



The harmonization of the Education majors in Nicaragua: policy and perspectives.

Ph.D Álvaro Escobar Soriano

Teaching Executive
UNAN-Managua
aescobar@unan.edu.ni

Ph.D Xiomara Lisbeth Videá

Teaching Executive
UNAN-Managua
lisvidea@gmail.com

Ph.D Roberto de Armas

Teaching Head
Scientific-Methodological Consultant
Universidad de la Habana, Cuba
rdearmas45@yahoo.es

Submitted on May 26, 2020 / Accepted on July 8, 2020

<https://doi.org/10.5377/torreon.v9i26.10258>

Keywords: curricular harmonization, curricular development, national education.

ABSTRACT

Socially, it has been reflected on the competences that the university demands from professionals. It is these reflections and demands that have led universities to rethink the curriculum with which they train professionals. Due to this reality and the social commitment of the universities, specifically the public ones, Nicaragua is experiencing a process of in-depth and assertive review regarding the study plans with which future teachers are trained.

This article will express the agreements reached by the four public universities attached to the Consejo Nacional de Universidades (National Council of Universities) CNU, to harmonize the curriculum that gives way to the academic training of high school teachers. Likewise, the successes and advances that will favor national education will be explained as prospects.

Particularly noteworthy is the articulation between two education systems (Ministry of Education-University) to develop the skills required of a good teacher.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nicaraguan universities (four public universities attached to the CNU: UNAN-Managua, UNAN-León, BICU, and URACCAN), where teachers who work at the secondary level are trained, have undertaken a process of curricular harmonization that leads to a new training, national and international mobility processes for both students and teachers, while the potential of the institutions will create a synergy capable of entering moments of continuous improvement of education in the country.

On the other hand, the prospects for the successes and advances that will favor national education will be explained. Of this, the articulation between the education systems (MINED-University) in favor of developing the skills required of a good teacher stands out.

2. CURRICULUM HARMONIZATION

Harmonization is a term that has been coined in pedagogical terminology from internationalization processes (derived from regionalization processes through bodies such as CSUCA), which higher education institutions encourage and promote as a method to update curricula, research and do external extension practices (Escobar, Videa and De Armas, 2019). There are several harmonization experiences (of instruments, approaches, procedures, goals, actors, etc.), (AECID, 2016), however, what is required to achieve curricular integration between universities is the harmonization between actors the which leads to the others at different levels.

Curricular harmonization is a process in which a deep level of agreement is reached (Feldstein, 2000), in educational terms, between universities both at the national and international levels. In other words, to harmonize curricula, the university authorities must decisively assume the common goal of having integrated curricula but respecting the institutional particularities and the characteristics of the regional societies to which the institutions' syllabus.

Consequently, curricular harmonization establishes a certain convergence between different curricula. In this harmonizing conjunction, they can be the object of harmonization, that is; "Harmonization (...), in the duration of the studies, in the minimum contents, in the levels of deepening in each level of studies, in the unit of measurement of the effort that the learning requires (...), in the quality of guarantee of the programs (...), (Videa, Escobar and De Armas, 2019).

The harmonization process of the education majors of the four public universities in the country requires a series of procedures that will allow the systematicity and integration of the

students' knowledge in the search to respond to the social demands of the country. Therefore, in the *step by step for the preparation of the harmonized curriculum to develop competencies* (2019), it is stated that the harmonization of the curricula of education majors in the country's universities is a need-oriented to quality training agreed to the Nicaraguan society. This part of the appropriation of a curriculum to develop competencies aimed at achieving the systematicity and integration of all its components and actors.

On the other hand, to achieve the above, the development of actions oriented on the basis and phases of educational action research is visualized. That is, based on this, the accompaniment to each of the actions and stages that will be developed in each of the majors that will harmonize the curricula must be carefully planned. In this way, it will be possible for teachers and leaders to be objectively involved in the improvement of educational processes whose main purpose is to improve learning, but from continuous improvement of the harmonized curricula of the universities.

It derives from the above that to begin harmonizing the curriculum design, it was essential to prepare different documents of the process of construction of the curriculum for each major. This, in the development of the process, has reduced the improvisation that can lead to the failure of a curricular innovation of these dimensions.

Operationally, it has been considered that planning, monitoring, and permanent evaluation are essential to verify the effectiveness of the process, as well as failures. Therefore, these recursive moments are necessary not only to consider the achievements but also to introduce the adjustments that make it possible to overcome the errors detected and guide the culture of continuous improvement in the curriculum.

2.1. Harmonization Policies for Majors in Nicaragua (CNU)

To achieve curricular harmonization between education majors in Nicaragua, some political and strategic tools have been signed and created that has allowed the process to advance significantly:

- Signing of an agreement to recognize titles in 21 Latin American countries.
- Agreement between the rectors of the country assigned to the CNU for the harmonization of majors in education, agricultural sciences, and medical sciences.
- Signing of an agreement between CNU and CSUCA for the adoption of the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Central America (MCESCA) and the signing of recognition of degrees with 21 Latin American countries.

- Formulate the harmonization of curricula as a strategic axis in the CNU's operational plan.
- Adopt curricular innovation as a strategic axis for the modernization of the university.
- Visualize a common curricular model to assemble the new harmonized curricula.
- Form a team of specialists in curriculum design and with the necessary qualities to accompany the harmonization process.
- Create and install the necessary instances to conduct the harmonization process.
- Plan the harmonization process in coincidence with the curricular innovation process in the universities.
- Develop a training process for harmonization commissions and academic groups.

From the previous actions, it can be deduced that the harmonization of education majors in the universities is a policy of the CNU derived from the National Education Plan and the National Human Development Plan promoted and developed by the Government of Peace and National Reconciliation headed by Commander Daniel Ortega.

2.2. The model for developing competencies: the central axis of harmonization

The curricular model that guides this process of curricular redesign and harmonization is the one developed by Sampaio, Leite, and De Armas (2015). It is based on the principle of integrating social demands into curricular planning because the university from its main functions teaches, investigates, and expands its work towards a society that expects from it the impulse to achieve sustainable development.

According to Escobar, Videira, and De Armas, (2019), the model to develop competences, adopted as a route for a curricular redesign in the harmonization process, has three characteristics:

(...) The *systematicity* between its components, the *integration* of the processes generated by the interaction between its elements, the work of the teachers and the learning of the students (related to that of the institutional and union leaders), and the *recursion* of the stages as a direct effect of the complexity of a process of curricular innovation of this nature. Adapted for the Nicaraguan context, it is made up of the following stages: diagnosis, design of the professional profile, and development of curricular axes. (p. 3)

3. INSTANCES TO OPERATIONALIZE THE CURRICULAR HARMONIZATION

The harmonization of education majors has its development through different actions that are discussed within the authorities of the universities in the process of harmonization. Therefore, to make the process effective, different commissions were formed. The first is the

National Harmonization Commission, which has the task of guaranteeing the development of the process from a macro perspective in which all the universities concerned in the process are reflected. Likewise, the National Harmonization Commission must approve the proposals that each Major Commission has harmonized.

In this sense, each major Curricular Commission will present the results of the work carried out at the work tables for it to be evaluated by the National Harmonization Commission. The latter has the power to make observations, suggestions, and comments that allow improving the curricular design of the degree.

On the other hand, harmonization would not be possible without the commitment, maturity, and responsibility of the coordinators of each major Commission and of the academic groups who are the ones who build the curriculum for the majors they represent.

In this regard, the Commissions for the Harmonization of Majors were also formed, which through a coordinator, ensure the work with the groups of academics. Therefore, the basis of the achievements is communication, consensus, respect and integration between groups and commission members, who using their classroom and professional training contribute to the development of the process.

The work carried out by the academic groups depends on the particularities of the university they represent. That is, it has been established as a common agreement between all the parties involved in the harmonization process, that 75% or 80% of the curriculum will be harmonized, leaving 20% or 25% of the construction of the design so that each university has the freedom to establish its own rules, taking into account that each house of study has its mission and institutional vision. In short, this will make it possible to respond to their training needs, context, and particular conditions.

Among the commissions formed, the Executive Committee for the harmonization of education majors stands out, in charge of the operationalization of the process in terms of making concrete decisions that favor fluidity and communication in the process. It is this commission that seeks to organize the workshops in which the different commissions harmonize and discuss the progress of the phases in the design of the majors. It should be noted that each university in the process of harmonization is represented in this committee, being consistent with equity in decision-making.

As part of the operationalization of the process is the support that is given to the academic groups by the advisers. At this time, a strategy is being developed to support and reinforce the academic groups in the universities to reduce the impact of the difficulties that have arisen in the preparation of the curricular design of each major, both at the process level and teamwork

level. In this sense, the harmonization process leads to the cooperation of each teacher in the construction of the curricular design of their major, making teamwork develop. On the other hand, with the practice that is carried out, the academic groups prepare to make the integration into the curricular components effective. Required element to develop skills.

4. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE CURRICULAR IMPROVEMENT OF THE NICARAGUAN UNIVERSITY.

In this section, we want to highlight the importance that the presence and decisive support of the cooperation of the Universidad de la Habana, Cuba has had for the development of curricular harmonization. This has consisted of the advice provided by specialists of high level and experience in the fields of strategic planning, curriculum, and educational policies.

About advice in the field of curriculum, the following actions and results stand out (Videa, Escobar, and De Armas, 2019):

- Training of the team of undergraduate teaching executives in full working days on topics as following:
 - The process of assembling the educational model based on competencies.
 - Experience of the Universidad de la Habana in the subject of competences: transition process, implementation, and current development of the curriculum.
 - Theoretical methodological elements for the curricular transformation by competences: elaboration of the referential framework of competencies, design of integrating axes, learning results and evaluation of the learning generated by the development of competences.
- Preparation of the methodological document: *Guiding manual for the development of the curriculum to develop competencies at UNAN-Managua*. This document was presented to the Rectorate of UNAN-Managua, 2019.
- Preparation of *step by step for the construction of the harmonized curriculum to develop skills, 2019*.
- Training for the National Commission for Harmonization, Commissions for harmonization by major and academic groups.
- Accompaniment and advice to the Harmonization Commissions by major and to academic groups.

5. FUTURE PROSPECTS

The process of harmonization of education majors that is carried out in the country will allow a significant advance in the training of citizens since it seeks to provide society with a professional who contributes to the development of quality education respecting the idiosyncrasies of their habitants.

It should be noted that the authorities representing the public universities attached to the CNU coincide with what was expressed by the teacher Ramona Rodríguez, President of the CNU and Rector of the UNAN-Managua: “(...) *harmonizing the curricula will allow agreement on the competences and qualifications that the university teacher must have, defining the strategies and subjects that are required in each major, and ensuring that the student is the protagonist in their training process*”.

Among the advances that aim to improve quality and integration in correspondence with the particularities of society, in the words of the teacher Rodríguez, the importance of promoting interculturality and interdisciplinarity, as well as encouraging creative thinking and proactive criticism, skills education and research in correspondence with the National Human Development Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals (ODS, as in Spanish) and the 2030 Agenda.

For his part, the teacher Alejandro Genet Cruz, Dean of the Faculty of Education and Languages, considers:

(...) That the advances and achievements that will be obtained with the harmonization process will be significant in terms of a curricular approach of the degrees in teacher training with the intention that these have between 75% or 80% similarity in the syllabus of study of the four participating universities and the other 20% or 25% that correspond to elements of each institution that reinforce identity and autonomy.

Another achievement that should be highlighted is the participation of the Ministry of Education (MINED), which, through different representatives, has made substantial contributions to the process. This has been necessary for three important reasons:

- First, it is necessary to match the training received by high school students with university training. In this way, the Ministry of Education prepares young students for their insertion into the university.
- Second, education majors train future high school teachers.
- Third, harmonization is allowing the Ministry of Education to contribute to the skills required by teachers in the subsystems of initial, primary or secondary training.

Therefore, this process demonstrates the articulation between these two educational institutions in the country and their commitment to Nicaraguan society.

Finally, the scope of the harmonization process for the future of education in Nicaragua cuts across the educational system as a whole. Consequently, the competences of undergraduate students in universities should be projected towards postgraduate training, which remains the responsibility of the university, which will decisively reinforce the processes of educational improvement through research in the different areas of the national curriculum.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The harmonization of education majors at the national level makes it possible to highlight the society-university link in terms of the training of professionals according to the needs of the country. This process is proof of the efforts made by the public universities of Nicaragua to train an educational professional with the competencies required by society.

On the other hand, the MINED - CNU link becomes evident by having the participation of the former in the construction of a curricular design that forms the competences of the classroom teacher of the basic and medium subsystems.

The process experienced from the National Harmonization Commission to the academic groups is being built based on values such as respect, tolerance, solidarity, equity, and consensus. This facilitates developing the curricular designs of the majors under these same principles, emphasizing issues such as educational quality, inclusiveness, interculturality, innovation, entrepreneurship, among others of vital importance in the country.

WORK CITED

- Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo. (2016). *Experiencias de implementación de la agenda de eficacia en las OTC*. Madrid: Cooperación Española.
- Escobar, A. Videar, X. y De Armas, R. (2019). Armonización de las carreras de educación en Nicaragua: experiencia y proyecciones. (Manuscrito no publicado). Managua: UNAN-Managua.
- Feldstein, S. (2000). *Derecho internacional privado. Parte especial*. Buenos Aires. Argentina: Universidad.
- Sampaio, L. Leite, P. y De Armas, R. (2015). *Diseño curricular para desarrollar competencias: una propuesta metodológica*. Aracaju: Editorial Universitaria de Tiradentes.
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Managua. (2019). *Guía Orientadora para la elaboración del currículo*

para desarrollar competencias en la UNAN-Managua. (En prensa). Managua: UNAN-Managua.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Managua. (2019). *Guía de revisión de diseño curricular.* Managua: UNAN-Managua.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Managua. (2019). *Informe de acompañamiento a Comisiones de trabajo Armonización.* Managua: UNAN-Managua.

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Managua. (2019). *Paso a Paso para la elaboración del curriculum armonizado para desarrollar competencias.* Managua: UNAN-Managua.

Videa, X. Escobar, A. y De Armas, R. (2019). *Conformación y formación de estructuras para el proceso de armonización de carreras de educación en Nicaragua.* (Manuscrito no publicado). Managua: UNAN-Managua.