

Academic training through research and links with rural community organizations

Formación académica desde la investigación y vinculación con organizaciones comunitarias rurales

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Abstract

Higher education institutions are a very representative step for the new generations and for society, they are the cradle of the new professionals who will be in charge of the country, so their academic training must be comprehensive, with a holistic approach. Research efforts and the link with society play a very important role in the personal, academic and professional growth of the actors: students-teachers-community. The research analyzes the perception of students participating in the research project "Communication strategies in rural community organizations with female leadership in the province of Guayas", who aligned their degree work with the objectives of the project, the social welfare of rural areas through scientific and technical knowledge of the academy, based on a descriptive methodology, with a qualitative approach and field work, for direct observation and interviews with semi-structured questions to participants. The results determine that the linking of the key actors of the educational process with research and integration with community organizations represents an enriching

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factor for their professional life and broadens their outlook towards more creative solutions in the environment.

Keywords: Academia, research, community, community outreach, society

Resumen

Las instituciones de educación superior son un peldaño muy representativo para las nuevas generaciones y para la sociedad, son la cuna de los neo profesionales que estarán a cargo del país, de tal forma que su formación académica debe ser integral, con un enfoque holístico. Las gestiones investigativas y la vinculación con la sociedad cumplen un rol muy importante en el crecimiento personal, académico y profesional de los actores: estudiantes-docentes-comunidad. La investigación analiza la percepción de los estudiantes participantes del proyecto de investigación “Estrategias comunicacionales en organizaciones comunitarias rurales con liderazgo femenino de la provincia del Guayas”, quienes alinearon sus trabajos de titulación con los objetivos del proyecto, el bienestar social de las zonas rurales mediante los conocimientos científicos y técnicos de la academia, en base a una metodología descriptiva, con enfoque cualitativo y trabajo de campo, para una observación directa y entrevistas con preguntas semiestructuradas a los participantes. Los resultados determinan que la vinculación de los actores clave del proceso educativa en conjunto con la investigación y la integración con las organizaciones comunitarias representa un factor enriquecedor para su vida profesional y amplía su panorama hacia soluciones más creativas en el entorno.

Palabras clave: Academia, investigación, vinculación con la sociedad, comunidad

Introduction

The academy was born with the purpose of being a cradle of knowledge, to build new learning models and disseminate theories about the world and the reality known so far. In history, the Greeks dialogued about new knowledge and questioned what was known. Universities should be entities that promote questions about paradigms and changes in the social behavior of individuals, from

the perspective of each professional branch. "Currently, higher education focuses on the formation of skills and abilities in university students to promote their comprehensive preparation" (Pástor et al., 2020, p. 7).

Teachers and students can look at a social problem from their perspective, this allows the generation of ideas to be more enriching, due to the intercultural exchange of empirical and scientific knowledge, the creativity factor and the enthusiasm for the unknown.

The educational process not only builds knowledge, but also forms part of the growth of the student, who absorbs and creates his own criteria based on what he observes and learns in the academy, for this reason, teachers are considered as trainers of lifestyle and knowledge. (Herrera and Vilema, 2021, p. 79).

The observation of social phenomena represents in the actors of the academy an opportunity to approach the conflicts of society. Senior et al. (2021) in their study on the linkage of the university with society highlight the importance of the pedagogical approaches adopted for the design of strategies and activities, with the objective that students develop skills and abilities, as an opportunity for students to grow personally, academically and professionally.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization emphasizes that:

"...the research function is a transversal axis in university work; the university is the space where the production, dissemination and application of knowledge takes shape, assimilating those already generated by humanity and producing new ones, through the research of teachers and students whose purpose is social transformation. (UNESCO, 2008; quoted in Medina, 2018, p. 707)

Chuquimarca et al. (2017) in their research on the culture of communication in teachers, highlight the importance of developing

cognitive skills in students and their ability to develop in the social environment, based on strategies that promote the construction of knowledge at the individual and collective level. Higher education institutions maintain academic efforts that influence the quality of new professionals, their ability to develop in the sociocultural environment and the understanding of the different problems of society from their field of action (De Aparicio et al., 2017). Hence, the linkage with society is conceived as "...an exchange of skills, knowledge and knowledge, where students, teachers and community benefit" (Zambrano et al., 2020, p. 46).

The community represents families, neighborhoods, communes and institutions that reflect the relationships within them, have characteristics that identify them and a territory of physical space. They share with students and teachers the historical experience accumulated based on the contributions of its members in different fields, therefore, in the process of linking a process of mutual learning takes place.

In 2020 Gonzalez presents his study on operationalization and measurement of the linkage with society and highlights that this management promotes "social awareness and sensitivity" (CACES, 2020, p. 73). The linkage with the community is a logistics of dependence and collective support, in which according to Viña et al. (2019) there must be a "triple helix triangulation (TH), Business-State-University" (p. 20); however, it is recognized that 4 key actors are involved: the institution, teachers, students and the community (Senior et al., 2021). It is "...a process where knowledge, skills, assessments and experiences of individual and collective activity are systematized...around a problem that originates in practice and that is transformed with the incidence of each of the subjects." (Concepción et al., 2020, p. 278)

Institutions are created by men and women for the development of society, this sphere has allowed and allows the active participation of academia in order to fulfill the social task, applying and sharing scientific and technological knowledge for the welfare and development of the community.

Zambrano et al. (2020) presented a model on the process or systematization of the management of linkage with society and emphasize that the strategic axes are defined by institutional alliances, the creation of knowledge exchange networks, institutional cooperation agreements and internationalization. They also list the following dimensions within the process: 1) cultural, 2) political, 3) economic, 4) social and 5) environmental. Finally, the authors emphasize that in order to achieve an integral formation of students, it is necessary to articulate the three dimensions: linkage-teaching-research.

The common denominator in each of these axes is the need for interaction, communication and mutual support between public and/or private organizations and higher education institutions, in order to achieve the financing of seed projects, research and linkage. In the case of internationalization, it broadens horizons to new approaches or global perspectives. An example is the funding competitions of the embassies of different countries for projects focused on the resolution of priority social needs. In the case of the dimensions, everything is framed in the holistic approach, that is, a global vision of the socio-cultural context, so the dynamics of meaningful learning, with a theoretical and practical understanding, must be prioritized. The linkage with the community allows flexible minds to changes and induces creative, dynamic and effective solutions.

Community outreach, besides being a requirement for higher education students, is a social commitment due to the fact that its purpose is to solve problems of society, knowledge transfer, help people in need and acquire knowledge (Mendoza et al., 2017). It is a management whose global vision is as follows:

seeks to have access to knowledge, as well as to transfer it to the community, in many cases linking universities to sectors where they do not have access to training and information, so that one of the most evaluated points in the fulfillment of the link with society is the promotion of knowledge (Tamayo et al., 2020, p. 36).

The community is the clearest representation of the collective life of human groups and conglomerates, it is the basis that enables the social development of the different strata. Research is a "fundamental activity in the construction of the knowledge society" (Olivera, 2020, p. 71), and achieving the triangulation of the research, linkage and titling efforts, will allow the student to relate to reality and achieve significant learning for life, which will allow an approach to labor development as a future professional.

training should be continuous through scientific and academic activities, the linkage in the learning process starts from the learning environment in the academic aspect, whether it is the open or closed environment (classroom), learning and empowerment are promoted when it is handled in both environments (Noboa et al., 2019, p. 45). To achieve this it is necessary that "there is more direct communication through forums, work meetings, work tables to reach commitments and improvements to the project." (Garcés et al., 2018, p. 86).

Community projects consist of thinking about a set of interrelated activities that should lead to the achievement of the expected results. Similarly, the transformation process involves addressing a real situation and changing it for the benefit of a collective or society, therefore the participation of those involved is necessary. (Moraima and Aldana, 2019, p. 151).

Higher education institutions have the responsibility and at the same time the necessary knowledge and experience to take on this challenge, hence the commitment to permanently update knowledge, acquire new knowledge, recreate methodologies and innovate the practices of linkage, degrees and research with problems and needs from and for the communities.

The monitoring and control process within the process of the different academic and programmed areas of training are essential for the development and implementation of community projects (Moraima and Aldana, 2019, p. 166).

Evaluation is one of the fundamental elements of the community outreach work, it has the characteristic of being permanent, it is the task of the whole group, including promoters, community leaders and members of the community, it is the necessary condition to improve the work done.

"That the university management focuses technical and administrative actions that contribute to the realization of institutional projects where teachers and students from different specialties can be inserted to achieve interdisciplinary knowledge" (Guerrero, 2021, p. 105).

In order to evaluate a group, it is essential that it be correctly structured and act permanently to analyze the fulfillment of the objectives set, the results obtained and the degree of participation of the members, as well as the future orientation of the group.

"It is necessary to delve into the influence that education has on the development of society and how it allows strengthening its foundations to adapt to new phenomena, changes and circumstances of the constant evolution in which human beings are immersed" (Fajardo and Cervantes, 2020, p. 105). For such reason, Sánchez (2017) rescues "...the need to plan and manage schooling, according to the priorities and expectations required by today's society" (p. 38), i.e., university curricula must have an outlook open to the cooperation of society.

With this premise, in Ecuador, the projects make "...emphasis on the sectors of: health, labor, risks, environment, social welfare, education, production, tourism, security and priority attention groups" (Ministry of Telecommunications and the Information Society, 2018, p. 6).

The design of a project is an application of the ability to take initiative in a creative and disciplined way towards social transformation. This indicates that the first stage begins with the desire and willingness to do something for the community, then to review together their needs and analyze the competencies of the

Faculties to plan a structured project that allows the integration of all spheres of influence of the community.

Materials and methods

The descriptive research is based on a qualitative approach, because, based on interviews with students and teachers about the process of linking with the community and scientific research, to know their opinions about their experiences in this process. The sample used was by convenience to students who in their graduation process were part of the research project "Communication strategies for community organizations with female leadership in the province of Guayas" and as a result, their graduation papers are aligned to this project.

An interview questionnaire with open-ended questions was used to create an atmosphere of trust, since students tend to be susceptible when answering topics related to the university. The questions focused on their appreciation of community outreach, their learning in the degree process, and research in community organizations.

Results

Once the interviews with the students were conducted, a point of saturation was reached. The most frequently repeated answers were that carrying out their degree project through field work, where they needed to travel and directly observe the problems, was an enriching experience. It was emphasized that maintaining a dialogue with the beneficiaries (community) allowed them to reflect on their profession and analyze the needs of society from their professional point of view.

The students mentioned that they considered very important the accompaniment of their teacher tutors in the research process, because they played the role of teachers, consultants, mentors and facilitators of knowledge. The research experience in the field will be very useful for their professional and personal future. Lastly, the students did not know the cantons.

Discussion

The research invites reflection on the importance of expanding learning from the classroom to the social reality, which generates questions for future studies on the guidelines or regulations that should cover the new processes of community outreach, as well as the question: should the outreach process be limited only within an educational institution or should inter-institutional cooperation and strategic alliances be encouraged for better results?

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