



Perspectives of UNAN-Managua in the field of university cooperation: analysis of agreements 2020-2022

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ABSTRACT

The research on the perspectives of the UNAN-Managua in the field of university cooperation of an exploratory-descriptive nature, based on the analysis of agreements, is achieved through the documentary review of cooperation agreements signed and renewed during the period 2020-2022, with the sample being 108 cooperation agreements. The article describes the characteristics of the agreements signed by UNAN-Managua and allows us to have a vision of the work of the last three years of the five years; it also seeks to identify the main key processes of inter-institutional cooperation

during the corresponding period, thus visualizing the process with the greatest use; it also aims to identify the challenges about the behavior of the use of agreements to achieve the goals of five years, the latest is in the process of being studied. The document shows the main results corresponding to the signing and renewal of agreements, highlighting Africa and Europe as the main areas of collaboration. On the other hand, it is possible to see the contribution of the Framework and Specific agreements in the key processes of UNAN- Managua, obtaining greater results in the area of training through participation in conferences, seminars, workshops, academic exchange, publications, academic mobility and development of joint training, research and extension projects. For the university, it is vital to carry out this reflection because it allows rethinking strategies aimed at taking advantage of the agreements, it also allows to analyze the integration of internationalization as a strategic bridge in the scope of compliance according to the key institutional processes.

INTRODUCTION

The area of agreements is one of the most visible internationalization issues, it is the means by which is possible to strengthen relations with international and collaborating institutions with the strategic and priority areas at the internal level of the institution, so it is appropriate to extend a look at the work of the UNAN-Managua in terms of agreements, the use of them and the key areas to which they are contributing.

In this article, a brief analysis of the literature review was carried out, highlighting the importance of collaboration and internationalization processes in higher education, especially international university cooperation. Likewise, the role played by academic networks as one of the axes of cooperation and integration in higher education is shown. To mention one, Zambrana's (2019) *study called International Cooperation: Opportunity for the Development of Higher Education in Nicaragua, stated that currently, the concept of international cooperation in higher education is the creation and development of academic networks.*

On the other hand, Ruiz Franco (2009) carried out a study entitled *Perspective of the University of Burgos in the Field of Development Cooperation: A Study of Agreements with Foreign Universities (1994-95, 2008-09)*, through a descriptive analysis he intended to know the number of agreements or specific agreements signed from 1995 to 2009 by the University of Burgos with various foreign universities in the field of University Cooperation at the same time to the development. The research method used in the first stage focused on a field study based on the documentary review of the agreements, developing a database for subsequent analysis, an explanatory analysis was carried out, and a descriptive analysis. Finally, he used the comparative method to identify the differences and similarities between the various documents analyzed. Data analysis was performed using quantitative techniques. As a general conclusion, it is

considered necessary for the organization and management of the agreements, to separate those that belong to the field of internationalization and inter-university cooperation from those that are integrated within development cooperation (Ruiz Franco, 2010).

Other researchers such as Montilla, Prieto, Arena, and Colinas (2006) carried out a study called Diagnosis of the Cooperation Agreements of the University of Zulia. The objective was to diagnose the cooperation agreements with the external sector executed during the period 2000-2003, identifying the typology and characterizing the sectors of performance. It was an exploratory-descriptive research, through documentary review, and intentional non-probabilistic sampling on cooperation agreements, signed and renewed during the study period, with the sample being 107 cooperation agreements. It is concluded that, in the cooperation agreements, the legal expression of the university-external sector relationship, the criteria for establishing the agreement are not precisely defined, in which the university could effectively agree on the scope of performance with the counterpart and thus obtain the benefits declared in them. It is recommended, *inter alia*, to design a system of explicit criteria and a monitoring system for these conventions (Montilla et al., 2011).

Therefore, this article seeks to describe the characteristics of the agreements which UNAN-Managua is subscribed, and allows us to have a vision of how we are in the last three years of the five years; it also seeks to identify the main key processes of inter-institutional cooperation during the 2020-2022 period, thus visualizing the process with greater development and involvement from the agreements and in which it is necessary to have a more critical vision, in the same way, it seeks to identify challenges about the use of agreements to achieve the goals of the five years.

For the university it is important to carry out this reflection because it allows the redirection of strategies aimed at cooperation and the use of agreements, it also allows for a critical and reflective analysis of the integration of internationalization as a strategic process in the scope of compliance according to the key institutional processes, such as a public relations office, It gives rise to the implementation of Quality Risk Management Plans that give rise to operational strategies for monitoring and evaluation, and will also allow the strengthening of the route of accompaniment and use of the agreements in the light of systematizing in a more solid way the experience from the management of agreements.

In theoretical terms, (De Wit et al., 2017) it is appropriate to review the positions of, those who state that the main challenges of the internationalization of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean were: on the one hand, to be connected to the global community of higher education, to try to find a balance between increasing competitiveness and commercialization of higher education; and on the other, to continue promoting higher education

as a public good; as well as finding a balance between local culture and the pressures arising from the harmonization and homogenization movements at the global level. However, all these processes have undergone significant changes in recent years linked to the issue of language, common research agendas, research capacity, knowledge production, and internationalization for higher education at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

According to Vásquez-García (2015), universities are in constant transformation in terms of methods, student profiles, supports, teaching contents, qualifications, university configuration, relationship mechanisms, and paradigms, these changes outline five trends such as the Renewal of the demand for teaching, qualifications, and educational models, increase in the educational offer and transnational education and internationalization, consolidation of new schemes of university competences and cooperation, the interaction of the digital educational component and the transformation of financing schemes and organization of efficient management.

In addition, UNESCO is taking strong steps in the flagship initiative “UNESCO’s Futures of Education”, which aims to rethink education and shape the future. This initiative integrates higher education into broader debates and reflections on the future of education, which was merged into four broad statements on the future of higher education as (1) Active responsibility for our common humanity, (2) Well-being and sustainability, (3) Intercultural and epistemic diversity and (4) Interconnections at multiple levels (Education, 2022).

Higher education by 2050 will change in ways that are both transformative and progressive, disruptive and fluid. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can leverage their “collective disruptive thinking” (Beckles) to support a shift in global and regional development paradigms that support more sustainable futures and engage in activities beneficial to humanity.

Likewise, higher education has traditionally been considered a public good that should be provided and financed essentially by the State (Huerta & Gaeta cite Casani et al, 2014, p.49). However, this funding is not enough, due to the various needs that exist in the field of higher education, such as the aid system, made up of scholarships, and the free program that involves a large amount of public resources and that are intended to increase more and more to benefit the population in general. Among other needs of the higher education system, due to this reality, it is essential to reflect on the scope of the perspectives of inter-institutional cooperation that allows redefining and innovating in each of the processes.

All these changes have led universities to implement different forms of external cooperation more inclusively, including multidirectional actions to achieve mutual benefits, hence the need for the existence and proliferation of agreements. This process entails the need

to develop and maintain its social relevance, the development and updating of human capital that allows the current development of the universities themselves (Montilla et al., 2011)

These international visions coincide with the institutional vision supported in the Regulations for the Management of Agreements at UNAN-Managua, which is presented in correspondence with the statutes and key processes (Training, Research, and University Extension) of the University. The Regulations contribute to the strengthening of the management of internationalization and cooperation processes for the formalization of inter-institutional alliances at the national and international levels. The inter-institutional relations of the UNAN-Managua are constituted as a process of dialogue, through the development of alliances and strategies are formalized with the participation and provision of services of common interest among the parties involved.

The alliances between the UNAN-Managua, universities, organizations, and foreign entities in the academic and scientific field, are established as one of the strategic mechanisms within the role of the University with global perspectives. The construction and formalization of strategic alliances are made possible through the execution of Agreements, agreements, memorandums, and other legal figures that are addressed in these Regulations and that the University has been developing.

In accordance with Article 8 of the Agreement Management Regulations (2021), different definitions are proposed for the purposes of the application of the regulations, including agreement, letters of intent, memorandum of understanding, letter of execution, agreement or framework agreement, specific agreements, inter-institutional commission, agreement or specific agreement.

Thus, the actions of the university have always been related to man, science, and society, the term university itself is associated with the universal in two senses, the first to higher education in different sciences and disciplines, and on the other hand knowledge has universal validity. Therefore, universities assimilate the knowledge acquired by humanity represented in the different disciplines that give rise to the production of new knowledge through the research that is carried out, which allows the transformation of the social environment, hence their social mandate is specified in three processes that are put into execution by the action of knowledge such as teaching, research, and extension, thus becoming the three substantive functions of Higher Education (Fabre, 2005).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are recognized for their contribution to the social, economic, and cultural development of societies, as well as for their responsibility in the training of integral professionals with ethical values and social commitment. According to the Manual of University Processes (UNAN-Managua, 2020), internationalization is integrated into university

processes from the Management of Internationalization to strengthen the institutional image and projection, by the minimum of international quality.

Among the key university processes, it is worth mentioning the macro-process of internationalization, where the process of internationalization management, university cooperation process, and academic mobility process stand out.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was assumed not as a static and inflexible process, but as a changing one, susceptible to modification, which is enriched in the course of its stages. Therefore, the study follows a research route with a quantitative approach of an exploratory nature with a descriptive scope where data collection is carried out at a single time (Hernández et al., 2010). The source of information is the institutional agreements between 2020-2022.

The collection of information was carried out through the technique of documentary review taking as a secondary source the reports, agreements, and other documents of institutional support, in the same way, such research does not have ethical implications in the process so it is not working with an individual but with numerical records, therefore it is governed by the International Rules and Standards for Scientific Research (COMMON RULE) where it is established that the studies of review of data/records taken from a pre-existing dataset that is available to the public and do not involve any type of interaction with humans or the collection of any type of data from a human participant are exempt from making Informed Consent, however, being proprietary information and institutional secrecy, every one of the elements that are considered non-disclosure is kept safe.

In total, the agreements signed from 2020 to 2022 were analyzed, being 57 specific and 51 frameworks, national and international. Among the selection criteria, it was taken into account that the agreements were registered in the agreement matrix of the Directorate of Public and International Relations (DIREPI), that they were in force, and reported, and that a digital copy of the agreement was obtained. In summary, the information contained in the agreements was analyzed, the agreements were classified according to their name, establishing the parameters to study the information generated, based on the general context of the agreement, obtaining the data that identify the criteria, clauses, principles, purposes, and objectives used by the parties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The framework agreement at the institutional level is conceived with the objective of developing a five-year strengthening plan that is implemented annually based on an institutional strategic project. The projects are prepared in line with the institutional strategic

plan, considering public policies in education and seeking to strengthen institutional capacities. However, they state that the framework agreement does not provide freely available resources, they are being linked as mentioned to the strategic lines and institutional processes, elements that coincide with what has been proposed (Huerta et al., 2019).

Table 1

Types of agreements by scope and sector of application.

Guy	Ambit	Sector (type of organization)
Framework Cooperation Agreement	*National	* Institution of Higher Education. * Government Sector.
Specific Cooperation Agreement	*International	* Productive Sector. * Other Organizations.

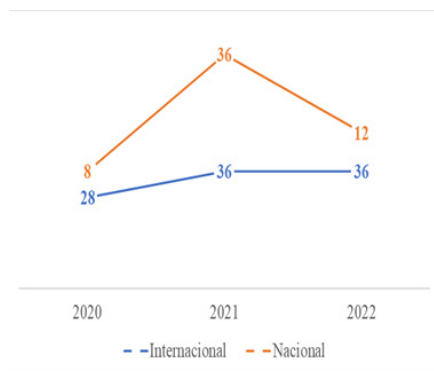
Source: Prepared by the researchers.

It is important to note that the university in its work has two types of agreements according to the field and sector of work, in this we find cooperation agreements frameworks and specific agreements that can also be association agreements and alliances, both have a trend of national or international linkage. The element to highlight in this table is that within the application sector, the linkage is mainly with higher education institutions, but as we can see it is not the only one in the application sector.

This is linked to what Bautista (2009) cites, where he states that the university-business-government link is important since it is one of the axes of HEIs, the linkage which is accepted by some writers as the fourth substantive function of HEIs and the one that is manifested in public policies from the impulse towards innovation. Where the work of the university in the generation, application, and transfer of knowledge is disputed. However, as an IES, this linking process is already integrated into the strategic processes of UNAN-Managua that respond to the key institutional processes. (*View of the Importance of University-Business-Government Linkage in Mexico, n.d.*)

Figure 1

Percentage of agreements signed per year.



Source: Database of agreements.

As can be seen in the issue of international agreements, there is an increase from 28% to 36% of the agreements signed over the years, however, in the issue of national agreements it is observed that for 2021 there were 36% of agreements signed and executed, decreasing this percentage for 2022 with 12%. But it is important to note that the level of use was really satisfactory.

In this sense, it is important to consider contextual and epidemiological aspects of the country, there is a very marked decrease in national agreements in 2020, which is associated with the pandemic situation of SARS 2 COVID-19.

On the other hand, we find the distribution of the international agreements signed, in which the university contains 17% of the agreements signed in Central and South America, but only 13% in North America, while 26% of the agreements signed in Asia and Europe are found.

Figure 2

Breakdown of agreement by continent.



Source: Document review of the DIREPI database.

Within the framework of the cooperation areas, this process has an articulated mechanism that facilitates the achievement of the objectives and seeks the best fluid communication route between the corresponding units that allows the achievement of the objectives more efficiently, a route of the management process is described below:

Table 2

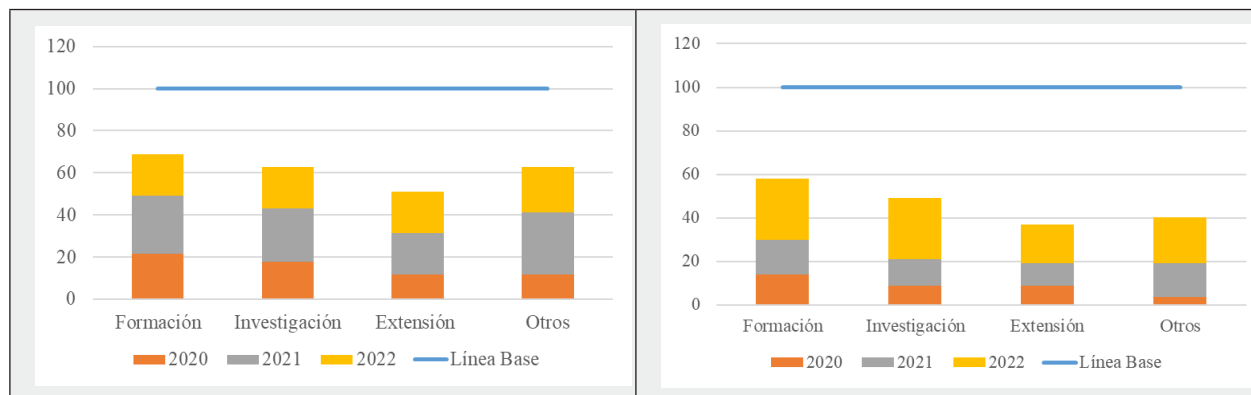
Route of the agreement management process.

Identification of opportunities (academic units).	Management of the signing of agreements (general secretary, Rectoría).
<p>Identify opportunities for the signing of HEI agreements.</p> <p>To characterize the HEIs identified.</p> <p>Socialize with the academic units (UA) related to the areas of cooperation, promoting the signing of agreements.</p> <p>Identify possible specific actions.</p>	<p>Review the institutional agreement format technique</p> <p>Exchange and review legal documentation</p> <p>Review the technical-legal of the agreement file</p> <p>To sign the agreement by the corresponding authorities</p> <p>Register in the database</p>
Execution and monitoring (Academic units)	Communication, information management
<p>Identify opportunities and promote the dynamism of the agreement.</p> <p>To propose to the UAs actions for the dynamism of agreements.</p> <p>To serve as an interlocution between the UAs and the HEIs convenient for the dynamism of the agreements.</p> <p>Accompanying the AUs in the dynamism of the agreements</p> <p>Prepare the management document for each agreement and keep a record of the activities carried out.</p> <p>Collect evidence of dynamism.</p> <p>Follow up to the agreements to ensure their dynamism and compliance with goals.</p> <p>Review the validity of the agreements.</p> <p>Manage the settlement or renewal of agreements.</p>	<p>Participate in the production and awareness of information and knowledge regarding the dynamics of agreements.</p> <p>Participate in the production of peer visit reports, high-quality accreditation, initial conditions, and board of directors.</p> <p>Participate in the production and awareness of the results of agreements.</p> <p>Disseminate in: institutional newspapers, social networks, screens, and capsules.</p>

Source: Authors.

Figure 3

Contribution of the Framework and Specific Agreements in the Key Processes of UNAN Managua.



Source: Database of DIREPI UNAN Managua agreements.

Graphically, it is evident that, of the 100% of framework agreements signed between 2020 and 2022, there were 70% in the key Training process for the year 2020, 62% contributed to the research, 50% to extension, and 62% to other items such as donations and equipment. In relation to the specific agreements, of 100%, 59% contributed to Training, 50% to Research, 38% to Extension, and 40% to other items such as donations and equipment.

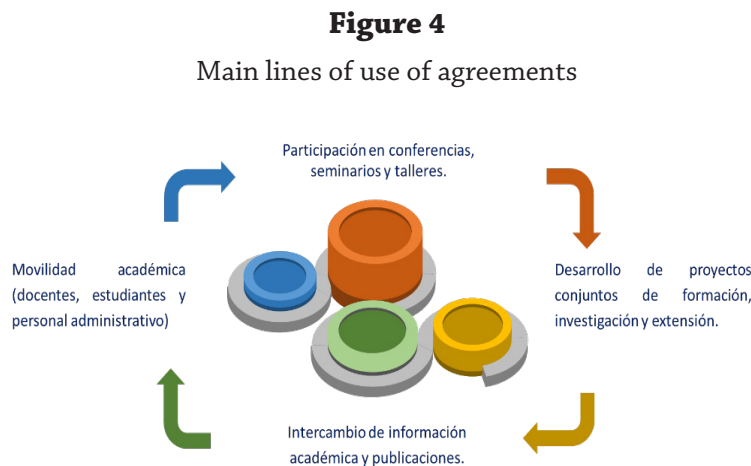
From the perspective of the contribution of agreements, it is visualized how in the framework and specific agreements there is a higher percentage of actions aimed at the field of training, followed by the research theme, however, we see that the issue of extension is seen a marked decrease mainly in the year 2020.

Despite having been a year particularly affected by the global epidemiological crisis, 2020 brought significant steps in internationalization, achieving new collaboration agreements, and adhesions to new networks that promoted research and training and encouraged collaborative work virtually.

The work mechanisms implemented by the university amid COVID-19 made it possible to continue with the existing cooperation agreements, which facilitated the stability of university extension, managing to virtualize most of the planned activities with academic and social work. This experience establishes a prelude that allows for varying and at the same time strengthening the work strategies projected and executed in 2021, achieving this year to increase training, research, extension, and mobility in the university community, prioritizing the virtual methodology.

The new work experiences strengthen collaboration agreements and actions in the different academic networks, this allows UNAN-Managua to invigorate the articulations of

institutional work and causes the implementation of a research internationalization strategy that executes new research projects. The strengthening of articulated work, the institutional measures implemented post-COVID-19, and the development of an adequate action plan managed to solidify the key processes of the university, examples of some determining actions of the work of the key processes within the framework of the use of the agreements are shown in the following image (Figure 4).



Source: Lechado Rios, Clara 2023. Internationalization at UNAN-Managua: perspectives for inter-institutional cooperation. XII Internationalization Week, organized by: Central-Eastern Node of the Colombian Network for the Internationalization of Higher Education.

The above described is linked to what UNESCO (2011) stated in the document of *Performance Agreements and its contribution to the financing of higher education in Chile*, where it states that performance agreements contribute as an instrument for financing higher education. But it is important to note that state funding for educational services is the one that sustains the highest percentage of the real performance of the country's higher education institutions and not only allocates resources according to what is planned and committed but also for the search for more and better results (***Performance Agreements and Their Contribution to the Financing of Higher Education in Chile - UNESCO Digital Library, n.d.***).

CONCLUSIONS

The types of agreements signed at UNAN-Managua are of a framework and specific type, both national and international. These agreements have a greater tendency to collaborate with countries on the continents of Asia and Europe and have described a route for the management of agreements that fits the strategic process of internationalization, providing positive results within the framework of the strategic processes.

The areas of cooperation are determined by the institutional strategic processes according to the manual of institutional processes, among which the training process in the first place, research in the second, and extension in the third stood out, as the main areas where international collaboration is focused within the framework of the agreements signed by the university.

The identification of challenges about the use of agreements to achieve the goals of the five-year period continues in a process of construction at the time of presenting this research advance; Through this objective of the paper, it is intended to seek the best strategies that aim to strengthen the articulated work to achieve quality management by mitigating risks in the processes.

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