

The internationalization of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean towards 2050

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It is indisputable that higher education (HE) has a major impact on economic growth, social capillarity, reduction of inequality and citizen training; therefore, it is a factor of change, development and democracy. Its future planning is relevant, building long-term hypotheses, but starting from a diagnosis to avoid falling into utopian generalizations. Hence, this question directed to a specific area and region, namely: How could the internationalization of HE contribute to a better future for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2050? To outline an answer, we describe the salient features of the socioeconomic and university context of LAC, with special emphasis on its internationalization process. Subsequently, the conceptual framework of internationalization and global citizenship (GC) is addressed, assuming that it has the potential to help overcome many of the region's educational and socioeconomic problems.

Socioeconomic and educational context of LAC in 2030

LAC represents 8.4% of the world's population and 7.2% of the global economy. It is a heterogeneous region in which the economies of Brazil, Chile and Mexico, with a high average development, contrast with the rest of the countries that reach only average development. Its GDP per capita is equivalent to 36.5% of the OECD average. The economic growth of LAC countries has so far been uneven due to excessive dependence on global commodity market fluctuations, lack of integration into global value chains, low labor productivity and weak institutions characteristic of the region's states. With the exception of Chile, Latin American nations are lagging behind in terms of international competitiveness, with countries such as Mexico, Brazil and Argentina in declining positions. The regional human development index (0.758) is below the OECD average (0.895), with high and increasing levels of poverty, earning it the label of "most unequal region in the world". This lag is largely attributable to a shortage of human capital with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to join global value chains, in addition to deficient technological development. Proof of this is the productive sector's constant difficulty in finding qualified personnel to meet its development goals.

Paradoxically, this situation is due to the fact that LAC based its development on the intensive exploitation of its natural resources and unskilled labor. The region has come up against the so-called "development traps", which limit its capacity to overcome its levels of development: the productivity trap, the social vulnerability trap, the institutional weakness trap and the environmental trap. At least three of these traps are directly linked to the poor performance of the education sector, such as: high enrollment (45%) in traditional disciplines such as management, business and law and low enrollment in science and technology; low public investment in research and technology; a teaching staff with mostly non-graduate degrees; and an insufficient level of internationalization.

Internationalization and its potential for LAC development

All diagnoses of the region point to the fact that the progress made in recent decades has been rather modest. Compared with other regions of the world, LAC ranks at the bottom of the world, far behind Asia, Europe and Oceania. Efforts have been concentrated on mobility, although the percentages of outgoing students (6.4%) and incoming students (3.4%) in LAC are among the lowest in the world, with more than half being from Latin America and the Caribbean. This situation is due to: the lack of public policies to promote internationalization; a limited strategic vision; the marginal nature of the international dimension in teaching and research policies; deficient planning, evaluation, implementation and management strategies; scant internationalization at home and of the curriculum; insignificant investment in international collaboration in research; insufficient command of foreign languages among students and professors; and low international profile of academics. In summary, internationalization strategies have been characterized by being more of an individual type (mobility of individuals) and not of a systemic type (internationalization at home, of the curriculum and of research), when it is precisely the latter that has the real potential to transform HE. As a result, the impact of internationalization has been insignificant for the sector, putting LAC and its university graduates at a competitive disadvantage in the global scenario.

Therefore, in order to improve the standard of living of its populations, LAC depends, to a great extent, on the transformation and internationalization of its HE. The international dimension of university work is particularly relevant for raising the quality of educational processes, for the acquisition of the competencies needed to integrate into the global knowledge economy and for the development of a global citizenship. To the extent that the region implements diversified internationalization strategies abroad and at home in its university work, the region will be able to integrate into the global economy under more favorable competitive conditions. To this end, the current concept of internationalization and its implementation strategies must evolve sufficiently to be an educational and ethical response to the needs of human formation in 2050.

Conceptual framework of internationalization towards 2050

As an educational concept, internationalization has the potential to impact not only the ability of people to incorporate added value to the goods and services they produce (increase in labor productivity and international competition), but also in the development of the skills necessary for the performance of citizenship; as specified in the UN SDGs : "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development".

The concept of GC, being an evolving theoretical construct (i.e., not fixed and predetermined to a given social situation), has the potential to incorporate and promote in the long term the conditions of a social morality necessary to peacefully resolve conflicts that arise in future scenarios. UNESCO's concept of GC (Nikolitsa-Winter, Mauch, & Maalouf, 2019) involves developing a sense of belonging to a common humanity; respect for diversity; an awareness of global issues; and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity, empathy at the global level, and a sense of solidarity. It also includes the development of the capacity to act collaboratively,

the responsibility to find solutions to global challenges and to strive for the collective good. GC is based on three basic conceptual domains of learning: cognitive, socioemotional, and behavioral, from which the learning objectives and corresponding competencies are defined; which in turn integrate the four pillars of learning: learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together.

The concept of internationalization, referring to higher education, has semantic-pragmatic characteristics that allow it to have as one of its essential features an evolutionary character. It is a theoretical construct whose content has the potential to incorporate a normative framework (of values) to HE processes, which makes it possible to specify objectives, rationales, strategies, learning and research outcomes for different socio-economic contexts, considered from a perspective that is not reduced to a given local level. This property of the concept is due to the fact that its framework of values is integrated by three dimensions: intercultural, international and global. This characteristic of the concept has allowed its recent re-definition as an "intentional" type process aimed at carrying out contributions to society (De Wit & Hunter, 2015). This feature has been further emphasized by coining the expression "Internationalization of HE for Society", thus underlining the social responsibility component that should be emphasized in internationalization. "Internationalization of HE for Society explicitly seeks the benefit of the wider community, at home and abroad, through education, research, services, and international and intercultural engagement" (Brandenburg, de Wit, Jones, & Leask, 2019). Such an argument is based on the fact that while it is true that internationalization develops students' intercultural, professional and personal competence, thus increasing their levels of employability and potential for success; a greater social impact is needed. Therefore, access to its benefits must be drastically increased to a greater number of students through internationalization at home, curriculum and collaborative international programs, in order to prepare university graduates to be better citizens, more aware of their civic and environmental responsibilities.

For its part, the intercultural dimension of the concept of internationalization brings another defining element: inclusion, which endorses its evolving character, necessarily changing, as shown by the recent debate from the perspective of the problematic of societies in the Global-South and the apparent status of being "ethically neutral" of the definition of the concept. (Teferra, 2019; de Wit H. , 2019). According to this debate, in order to face the negative effects of a growing gap between the Global-South and the Global-North, internationalization must stop being focused on a single model designed by the Global-North countries, in order to ensure greater reciprocity of benefits among all institutions and countries involved. In this sense, the current pandemic has been a turning point with important effects for the future of internationalization; becoming an opportunity to re-examine its values, objectives, strategies and priorities. The elitist character of internationalization is denounced for being accessible only to a small minority of economically and socially favored students, where mobility has been seen more as an end in itself than as a means of connectivity for research, teaching and learning. Internationalization has been criticized for being a phenomenon largely dominated by the Global North and the Western world, promoting inequality at two levels: within each country and between nations and regions.

In conclusion, by 2050, HEIs should have revisited and reaffirmed the values and principles of internationalization, such as the promotion of intercultural learning; inter-institutional cooperation based on mutual benefit, solidarity, mutual respect and fair partnership. The future of internationalization will require HEIs to commit to supporting a global higher education system based on integrity, academic quality, equitable access, reciprocity, the development of GC skills, the advancement of international research collaboration, and the solution of global problems at the center of their efforts.

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