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THE EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM IN CONTEXT OF CHANGE

Outcomes Evaluation and its impact on the curricular development and its implementation

Establishment of the quality assurance and participation of the multiple actors involved in its design and development

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Regional Mechanism implementation process

The Mercosur accreditation mechanism has two phases on its implementation. First, the experimental phase, named MEXA¹, for which courses of agronomics, engineering and medicine were summoned. On second phase, permanent, denominated ARCUSUR², architecture, infirmery, odontology and veterinary medicine courses were summoned.

In ten years of constant work this mechanism has made possible development of quality assurance processes in countries members and associates, and has also contributed to widespread concepts throughout all the actors of diverse university communities.

On the other hand, it has contributed with incomes towards the harmonization of quality criteria in a more extended region, constituted by RIACES³

Bases for agreement of regional quality assurance

Agreement of quality assurance for Mercosur is based on mutual recognition of capacity of each country, through the designated agencies or official instances to the effect, to evaluate the quality of its own university programs.

In order to guarantee an even judgments emission, procedures and quality criteria have been agreed, including pairs from countries members and associates⁴, participation in external evaluation. Thus, it is hoped to get a common format for evaluation reports and a regional speech in quality assurance terms.

¹Mercosur Experimental Quality Assurance Mechanism

²Mercosur Quality Assurance Mechanism for University Programs

³Iberoamerican Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

⁴ Members: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Associates: Chile and Bolivia

Also, it has been faced a process of actors qualification, as much as agencies and pairs, to make easier not only the proposal understanding, but also mechanism feedback after its application.

As a result, the application has provided useful data for revision and improvement of the process of quality assurance, and has also allowed the adjustment of national processes of quality assurance like a subsequent outcome,

Participation of the multiple actors

Process of designing quality criteria has been extended throughout ten years and has brought up permanent reflection as well as it has been widely spread in regional university community. For quality criteria development, consultative commissions have been summoned for each degree programme. These commissions were initially integrated by two academic and a professional on the discipline into consideration, introducing vision of labor's environment into criteria's design.

It is also important to indicate, the interaction of Higher Education Institutions with Ministries of Education Authorities. This relationship has made possible building a joint work mechanism between the two institutions, in a frame of respect to university autonomy.

The process of validation of the quality criteria

Once it has been agreed the quality criteria for MEXA, they were put under a previous process of validation before application, to verify its applicability in a exercise named "pretest", in which higher education institutions from the region participated voluntarily. In this exercise it has not been assessed programs quality, but feasibility of criteria's application and its validity like estimators of programs quality.

Also, once the experimental phase has been finished, the mechanism was put under evaluation with the participation of institutions, pairs and agencies that have participated in the process. This evaluation process has allowed mechanism adjustment towards permanent quality assurance system, ARCUSUR.

Impacts

Educational Mercosur has advanced in a constant way, facing differences in rates of growth and development and in size and complexity of the educational systems of the diverse countries. It has also had to deal with differences in the educational qualifications of high school level.

Furthermore, changes in countries educational policies have been occurred during the process. Languages difference has had to be handled, as well as progression in a common understanding of mechanism.

On national educational systems, it has also made possible the revision of normative referred to higher education, to allow the application of MERCOSUR accreditation mechanism.

In addition, where previous experience in accreditation did not exist, like in Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, it has facilitated process development and official instances for accreditation

creation. In case of countries with prior experience, it has been an opportunity for reflection and learning and has contributed to legitimize the idea of higher education quality assurance⁵.

On top of that, Mercosur accreditation mechanism evolves from an academic quality assurance mechanism, exclusively referring to programs, to a proposal that gives quality guarantee of the individual graduate's certificates, making necessary a discussion about the normative for professional performance in the region.

In the specific field of the degree programs themselves, which has entered the process, once the general quality criteria has been decided; consultative commissions have been concentrated in definition of two fundamental aspects: graduates proficiency and the curriculum that leads to professional title⁶.

Fundamental agreements go around the minimum hours and contents, as well as the professional practices and the conditions for students to graduate.

In each one of degree programs called, it has resulted in curriculum revision, introducing compulsory fulfillment questions considered at the moment of the proposal as desirable aspects and conditions.

Thus, engineering programs have been introduced students practical training and final work as aspects of obligatory fulfillment. In medicine, the medical internal school has been incorporated as obligatory inside degree level, and it has also been defined medical training practices throughout all the formation. It has also been included an instance for permanent curricular supervision, as well as evaluation of institutional management processes. In agronomics, criteria referred to research activities were adjusted to consider activities of research at degree level.

These conclusions of participant courses in the experimental phase have served as incomes to the new ones, working on this frame already developed. They are presently working at specific aspects, such as the hours dedicated to practical formation in dentistry and infirmary, definition of the subject of project in architecture and clinical practice in veterinary medicine.

Another fundamental aspect for regional agreement is that courses must aims towards a person integral formation, not only as a professional, but also as a citizen and as a human being. This decision forces the inclusion of aspects referred to this issue in curriculum, not only as contents, but also as educational proficiency and allow the development of these skills throughout the whole learning process.

On the other hand, each individual program faces or will face a particular situation when considering the introduction of these adjustments to its own curriculum and the consequences that these will have in students and teachers performance.

Experiences of modification of curriculum have been registered during the process of self assessment for accreditation, in the attempt to satisfy the exigencies of Mercosur mechanism. This issue brings with itself the logical institutional tensions facing a change process, but also consequences in students, who are subjected to the curriculum transition.

⁵ Lemaitre, M. J. Robledo, R. MERCOSUR, AN EXPERIENCE OF REGIONAL ACCREDITATION IN PROGRESS. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MECHANISM. INQUAAHE, Dublin, 2003

⁶ In Mercosur region, diplomas from university courses gives professional entitlement by themselves