UNIVERSITY & SOCIETY AS A CURRICULAR SPACE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The paper presents the systematization and socialization of the experience of the English Club, as a linking project and training space for students of the Language and Linguistics School of the Technical University of Manabí, Ecuador. We share some preliminary results that have been built since the process of systematizing the experience, which attempts to synthesize some lines of analysis, to visualize ways of working and construction of knowledge from and to the practices themselves, giving rise to questions on this subject, which aims to promote the transformation of linking practices in our university. The critical reflection on the practices, the reconstruction of the experience, its conceptualization and the production of new knowledge, assuming as a reflexive axis of the analysis the pedagogical dimension of the extension, constitutes the objective of the present paper, which summarizes the partial result of the thesis Doctoral of one of the authors of the work, aimed at resituating and reframing the role of extension projects as social spaces of learning and integral training of university students.

Keywords: university extension, linkage, integral formation.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of the search for a relevant higher education and with social responsibility, the projection of the university to the society acquires significant relevance for the achievement of its social order and the economic, social and cultural improvement of the context in which it operates.

In Ecuador, as part of the Government Plan of President Rafael Correa, under the new Constitution of 2008, and under the National Plan for Good Living presented in 2009, work is in the search for alternatives that lead to a better style of life of the whole population, that develop the human talent and that propitiate a higher education of excellence that promotes the development [1].

One of the central criteria that have guided the design of Ecuadorian educational policies at the higher level in recent years has been the link of university–society, which has driven many of the changes observed in the higher education system throughout the present decade.

In the area of curricula and syllabi, the curricularisation of the link university-society begins to be consolidated through a greater coherence of the objectives and the terminal profiles with the prevailing needs in the sphere of influence of the educational institution and the work market; or through the formulation of local, regional or national development programs and projects.

Consistent with the criterion that extension should be the best expression of a creative integration University-Society and its most suitable link, there is the possibility of making this function the axis of university action, the thread of social immersion of the University, with which their programs acquire an extraordinary relevance in the work of institutions of higher education [12].

The marginality of extension in relation to teaching and research functions, the extracurricular nature of extension projects, and the limited participation of the university community in dialogue with social actors, began to be replaced by innovative proposals for curriculum extension, as a social space for learning and training of socially committed professionals. It is committed to the articulation between training and social responsibility, which has opened a new path to the debate on the educational role of extension projects with the integration of the pedagogical dimension to the social, institutional and dialogic dimensions of extension, which in their integration confer a great conceptual wealth and reconfigure the extensionist practice with an integrating character.

All of this in the institutional debate rests on the "way of being a university", within the framework of the relevance of its social mission, but also calls us to re-define the role of extension as a formative space in the personal, professional and social development of the student.
As M. Rafaghelli points out: "From its pedagogical dimension, extension has the obligation and the commitment to create opportunities for institutional consolidation of academic training in articulation with social problems" [10].

Important contributions in this direction result from the doctoral thesis of A. Batista[3], who defines the curricularisation of university extension as: "... the process through which are designed and implemented, in the undergraduate, curricular spaces of teaching and learning with the general aim of promoting culture, and in which elements of the three substantive university processes are naturally incorporated, so as to influence in a more organic way in the fulfillment of the social order of the university and in the integral formation of the future professional", who also assumes it as a formative process, dynamic, integrative and multifaceted, from an interactive and multidirectional dialogue with the different actors involved in the university - society relationship.

In Ecuador, the link with the community as a function of higher education is institutionalized from the 1998 Constitution and the Higher Education Law of 2000, with the expansion of interaction with productive sectors, the establishment of student compulsory education of services to the community and the creation in the HEIs of the Permanent Commission of Linkage with the Collectivity.

The National Plan for Linkage to the Society constitutes a support instrument for the management of the process of Linkage with the Society of HEIs, which establishes as a strategic objective:

To develop the link between HEIs and society, transforming this function into a continuous action of HEI activities, which promotes and enhances the integral development of the university community and its environment, oriented to the improvement of the quality of life, the search for Harmony with nature and respect for particular cultural manifestations [11].

In accordance with the social order of the Ecuadorian higher education institutions, the Technical University of Manabí (UTM), founded on June 25, 1954, has the mission of forming integral professionals under the critical - propositional paradigm, contributing to the development of locality, the province and the country in its different branches. Within its functions, it has the responsibility to maintain the direct link with the society to identify its demands and needs, which will allow to continue raising the effectiveness to generate actions that contribute to its solution and to enhance in this way the own university development.

In compliance with this function, it has in its organizational structure the General Directorate of Linkage and the Department of University Linkage and Extension, regulated in their functions by the General Manual of Guidelines for Linking with Society and University Extension, in which it is conceptualized The Linkage as: "... the interaction of the University with the other components of society, for mutual benefit in the advancement of knowledge, contributing to the solution of problems according to the National Plan of Good Living." [6]

English clubs, as community projects of the Technical University of Manabí (UTM), have constituted an important initiative of the Language and Linguistic School, as an action of linking with the community and organizational form of learning the English language in non-formal contexts, aimed at complementing the formal teaching of the language in high school students of the public education institutions of Portoviejo, province of Manabí, Ecuador.

The project arises from the inadequacies in the communicative language skills and the limited alternatives and opportunities to access spaces that complement formal education in the local context.

The institutionalization of the English Club in 2013 as a community linking project has benefited students from 14 public educational units in the 3 experiences made, however, the actions deployed do not show all their formative wealth if our reflection does not become explicit, Through spaces of systematization of the lived experiences, that allow redefined it from its contrast with the theoretical referents, and to produce new knowledge for the enrichment of future experiences.

This initial approach to the systematization of experience, through the reflexive dialogue between theoretical knowledge and the knowledge that emerges from practice, constitutes the objective of this paper, as a partial result of the doctoral thesis of one of the authors of the work, aimed at resituating and redefining the role of extension projects as social spaces of learning and training.

2 METHODOLOGY

The scope of the investigation determines the relevance of the qualitative perspective as a methodological option, where the analysis is focused on the meanings attributed by the subjects to
their actions and the intentionality of them, which allows to deepen the understanding of our object of research in its contextual relations, that makes it possible to expand the existing body of knowledge, without pretending to reach universal abstractions but to concrete and specific universals. This does not limit the incorporation of quantitative methods and techniques of collection and analysis of information, which can provide greater breadth and depth in the study.

The methodological approach distinguishes two stages:

- In the first, we work with the mixed case study, with a complete integration design, which incorporates both approaches throughout the process of inquiry, collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. It aims to document the case (the UTM English Club) in depth, to understand it from the voices of its informants (beneficiary agents and participants) and to establish the lines of change in relation to the planning, orientation and evaluation of the English Club.

- The second stage, directed to the formulation of the Methodological Strategy, privileges the Focus Group, being cyclical the identification of weak and strong points of the formative process in the UTM English Club and the selection of particular strategies that have to be implemented. Both aspects are systematically subjected to a process of reflection and change.

The theoretical methods cover the entire research process (analysis-synthesis, inductive, modeling), based on the use of the assumed referential scheme, where a set of principles and requirements are identified as the guiding thread in the design and implementation of the results obtained.

The diversity of information sources, characteristic of qualitative studies, required the development and application of a variety of empirical methods and techniques: document analysis, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, participant observation, field diary, placement test production level oral.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The English Club: deconstruction and construction of the experience

The English club, as a community project of linking in the UTM, arises from the initiative of two teachers of the Language and Linguistics School, who develop the first experience with their students of school, achieving a high acceptance in the participants.

The identification of linkage programs, as an opportunity to guarantee the sustainability of the proposal, conditions the presentation of the project and its approval by the Directorate of Linkage in the year 2013. The formulation of the project is based on the diagnosis of the inadequacies in the achieve of communicative skills, the limited opportunities to access spaces that complement formal education in the local context, and the potential of the University to respond identified needs, in which the University is intended as an actor who brings more and also learns from reality.

The English Club project corresponds to the "Let promote languages in education" program, inscribed in the strategic linking line: academic, cultural, artistic, scientific and technological diffusion.

English clubs, such as community projects, have been an important initiative of the Language and Linguistic School of the UTM as a way of linking with local development and organizational learning in non-formal contexts, achieving a high acceptance by the participating actors and beneficiaries, conditioned, among other factors, by the fact that classes in non-formal contexts meet the needs of adolescents to freely decide what they like and are attractive in a more dynamic and participative environment among high school students and the teachers-students of the University.

In this non-formal context the student can find an alternative learning environment that allows them to work more independently in the development of their abilities. The methodology used is completely innovative, dynamic, creative, attractive and practical, in such a way that motivates towards a permanent learning of the language and becomes a significant experience.

The proposal pursues - at least at the declaratory level - a dual intentionality: to create a social space of learning in which the students of the school of languages put in tension and develop professional competences that will be required in their future teaching practice, promoting a compromised attitude with social reality. It also seeks to meet needs identified in educational institutions, which the university can respond effectively.
Since the approval of the project in 2013 to 2016, three experiences have been carried out, which have benefited students from 14 educative institutions in urban and rural zones in the city of Portoviejo, Manabi Province, Ecuador:

- Uruguay English Club (2013-2014)
- Sosote-Mejía English Club (2015)
- UTM English Club (2015-2016)

### 3.2 The UTM English Club

The project executed in the period October / 15-January / 16, is carried out on the premises of the Technical University of Manabí, in which six educational institutions of the city of Portoviejo intervene as beneficiaries, and as a participant entity the UTM, represented by the project manager (the researcher), the teacher-supervisors and the students of the seventh semester of the Language and Linguistic School.

It is assumed as an initial reference of the research proposal, the established regulations and the documents elaborated in the previous experiences, however, a set of instruments of diagnosis, monitoring and evaluation of the educational process are incorporated, as well as actions aimed at enhancing the formative influence of the English Club in the development of the oral production of high school students and in the professional, personal and social development of student-teachers of the university, based on the theoretical-methodological references assumed in the research. The built-in instruments are not only intended to diagnose and document the experience from a new perspective of analysis and understanding, but also to establish lines of action in the training area of the extension project.

In the initial stage of project planning a questionnaire is applied to the 30 students who register to perform their practices of linking in the club, aimed at self-assessing their experience and teaching preparation. The results evidenced, in addition to a limited teaching experience, the recognition of limitations in the mastery of teaching strategies for a successful performance, which suggested the need to incorporate a first moment of "Meetings of reflection and theoretical-methodological appropriation of strategies of Teaching in the non-formal educational context", in which they participated: the 15 student-teachers of the school selected for the research project; 5 supervisors; The project manager (researcher) and the specialist coordinator of the meetings.

The first meeting begins with a presentation by the researcher of the main deficiencies of the students from publics high schools in the English language, as a social need to which the community project of the Club responds; Together with the results of the self-evaluation questionnaire of the pedagogical experience and preparation, which showed its limitations for teaching practice. These results are subject to a critical reflection on the necessity and possibility of change and the requirements to achieve it, based on the assumption of commitments and responsibilities agreed upon.

The 11 scheduled meetings of theoretical and methodological appropriation are carried through a learning process in, on and for the action, through the anticipated simulation of tasks located in a non-formal education context. This systematic process of reflection-action-reflection allows the student to modify his experience and professional domain, enrich the experience of his colleagues, build and improve intervention strategies in high school.

The process evaluation through the incorporation of the portfolio, allowed to locate the student as an active subject and to reflect the trajectory of the learning progress, culminating with the elaboration of a proposal of intervention to promote the oral production in the high school students, that is constructed and reconstructs throughout the process, based on a participatory methodology that promotes socialization, discussion and reflection for change.

A second moment of "Execution and reflection of the practice in the English club", through proposals that allowed to put in tension the theoretical-methodological references with the practice and with it to dynamist the educative experience of the students, incorporated the observation registers of the Teaching performance; The student-teacher field diary; also, with workshops for biweekly reflection on the educational experience lived, and from there problematizing the practice, questioning and transforming it, reflecting on the fears, anxieties, successes and mistakes that accompany the experience.

The resistance of teachers-supervisors to modify their controlling role, by a real function of accompaniment, feedback and orientation, with the use of observation guides, and with the limited
experience of students in the elaboration of the field diary (focus more in the description of activities than in the reflexive expression of feelings and evaluations); have limited the analysis and understanding of the training opportunities offered by these instruments. Only in the case of the researcher, in her role of supervisor, are documented observational records, which show a progress in student performance; Also, in the workshops of reflection, it is possible to recreate the experience, articulating the academic knowledge with those that emerge from the practice.

A third moment of "Evaluation of the educational experience", from the voices of the actors, is implemented with the application of questions to high school students and students, as well as interviews with student-teachers.

It is intended through this moment, not only to obtain data to measure results, but to make an interpretation of the meaning that the actors print to the experience, focused on their interests, concerns, problems, difficulties; that guide the decision making and proposal of actions for the improvement of the project.

3.3 The Voices of Actors

3.3.1 Students from publics High Schools:

The criteria of the high school students are investigated from an anonymous questionnaire of self-evaluation of the lessons learned and of the lived experience, applied to 78 students.

Most of the students recognize that the experience of the club brought new learning in the domain of the language, related to the increase of the vocabulary and the oral expression. There is also a greater interest in the study of the language and the confidence to communicate orally, which may be associated with the recognition that the activities were interesting, developed in a pleasant climate, which allowed them to travel and progress through the club sessions without difficulties.

To this report of the achieved learning, the very favorable evaluations are incorporated in relation to the quality and dynamism of the activities, the teaching strategies employed by the student-teachers, the interaction that is achieved between high school students from different schools and with Teachers, creating a pleasant psychological climate for learning.

The brief analysis of the sense that the high school students attribute to their experience has an inestimable value in the reconceptualization of the non-formal spaces of learning, in which the needs, interests and potentialities of the students as active subjects of the process, enter into a dynamic interplay with the strategies of teaching and learning that are implemented, in which all learn and grow, in a permanent dialogue, knowledge and experiences.

3.3.2 Students-teachers of the Languages and Linguistic School:

The results of the self-evaluation questionnaire of the lessons learned and the lived experience, anonymously applied to 14 student-teachers of the course, show a very favorable evaluation of the project's contributions to their teaching performance, personal, professional and social development.

In the field of teaching, it is recognized the possibility of applying the didactic resources shared in the "Meetings of reflection and theoretical-methodological appropriation", which allowed them to achieve greater efficiency in the design and implementation of learning tasks, as well as in the achievement of the objectives for the development of oral production in high school students.

In the professional field they perceive an enrichment of vocabulary in the language and improvement of the skills, besides the appropriation of new knowledge in the practice.

Greater identification with their profession and teaching, from a growing consolidation of their professional interests and satisfaction with the teaching performance, show an important personal growth, with the achievement of greater security and confidence in their performance and in the management of groups of adolescent students, which was one of the main latent fears before beginning the experience. Social commitment to the profession is recognized as important agents of change.

In the reflection on the most important experiences during the project students attribute a high "educational sense" to the project, which reveals how the articulation of academic knowledge with experience in a real context, mobilizes different ways of thinking, feel and act on a personal, professional and social level.
The negative experiences experienced were little mentioned by the respondents, compared to the number and diversity of positive experiences recognized, which may suggest that the project has managed to stimulate new senses, allowing to transcend the simple fulfillment of a cumulated hours of bonding, Towards an explicit recognition of the "footprint" of the experience in their professional training.

These results are deepened through the group interview with 5 students of the course, which confirms the contribution of the experience to the personal and professional growth, from the transformative dialogue that is generated by putting in tension the academic knowledge with which are constructed and rebuilt in social practice. In this social space of learning, students can "think" by making meaningful contributions to the community, and thereby resituate their commitment as future professionals and agents of change.

Although both the questionnaire and the interview indicate that the lack of time to better prepare and plan the activities with greater rigor, as well as the limited teaching experience to achieve all the proposed objectives, are indicated as negative, however, this tendency to self-improvement can be an expression of personal growth and commitment to the profession.

The suggestions of respondents and interviewees to refine the project, emphasize their educational sense in pointing out the need for clubs to give themselves constantly, considering their positive contribution to the student and the practitioner; And a greater accompaniment of the supervisors in the planning, execution and evaluation of the classes, with a more coordinated work.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The systematization of the experience of the English Club, from the references of the pedagogical dimension of the extensionist projects, has identified three important lines of action:

- To resituate the role of extension projects in the training processes of professionals.
- Resign the educational potential of extension projects.
- Enable spaces of problematization, reflection and change, that allow articulating the academic knowledge with which practice demands.

In these social spaces university students acquire a greater responsibility with their own learning and have before them the challenge of articulating the knowledge learned in the classroom with those that praxis demands. In the experiences of social transformation, academic and scientific knowledge and knowledge are brought into play with social problems, taking into account their complexities and the diversity of participating actors.

REFERENCES


