedings Book

ISBN: 978-605-73415-5-6

DILKUR Academy



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Quiroga, S. (2024). Internationalization, Curriculum and Integration of Higher Education in South America. In Proceedings 10th International Entrepreneurship Social Sciences Congress. September 10-13, 2024. Targoviste/Romania. Pages 882-887. Available in <https://www.emissc.org/en>

Title: Internationalization, Curriculum and Integration of Higher Education in South America

Author: Mgter. Sergio Quiroga

Institution: Project Changes and Trends in Higher Education. Policies, Subjects and Practices. Looks from Education and Philosophy (Universidad Nacional de San Luis, Argentina)

Email: sergioricardoquiroga@gmail.com

Introduction

This article examines the literature on the internationalization of the curriculum in higher education in South America, identifying two major contrasting trends, each with different approaches and objectives. The internationalization and regional integration of universities in Latin America are not exclusive objectives, but rather complementary facets that reflect the universalist nature of the university. One approach to the definition of curriculum internationalization refers to "the internationalization of the curriculum as a strategy to

promote the inclusion in curricula of international and regional perspectives, trends and strategies. This strengthens competencies, skills, attitudes, values and knowledge of different disciplines and areas, so that they reflect the mission and profile of each university" (Fazio and Coppola, 2015).

On the one hand, there is the market-oriented perspective, driven mainly by supranational institutions and organizations such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO). In this view, internationalization is closely associated with economic globalization and is considered an almost hegemonic paradigm. It focuses on North-South cooperation and seeks to respond to the challenges of higher education in a context of market liberalization. On the other hand, there is the perspective of solidarity, endogenous and horizontal internationalization. This approach seeks institutional development and strengthening, as well as improving the quality of higher education in a broad and equitable manner.

Methodology

The aim was to gather and study the current literature on the internationalization of the curriculum in South American universities, to account for its emergence, within the framework of the university integration processes experienced by higher education organizations in the region. In Latin America, for at least a decade, those responsible for curricular management at university institutions have recognized the need to implement educational policies related to regionalization and internationalization. These policies focus especially on research areas and undergraduate educational offers, with the main objective of guaranteeing the mobility of professors and researchers, the holding events to joint academic cycles and academic student mobility.

Findings

The educational MERCOSUR was a coordination body between the Ministries of Education of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. In 1992 in Las Leñas, Argentina, the Triennial Plan of the Education Sector in the context of MERCOSUR was approved by the bodies of the Treaty of Asunción and the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Meeting of Ministers were created. This initiative demonstrated the willingness of universities in the region to cooperate, above local governments and policies. This Committee has formed technical working groups in various areas: technological education, higher education, official MERCOSUR languages and information systems.

Internationalization actions, such as academic cooperation, student exchange programs, development cooperation, mobility of professors and researchers, internships and language immersion courses, imply an institutional commitment. This commitment seeks to manage knowledge and develop flexible curricula that facilitate the homologation of programs and double degrees, thus strengthening academic mobility.

To understand the processes of internationalization of the curriculum in universities, it is necessary to define the internationalization of higher education. Following Knight (2011), internationalization can be defined as a process that integrates the substantive functions of the university: teaching, research and extension. This process is dynamic and positions internationalization as a proactive response of institutions to globalization processes.

Traditionally, internationalization has been linked to educational quality, but a mercantilist perspective of higher education has also developed (Sebastián, 2004). Internationalization is understood as a comprehensive process that involves the integration of an international

and intercultural dimension. Brunstein (2009) highlights that the predominant tendency is to focus on specific aspects of internationalization, such as global partnerships, the recruitment of international professors and students, or education abroad initiatives. However, a systemic approach allows us to understand how each decision, activity, custom or structure can influence significant change in the overall internationalization process. For Brunstein, of Virginia University, there is no single, accepted definition of what constitutes a global university. To achieve this, Brunstein proposes ten steps to internationalize universities:

1. Internationalize the strategic plan.
2. Internationalize the academic curriculum.
3. Eliminate barriers to studying abroad.
4. Require foreign language skills.
5. Internationalize the hiring of teachers.
6. Incorporate international contributions into the professional assessment system for teachers.
7. Raise the importance of international offices in the university management system and place officials on the board of directors and key committees.
8. Take a holistic approach to the international student experience.
9. Take advantage of the knowledge and experience of emigrants and foreigners residing in the local community.
10. Prioritize global academic collaborations.

From these perspectives, internationalization is presented as an opportunity for universities to position themselves in terms of the internationalization of their curricular offer and assess both the benefits and the risks involved in the pedagogical and curriculum management processes, both for universities and for racing. This process implies an openness to change and innovation, and a reflection process to determine how and in what way these changes will contribute to the improvement of the profession and future professionals (Guido and Aguilar, 2012).

The commitment of the institution and the different actors is essential. Internationalization must be a comprehensive process that permeates all the functions of the university: teaching, research and social projection. Taking on the challenges of internationalization implies a constant openness to change and innovation. A continuous process of reflection and adaptation is necessary to improve professional practices and the training of future professionals. Although many universities have incorporated internationalization into their institutional strategies and statements, effective implementation in university curricula remains a challenge. Policies and practices must transcend discourses to materialize in concrete actions that truly reflect the objectives of internationalization.

The internationalization of the curriculum has gained greater relevance, becoming an alternative to international mobility, which was previously only available to an elite. Although the debate on the internationalization of the curriculum has been going on for 20 years, the current situation has put it at the center of the university internationalization agenda.

Conclusions

The internationalization of the curriculum in higher education institutions is a complex process that requires a profound transformation of educational and administrative practices. Involve all actors in the educational community in creating a curriculum that not only responds to local demands, but is also aligned with international trends and demands.

The conceptual evolution of the internationalization of the curriculum and presents three dimensions of analysis essential for its understanding and implementation: the disciplinary dimension, the individual dimension and the institutional dimension (Beneitone, 2022). Although studies on curriculum internationalization have prioritized the institutional dimension, this fragmented approach has limited the replicability and sustainability of successful actions over time.

- **Disciplinary Dimension:** This dimension focuses on how different disciplines can integrate international and multicultural perspectives in their content and teaching methods. Disciplinary internationalization seeks for students to acquire global competencies specific to their field of study.
- **Individual Dimension:** Refers to the experiences and skills that students and teachers develop through internationalization. This includes learning foreign languages, participating in international projects and developing intercultural competencies. The individual dimension is essential so that members of the university community can apply and benefit from internationalization opportunities.
- **Institutional Dimension:** Traditionally, this dimension has been the most studied and focuses on the policies and structures that universities implement to promote internationalization. It includes international cooperation agreements, exchange programs, and the integration of international criteria in strategic planning (Beneitone, 2022).

The internationalization of the curriculum is a complex challenge that requires a coherent integration of the disciplinary, individual and institutional dimensions. The pandemic has highlighted the need for alternatives to international mobility, and the internationalization of the curriculum is presented as an inclusive and accessible solution for all students.

These challenges and opportunities are:

- Internationalization must reach the level of the subjects, allowing teachers to integrate teaching and evaluation strategies shared with foreign colleagues and allowing students to perform in other languages. However, the lack of foreign language proficiency and the insufficiency of intercultural competencies limit this process.
- The fragmentation between successful experiences at the individual and disciplinary levels requires stronger institutional support. Universities must capitalize on these experiences to develop more comprehensive policies that promote the internationalization of the curriculum on a larger scale.
- It is crucial that universities adopt careful and flexible planning to incorporate internationalization criteria into curricula, taking into account the different needs of students and professors. This will allow greater articulation of processes and a more significant institutional impact.
- Institutions must provide the necessary tools and support so that professors can implement teaching and learning strategies in tune with the scenarios of curriculum

internationalization. Without an adequate context, the introduction of international elements can be truncated and without significant impact.

- Integrating international perspectives into higher education not only improves educational quality but also prepares students to face global challenges. Institutions must provide ongoing support at the macro level so that individual and disciplinary experiences of internationalization can be institutionalized and replicated.
- It is essential that both students and teachers develop intercultural competencies and master foreign languages. However, these skills must be accompanied by an appropriate context and teaching strategies that promote true internationalization in the classroom.
- For internationalization initiatives to be sustainable and replicable, it is essential that universities adopt a systemic approach, integrating the disciplinary, individual and institutional dimensions in a coherent manner. This will overcome fragmentation and ensure a lasting impact on higher education.

The internationalization of the curriculum is crucial to modernize and make education more flexible. For the internationalization of the curriculum to be effective, it is crucial to articulate these three dimensions in a coherent way (Beneitone, 2022).

Only in this way can fragmentation be overcome and the sustainability of internationalization initiatives ensured. The integration of these dimensions will allow us to move beyond the simple enunciation of successful actions and guarantee that they can be replicated and maintained in the long term. The implementation of curricular internationalization demands flexibility and planning both at a macro level and in the specific management of each career. A flexible curriculum is crucial to address the diverse needs and development possibilities of students and teachers.

The internationalization of the curriculum is essential for universities to maintain their relevance and competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world. This process not only improves the quality of higher education, but also prepares students to face global challenges, promoting a more inclusive, innovative education committed to sustainable and equitable development.

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