

SHORT COURSES ABROAD: LEARNINGS OBTAINED BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN EDUCATION

CURSOS DE CURTA DURAÇÃO NO EXTERIOR: APRENDIZAGENS OBTIDAS POR ESTUDANTES DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM EDUCAÇÃO

CURSOS BREVES EN EL EXTRANJERO: APRENDIZAJES LOGRADOS POR ESTUDIANTES DE POSGRADO EN EDUCACIÓN

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ABSTRACT: Academic mobility is a strategy for achieving internationalization and helps to meet the demands of globalization. This paper reports the learning achieved by 31 Mexican students from a professional Master's program in Education, who took a short, one-week course at the University of Salamanca and the University of Coimbra. The method consisted in performing qualitative content analysis of the students' final papers, specifically the reflective sections that were requested. The result allows identifying learning of diverse nature: (1) conceptual, mainly those of the course; (2) procedural, by the planning of the trip; (3) attitudinal, as personal growth, experience of values and reproduction of stereotypes, and (4) socio-affective, by the coexistence. As a conclusion, the relevance and meaning of study trips of this type is established, which, in spite of their brevity, entails substantial learning of diverse nature.

KEYWORDS: Internationalization. Student mobility. Postgraduate student. Learning.

RESUMO: *A mobilidade acadêmica é uma estratégia para alcançar a internacionalização e ajuda a atender às demandas da globalização. Este trabalho relata os aprendizados alcançados por 31 estudantes mexicanos de um programa de mestrado profissionalizante, que fez um curso curto de uma semana na Universidade de Salamanca e na Universidade de Coimbra. O método consistiu na realização da análise de conteúdo qualitativo ao trabalho final dos alunos, especificamente as seções reflexivas solicitadas. O resultado permite identificar aprendizados de natureza diferente: (1) conceitual, principalmente os do curso; (2) processual, pelo planejamento da viagem; (3) atitudes, como crescimento pessoal, experiência de valores e reprodução de estereótipos, e (4) socioafetiva, pela convivência. A conclusão estabelece a relevância e a significância das viagens de estudo desse tipo, que, apesar de sua brevidade, envolvem grandes aprendizados de natureza diferente.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Internacionalização. Mobilidade estudantil. Estudante de pós-graduação. Aprendizagem.*

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RESUMEN: La movilidad académica es una estrategia para lograr la internacionalización y contribuye a responder a las exigencias de la globalización. Este trabajo reporta los aprendizajes logrados por 31 estudiantes mexicanos de un programa profesionalizante de Maestría en Educación, quienes tomaron un curso breve, de una semana, en la Universidad de Salamanca y en la Universidad de Coímbra. El método consistió en realizar análisis de contenido cualitativo a los trabajos finales de los estudiantes, específicamente a los apartados reflexivos que les fueron solicitados. El resultado permite identificar aprendizajes de naturaleza diversa: (1) conceptuales, principalmente los propios del curso; (2) procedimentales, por la planeación del viaje; (3) actitudinales, como crecimiento personal, vivencia de valores y reproducción de estereotipos, y (4) socioafectivos, por la convivencia. Como conclusión se establece la relevancia y significado de viajes de estudio de este tipo, que, a pesar de su brevedad, conllevan aprendizajes cuantiosos y de diversa naturaleza.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Internacionalización. Movilidad estudiantil. Estudiante de Posgrado. Aprendizaje.

Internationalization and student mobility

Higher education institutions cannot be limited at the local level, so they are expected to take international and intercultural dimensions to achieve dialogue and interaction of teaching, research and service (LANDINELLI, 2010). In this context, it is relevant to talk about internationalization and academic mobility.

According to Knight (2015), the term internationalization is not new, but must be clearly understood and reformulated to meet the various dimensions that characterize the 21st century. For this, the author proposes the following definition of work for this concept: "Internationalization at the national, sectoral and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (KNIGHT, 2015, p. 2). " Internationalization is also a way of responding to the demands of globalization, so higher education institutions establish it as part of their development plans (ALCÓN, 2011), although it should be noted that internationalization should not be considered a goal in itself (DE WIT, 2011), but should serve for students to develop skills in global aspects, international and intercultural.

In order to fulfill its purpose, internationalization can be achieved in different ways in educational institutions. For example, you can talk about *internationalization at home*, which consists of intentionally integrating the international and intercultural curriculum, so that all students participate in home learning environments (BEELLEN; JONES, 2015). Similarly, there is the *internationalization of the curriculum*, in which the dimensions of intercultural, international and global are integrated with the results of the curriculum, that is, to learning

outcomes, teaching methods, evaluation and support services, with the objective of students developing social and professional skills that allow them to function in international and multicultural contexts (GREEN; MERTOVA, 2016; LEASK, 2015). Another way to promote internationalization is the most widespread mobility, whether students, academics, researchers, managers or administrative staff (CHANTRAIN, 2010; FRANCO-LOYAL; SOETANTO; CAMELO-ORDAZ, 2016; GARCIA, 2013). Specifically in student mobility,

undergraduate and graduate students conduct internships, short courses and academic residencies outside their institution. If the stay is fulfilled in a foreign country is an important instrument for the integral training of the professional future, the opportunity to learn another language, meet and live with people belonging to different cultures.

Likewise, it allows to take advantage of the presence of foreign students – or nationals returning from abroad with different experiences – to enrich local students (ANUIES, [21--], our translation).

This article presents the experience of student mobility experienced by a group of 31 students enrolled in a Master's degree in Education, offered at CETYS University. The objective that is sought to be achieved is to identify the learning that students have acquired with their experience of internationalization.

Internationalization at CETYS University: summer course of the Master's degree in Education

The Universage CETYS is a private institution with three campuses in northwestern Mexico. It offers programs in different areas of knowledge at the preparatory, undergraduate, graduate and continuing education levels. For the institution, internationalization is one of the differential elements and, as such, is offered to students of all educational levels. The goal with this element is to achieve "internationalization for all" (GÁRATE; ROCHA, 2011, p. 42) through several strategies.

In the case of the Master's degree in Education, which is a vocational program, one of the ways in which internationalization is achieved is through student mobility, specifically with short stays abroad, which are offered annually. Although short stays are promoted among all students enrolled in the program, those who are able and decide to do so participate. This implies making the monthly payment and, in addition, absorbing the expenses of the trip. The 2017 summer course was attended by 31 students. The institution's role before students is to coordinate academic activities, as well as some complementary social and cultural activities, which are the responsibility of the teacher designated as a companion. The teacher in charge

gives information about the course and the trip, follows the enrollment process, and travels with students to serve as a guide, liaison, and advisor.

The subject change annually, according to the options of the receiving institutions, but it is always equivalent to a program subject, since the number of hours is similar and the theme is linked to the program content. In 2017, the *Neuroscience in Education course* was offered, lasting five sessions organized in one week. Usually, the course is done at a university in Spain, but thanks to institutional agreements and negotiations, for the first time there were two receiving institutions: the University of Salamanca in Spain, where the group participated in activities for three days, and the University of Coimbra in Portugal, where students carried out activities for two days.

The dynamics were planned in such a way that the expert teachers presented lecture sessions on the various aspects of the proposed theme. Attendance in classes and the fulfillment of the request in them represented 60% of the course grade; the remaining 40% were determined with the score attributed to an integrative final work, in which the following elements were requested: (1) report of the topics addressed in each of the sessions; (2) recovery, reflection and identification of the main lessons learned, and (3) an optional section, as a bonus, in which they could share additional questions, for example, their experiences and the challenges they faced.

Method

To know the perspective of the participants about the learning they achieved with the international summer course, the work they generated was analyzed as a final report. Specifically in the two sections that reflected on their learnings.

Once the corpus was formed by the texts of the 30 students who delivered the final work, a qualitative content analysis was performed (MAYRING, 2014). In the first coding cycle, a deductive type analysis was used, the second was of the inductive type (Saldaña, 2016). That is, in the beginning we seek to categorize learning according to its type of content: (1) conceptual, which are facts or concepts; (2) procedural, procedural, procedural or technical; (3) attitudinal, which are attitudes, values or norms, and (4) socioaffective contents, linked to social, affective and behavioral skills (GALLEGO; SALVADOR, 2009, p. 144-145). Subsequently, the data were again categorized in a second coding cycle; this time, based on the information that emerged in the students' work.

The presentation of the results will be made descriptively, indicating the main aspects derived from the analysis, and will be enriched with the recovery of fragments verbally extracted from the works prepared by the students.

Findings

The studies analyzed reflect that the students of the Master's degree in Education who participated in the summer course abroad have a positive evaluation of the experience. They describe it as "gratifying", pointing out that this has aroused their "astonishment" and say they feel "satisfied". As for the institution, they recognize that they had follow-up during the process, from "the first information session until the end of the trip"; they also identify that "'pressures' were made to send all the requirements" and appreciate that the accompanying teacher gave them travel advice, interacted in an environment of "confidence to express doubts" and promoted "excellent communication". As for their personal experience, some value that for the first time they traveled to Europe and there are those who were impressed, for example, because "Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Cristóbal Colón walked the corridors of the University of Salamanca", through the infrastructure of the laboratories and for having "the opportunity to know one of the most impressive libraries in the world".

There are students who report appreciate the quality and affection of the work of the teachers who received them, as shown in the following excerpt: "[one] aspect I learned was the humility of the teachers, the desire to give quality time, not only in the course, but by inviting their students to eat". On the other hand, other students likely, other students like that, and appreciate what is offered in their own university, as evidenced by what is stated by one student: "I dare say that several of our teachers outperform in quality and content what we can live abroad."

In addition to experiences, one relevant aspect is that all students consider that they have achieved learning. The identified learnings are then classified, organized according to the type of content they correspond to.

Learning conceptual contents

Conceptual learning is the one that stands out the most, because students make a recovery of learned themes, such as neurosciences, neuro-education, dyslexia, learning, among others. In addition, they allude to textual phrases that were mentioned in the course and were

significant to them, such as these: "Not only do you need teachers to teach, you also have to make students learn" or "Neurosciences tell us that there are as many ways to learn as there are people in the world."

Something that stands out is that, although some aspects of the course were significant, relevant and attractive to some participants, for others were confusing or unattractive, for example, the theme of "scientism" and the relationship between neurosciences and education. This differentiated perception of the course contents is due to three main factors. First, for the prior training of students. For those who had no prior knowledge of the topics, the course was particularly complicated; on the other hand, those who had previous knowledge assimilated the themes better, as happened with a student of the Master's degree in Education who is a doctor and was able to "better understand the information that scientists approached". Secondly, an important factor was their personal interests or the taste that each has before these topics, as happened to a student who points out: "Personally, I'm not a fan of science and I should mention that it was a bit difficult for me to understand it." Thirdly, it can be pointed out as a factor to consider their motivation to participate in the stay, since there are those who recognize the interest in the subject, while others point to other motivations, as evidenced by what was reported by a student: "I decided to take the summer course in the first instance and be honest, to avoid taking a subject and having weekends off".

It is also relevant that some have identified possible ways to transfer their learning, especially those who are teachers, while there are those who see a broader application, since they consider that

teachers, institutions and corresponding authorities should be aware of the importance of neural processes, not only to be able to transmit knowledge within the classroom, but also for the administrative management of the same school entities, relationships with other teachers and with society itself.

Of course, there were also conceptual learnings of non-academic but cultural aspects. For example, one student learned that "beers are called 'cañas', for 'paja' canudos, benches are 'totas' and that roundabouts are 'rotondas'".

Learning processual contents

Knowledge of procedures and techniques related to academic issues was not detected, which is understandable because the classes were eminently theoretical. However, there were procedural learnings related to the planning and development of the trip: logistics of the places to visit before or after the course, saving for a period of up to seven months to be able to pay for the trip, organizing the necessary documentation, fulfilling the requirements at the established times, organizing work and family issues to be able to make the trip, use public transport from another country.

In addition to the ordinary issues involved in international travel, there was an extraordinary case, as can be seen in the following description:

Definitely, this trip and this course left important learnings in me. In the first week (sic.) in Spain my documentation and money were stolen. At first, I was terrified and wanted to return immediately to Mexico; however, it would have been very cowardly if I had turned the problem and not confronted. It was difficult, since I was alone [...], but I consider that my brain developed new strategies, or, from necessity, my brain created new connections to be able to live this time (our translation).

Two questions stand out from the previous fragment. On the one hand, there is an explicit identification of the learning gained after experience, which can be classified as procedural. On the other hand, there is an intentional effort on the part of the student to use the concepts learned in the course, and it was not the only case, the same happens with other participants of the course, although in less challenging contexts.

Learning from attitudinal contents

There are learnings of a personal nature, especially linked to the opportunity for growth, self-discovery and empowerment, as illustrated in the following fragment:

I had to be more organized, learn to trust myself more and the decisions I make, likewise, being away from home helped me to be more independent, know how to be economical, take care of myself and realize that I can do things myself, that I don't need to be accompanied by anyone to risk (our translation).

The experience of values is also identified, especially in the interaction with peers. This is evidenced when students pointed out in their work that they needed to be respectful, generous, tolerant and patient, especially with their peers.

The students also reinforced attitudes and reproduced stereotypes about the inhabitants of the cities they visited. This type of comment was repetitive, for example, in two different works were presented the following sentences: "I found that it is not a myth that the French smell ugly or do not bathe" and "Undoubtedly the cultural shock was more noticeable with the Spaniards and their eternal low self-esteem". In the same work from which the last fragment is extracted, a series of phrases that the student claims to have received during his trip through Spain are presented, like this: "But you are not black, are you sure you are Mexican?" As you can see, stereotypes are reproduced in both directions, as seen in the works generated by the students.

Learning from socioaffective contents

Socioaffective learning is, after conceptual learning, the ones that most identify students. They report having learned to live with different people, with whom they would not have thought of relating, and did so both by planning and during the trip. The above is illustrated in the following comment:

to know new friends-companions of adventure, with all kinds of experiences, that despite having very different ages, personalities and not knowing each other, the experience alone united us and allowed us to approach, know and value ourselves as people (our translation).

Final thoughts

The international mobility experienced by 31 students of the Master's Degree in Education was brief, only one week, although the participants reported having obtained a broad learning of a diversified nature. This includes academic and professional issues, opportunities for personal growth, and life experiences. The experience was not the same for everyone, each student highlighted in his integrative work what was relevant to him and became the opposite of what was identified by another classmate. There are those who have even reinforced stereotypes, which was not an objective of experience. Despite the latter, the most relevant thing about international mobility is that there were learnings identified by all participants, some that could be transferred, others that feed them intellectually or personally. For all this, international experiences of student mobility are recommended, both for students and for higher education institutions.

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