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EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF GUADALAJARA

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Abstract

Education is an inherent human right; it promotes the development of competencies, and it must be permanently exercised and adapted to individual and society's challenges and expectations. According to UNESCO, education must be of quality and imparted with relevance, equity, effectiveness and efficiency. Our individual and collective future is linked to the educational process because it generates quality of life, emanating from factors such as employment, salary, housing, health and leisure. Youth represents a quarter of the population of Latin America, and training in Higher Education Institutions affects their labor and social empowerment. From this perspective, we reflect on whether studying at university ensures employment for Mexican youth. The research was carried out in four centers of the University of Guadalajara: two in the Metropolitan Zone of Guadalajara, and two in the Valles and Southern Jalisco regions. The objective was to find out if the training received by graduates responds to the demands of the work structures and favours obtaining employment. The methodology is mixed and has been designed in two phases: the first one through the application of a Likert questionnaire, and the second one with interviews and discussion groups. The results of a preliminary study, reported in this article, allow us to identify the factors associated with better work opportunities in relation to university studies.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Development and progress

The concepts of development and progress are closely linked and are often used as synonyms. In our research, we hold that the idea of progress was conceived as a consequence especially of technological development, which improves the production processes and technologies available for different human activities. Technological progress, in many areas, led to an improvement in the quality of life of human beings.

The idea of progress is today questioned, due among other things to the fact that, according to Bauman & Bordoni (2016), our ancestors looked at it with hope, but now we look at it with fear and as a threat. For his part, Bauman & Bordoni (2016), also express the fear of a worse future for people, and also believe that the current conception of progress would not be based either on the amount of wealth produced, or on consumption, but on the quality of life. The pessimistic view expressed by these two European authors is also shared by the middle class of Latin America. However, it is worth noting that according to Trejo (2016), young people in Latin America clearly identify the conflicts of their society. However, they are more optimistic than adults regarding the future, and have “a greater resilience capacity that allows them to adapt to the transformations of a region that will continue to experience continuous and accelerated change” (p. 151).

Regarding development, today the inertia that existed in which development was linked exclusively in its technological aspects and related to the growth of the economy is being overcome. Among the nuances that we want to focus on, we highlight the consideration of human development as the empowerment of people and groups to face the changes confronting them (Calderón, 2016). For this reason we must highlight their autonomy and dignity, and the fact that people are protagonists. For this author, development has two aspects: the training of human skills and how they use these acquired skills (employment, productive activities or leisure). Himanen (2016) points out that the priority objective of development is the well-being of human beings and relates development to human dignity.

In the view of Mójica (2016) development is a complex reality, and thus it is necessary to deal with the scientific-technological change that interacts in the economic area but also in the cultural, social, environmental and political fields.

1.2. Development and empowerment of Latin American youth

According to Barro (2015), Latin American universities are key to economic growth in the areas where they are located due to the education of high-level human capital, the importance of the research and development they carry out (they execute more than a third of investment in R& D), and its support for entrepreneurship and innovation.

The OECD (2016) confirms in its report on Latin America the relationship between educational level and formal employment. Of those students who have completed tertiary education, on average 90% have formal jobs, while in the case of young people who have primary education or a lower level of studies, the percentage is 30%. In addition to this, educational level has a greater relationship with income and wages in this region than in the other OECD countries.

Despite the importance of education, the OECD (2016) states that there is evidence in Latin America of deficiencies in the quality of education, especially in the acquisition of basic competencies in reading, mathematics and science. Likewise, it expresses its concern about the lack of links between education and the skills demanded by labour markets. Finally, although the document focused more on the economic area, it does not fail to recognize the importance of education as a tool for social inclusion, and for young people to participate in social and political life.

The complaints regarding the lack of quality that the OECD makes are serious since if we follow what is expressed by Stiglitz and Greenwald (2015), they affirm that what separates the least developed from the developed countries is not only the resources gap but also the knowledge gap. These authors propose that policies to favour development should improve learning to close the gap.

In the case of Mexico, Saraví (2015) reflects on the work carried out by universities in social mobility. He affirms that the quality and immediate employability of graduates, in addition to the training, is conditioned by the social class to which they belong and their networks of family and friends. It is what he calls students' sociocultural capital. This author also considers that university education is important for young people coming from low and marginalized classes since a university degree gives high value and prestige to them and their families. University studies represent for these young people the possibility of getting to know other people, having different experiences, living under other parameters and rules which are very different from the aggressiveness, the depressing environment, and the multiple forms of violence that are experienced in the areas they come from. The jobs resulting from their university studies can allow them to leave those places.

2. Problem Statement

The University of Guadalajara is one of the most important in Mexico in terms of number of students and other indicators such as teaching, research, and size. The evaluation and research of the opinions of students who graduate from this university is relevant to verify the quality of the education they receive and detect strengths and possible deficiencies in their education and integration in social and work life.

3. Research Questions

Has the training received by the graduates of the University of Guadalajara (Mexico) allowed them, or facilitated their personal development and their inclusion into the society in which they live in the social and labour dimensions? What kinds of competencies have been developed in the students during their training process?

4. Purpose of the Study

The relationships between Higher Education and society are changing, affecting the training offered and leading to successive adaptations and revisions in terms of emerging new needs (Rue, 2016). Therefore, this type of research, in which we seek to find out the weaknesses and strengths of the education received by graduates, are relevant to guide the direction of changes in the curricula offered by universities. All this should also include the perspectives and the needs that are detected (economic, social, environmental, etc.).

5. Research Methods

As discussed above, the work presented here is part of a larger research project that uses mixed methods. For this study we present a first research phase in which a questionnaire was designed, validated and applied to a pilot sample of 130 graduates. Therefore, a survey methodology is used.

The questionnaire designed was validated by judges. 10 experts in research methodology and in the field of entrepreneurship assessed the suitability of the content of each item (content validity). Some suggestions were accepted, and the final instrument had 70 items that combined different formats: identification questions, multiple choices, and a Likert scale (from 1 to 5).

A study of internal consistency (reliability) was carried out on the 14 items of the Likert scale, obtaining a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.915. On these same items, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out with the principal component method. The factor analysis was considered feasible based on compliance with the application conditions (KMO = 0.891, and Barlett's sphericity test with a χ^2 of 1,331.37,91 df and $p \leq 0.0005$). The analysis produced a factor solution of two components (factors) that accounted for 64.46% of the variability. One of the factors included items related to acquired competencies and education for performance outside university, and the second factor included the variables related consistency between the education obtained at university and the work activities carried out today.

The pilot sample consisted of 130 graduates (35.4% men and 64.6% women) with a mean age of 26.99 years old (SD = 2.44). The profile of the graduates shows that 53.9% have become independent (live alone, or with his/her partner, and even have children) compared to 43.8% who still live with their parents and/or siblings. The participants in the survey all finished their studies between 2013 and 2017 with a completion media of 2014.31 (DS = 1.27), and most of them already have a job (86.9%).

6. Findings

Some of the results that delve deeper into the description of the pilot sample are the following. The majority of people work in private companies (63.8%). 10.8% of these people do it in their own company (entrepreneurship). 70% are working in the same region / state (Jalisco) where they studied their degree. Only 5.4% develop their work activities in other states (outside Jalisco) and 3.8% in other countries. Table 1 shows the size of the company in which they work. As it is observed in the same one, the greater percentage (34.6%) works in big companies or in medians (19.2%). The micro-enterprises (between 2 and 10 workers) represent the third option with 15.4%.

Table 01. Size of the company

Size of the company	Frecuency	Percentage
Large company (more than 250)	45	34.6
Medium-sized company (between 50 and 250)	25	19.2
Small business (between 11 and 49)	8	6.2
Micro-enterprise (between 2 and 10 workers)	20	15.4
Independent (without staff)	10	7.7
DK/NC	22	16.9
Total	130	100.0

Table 2 shows the results that were presented on a Likert scale (0 is not in agreement at all and is 5 totally agree). In general, all the results are above the media score of the scale (2.5), except the item related to the correspondence between salary and level of studies (2.32). The standard deviations are all very similar and range from 1.35 to 1.84. Other items, with not too high scores, are those related to consistency between what was studied and the work performed (2.66 and 2.98). The consideration that university prepares students for society does not have a high rating either (2.95).

The highest scores correspond to the item related to acquired competencies (3.35), and their contribution to having a good relationship with clients or users (3.71). The same applies to the items that relate these competencies to maintaining a good relationship with friends (3.57), family members (3.52), and co-workers (3.48). All of the above highlights the value of the education received at university. Other items that stand out for their high score are those related to the possibility of changing jobs in the next 5 years (3.68).

Table 02. Competencies acquired

Elements	Mean	SD
The competencies acquired at university contributed to having a good relationship with customers or users	3.71	1.36
I will certainly change jobs in the next 5 years	3.68	1.80
The competencies acquired at university contributed to having a good relationship with my friends	3.57	1.45
The competencies acquired at university helped to have a good relationship with my relatives	3.52	1.45
The competencies acquired at university helped to have a good relationship with my co-workers	3.48	1.47
The results of my work are recognized by my superiors (if applicable)	3.41	1.71
At university I acquired the competencies, abilities and skills to perform well at my job	3.35	1.47
I'm satisfied with the work I'm currently doing	3.30	1.65
The university met my expectations about my professional training	3.29	1.35
The education I received at university was important for obtaining employment	3.12	1.68
There is correspondence between what I learned at university and the activity that I do in my workplace	2.98	1.64
I believe that university prepares students to face the challenges imposed by contemporary society	2.95	1.46
The category or level of position in which I work is in accordance with my degree	2.66	1.84
The salary I receive for my work is in accordance with my level of studies	2.32	1.66

7. Conclusion

This research has allowed the design and validation of an instrument to evaluate the education and employability of university graduates. The questionnaire, in addition to showing a high internal consistency (reliability), was validated by experts (content validity). After the pilot application, using the appropriate analysis, we managed to obtain a factor structure for the questionnaire (structural validity) that was organized into two components: 1) acquired competencies and education for performance in the workplace,

and 2) consistency between the education obtained at university and the work activities carried out at present.

In addition to the previous methodological conclusions, the results of the pilot application ($n = 130$) have allowed to gather exhaustive information from university graduates. Most of them already have a job (mostly in large companies) and have become independent of their parental family. They also think that they will most likely change jobs in the next five years. They are not very satisfied with the salary they receive in relation to their level of education.

The items with higher means support the conclusion that the acquired competencies during university education have contributed to their education as people with social skills who are able to maintain good relationships with clients, friends, family and co-workers. This undoubtedly gives great educational and social value to the competencies developed at university.

We can also highlight the scores of graduates who feel satisfied with the work they are currently doing. On the other hand, they give a low value to the relationship between the category or level of job they hold with their studies at university. These data go in the same line as the research carried out by Trejo (2016), which affirms the positive vision of students about the future, although they are aware of the current problems. This affirmation is even more reinforced with the result of the item "I will surely change my job in the next 5 years".

Independently of this, students have a negative view of the evolution of their salaries, one of the keys to the malaise of the middle class in developed countries (Bauman and Bordoni, 2016).

The relationship between employment and education received at university, as well as between what was learned at university and the activities they carry out at their workplace, did not receive high values. This is in line with the results of the OECD (2016) research on Latin America, which criticizes the deficient link between the competencies developed in universities and the competencies demanded by the labour market.

An improvement in education, especially in the link between the competencies that are promoted at universities and those from the world of work, would probably affect improvement in graduates' labour insertion, leading to them being able to obtain better salaries and positions or job categories.

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