

The Internationalization: A Challenge for the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla in Mexico

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Abstract

Fast processes of competitiveness related to the society of knowledge along the insufficiency of human, economic and material resources, factors which Higher Education Institutions (IES by its Spanish acronym) face up to all over the world, require the adoption of more open and cooperative profiles. It can be deduced that during the last decades internationalization has been quickly developed in the world as a strategy to strengthen, generate and/or complement their capabilities.

Internationalization is the transforming answer from the academic world to globalization, translated into purposes, programs and actions.

In Mexico, several government, civil and education institutions agree with the importance of sponsoring Higher Education internationalization. However, our country keeps maintaining very low levels of competitiveness. In the subject analysis on Higher Education published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) it can be seen that Mexico has not been able to keep moving forward in a desirable pace in this matter.

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) (Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla in English) is the oldest and largest university in Puebla, Mexico. Founded on April 15, 1587, the institutional mission has been the integral formation of the undergraduate professionals of the university, providing a coherent education according to the international dynamics.

As a public university, BUAP has been involved in the process of internationalization through restructuring their teaching and researching programs, resulting in a growth process in the last nine years in its mobility and academic exchange and helping its integration into the world scientific community.

The current context requires thinking over on what BUAP is doing on this subject, what challenges it is being faced, what the opportunities are and how to take advantage of them with the purpose of strengthening the academic internationalization programs.

Key words: MOBILITY, INTERNATIONALIZATION, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla.

Literature review

In the preliminary phase to the forceful expansion of internationalization, the European higher education was clearly marked by the national context. The limited relationships among universities from several countries were based on the noticeable knowledge community among scientists in the different branches of knowledge. It was mainly manifested by the cooperation and mobility of some teachers because of their research. The mobility of students was not an aim neither for the institutions nor for the students. It was restricted to a few individuals, especially in the most advanced career levels, within the frame of bilateral agreements among institutions and/or countries. The key concept for an international contact was individual, specialized and limited.

In Europe, the next phase was the intra-European mobility which began in the mid-eighties characterized by a fast and strong increase of mobility based on an institutional cooperation among home and host universities, in response to the adoption of the ERASMUS program by the European Union (EU).

ERASMUS has changed the reality of the international dimension in the European universities and has created the necessary conditions for the subsequent stages of its internationalization. In a few years, the support infrastructure to mobility at European level, national, and above all, institutional was created; experience of cooperation with other systems was accumulated; budgets were increased and exchanged formulas were diversified while its geographic ambit was expanded as a result of the EU enlargement and the implementation of new programs: TEMPUS with Eastern Europe and later with the Mediterranean Basin; ALFA with Latin America; ATLANTIS with USA. And more recently ERASMUS MUNDUS for the cooperation among European universities and from any other country in the world in the framework of joint MA or Ph. D. programs.

ERASMUS fosters the development of an organized mobility of students (and also of professors in a minor proportion) without modifying the structures of the national systems, despite its basic incompatibility in all aspects (not only in languages, but also to regulations, institutions, professional degrees, academic calendars, grading systems, teaching methods, financing, etc.) However, this strong growth of student mobility caused directly and indirectly by ERASMUS was limited to a minority of students and was

dependent on the signing of agreements among the respective universities, disciplines, and provision of scholarships (generally limited).

The setting up of the Bologna Process in 1999 by European countries and universities, correspond to the recognition that the European integration required a more extensive mobility of students and graduate students, and therefore, the structures of degrees of higher education institutions of several countries of Europe should be more legible and compatible. With this convergence it is pretended to create the conditions that allow a more spontaneous and free mobility, and at the same time, a more efficient recognition of the studies for those who want to study or work in another country.

These aspects have created the agenda of modernization of higher education proposed by the European Union under its Lisbon Strategy, aiming to promote employment, economic growth, social inclusion and competitiveness of Europe, its higher education and research systems and its universities in the world.

These objectives have joined to the Bologna and have encouraged a deeper internationalization, for reasons less linked exclusively with mobility and more related to quality, relevance and competitiveness of systems and the higher education institutions.

The college internationalization in Latin America is not a new issue; however, since the 90's it has notoriously been developed expressing in multiple dimensions such as: the mobility of students and teachers, the formation of research networks, the diversification of qualifications, having as background the international agreements which permit the double and multiple certification of studies.

The efforts to successfully concentrate the college internationalization in Latin America have as a referent the headway of the European Community whose starting point was the Bologna agreement. The political will of the Presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay created MERCOSUR on March 1991 that is the strongest block of the region, as opposed to the Andean Community (Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Colombia) created in 1969, but has recently weakened with the withdrawal of Venezuela in 2006. The university in the Latin American countries needs to be changed in a system that allows improving the quality of life of people due to education is still the basis for the development of themselves (UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1996).

The quality of higher education in Latin America has marked the third university reform, in this context, progress has been made in self-assessment and accreditation processes of professional careers and universities. There is a regulatory framework in all the countries of the region, in the Peruvian case with National Assessment, Accreditation and Certification of Educational Quality System (SINEACE by its Spanish acronym) and its body operator the National assessment and College Accreditation Committee (CONEAU by its Spanish acronym).

In Latin America there are students who study in foreign universities either through virtual modality or in the seats that are set up in their countries by suppliers; the highest figure is for Chile with 12% and only 1% corresponds to Peru (Rama, 2009). Even being very low demand, nowadays there is no a legal framework for the recognition of qualifications and diplomas that are issued under this modality. However, it is an expression of globalization and world which needs response.

In the case of Mexican universities, the international orientation has been perceived as a natural aspect and inherent of higher education for long. Indeed the existence of several mobility programs for students and teachers, of cooperation on research in most universities, indicates a long tradition of international academic partnership among academic institutions all over the world.

However, for the Mexican higher education institutions the fact of having (around the 80's) a more systematic and organized international activity is still recent. This is given mainly in the universities of more developing regions (Mexico City, Jalisco and Nuevo León); and the Technological Institutes which are the most marginalized in this aspect due to their academic activities are less developed in this area. In relation to the different modalities of international activities it can roughly be highlighted that for most of the Mexican public universities its chief weight is in the mobility of elite academic staff and research areas while for private universities their great development occurs in receiving foreign students and in the mobility of students.

The phenomenon of globalization has made the higher education institutions think about the ways to expand their flows of academic and scholastic mobility as well as all kinds of international activities. Therefore, the need to research and analyze the mechanisms that allow systematize and improve forms of administration of the internationalization process has emerged all over the world and in Mexico, in particular since the signing of the North America Free Trade Agreement.

The internationalization of Mexican universities, as all process in evolution, has challenges and problems, both academically and administratively speaking, which in practice are equally important.

The analysis of the internationalization degree of Mexican universities reveal some deficiencies, in greater or lesser degree, according to the institutions, such as the formation of human resources of high level, a wider range of activities and international programs, standardize curricula, methodological methods, school years, scholarships, etc.

The history of the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP by its Spanish acronym) goes back more than four centuries which have been rich in experiences and happenings. It is a public university that has a total enrolment of 65, 130 students; out of which 11, 834 are enrolled in high school, 49,831 on BA programs and senior technical and

3,465 on Ph. D. programs. Nowadays, it offers a bachelor's degree program, an associated professional program, 61 BA programs, 20 specialties, 49 MA programs and 14 Ph. D. programs. In addition, it offers extensions of some BA programs in nine regional sections which are located in the State of Puebla.

In relation to the academic staff the university has achieved significant progress. The teaching staff with Ph. D. represents 34.2% of the total amount of full time teachers, indicator above the national average (32.5%). In this sense, the teachers who belong to the National Researchers System (SNI by its Spanish acronym) represent 17.4% that is also above the national average (16.5%).

It is necessary to mention that on institutional management 81 processes of 14 dependencies are certified with the norm ISO 9001: 2000 that guarantees the quality of its services. In addition, the university is placed on the first national places in transparency index and Information Access of Public Universities and has a specialized unity in dealing with information requests by the students and the society in general.

In recent years BUAP has experienced a process of growth in its mobility programs and academic exchange, fostering its integration to the scientific world community.

As a public university, BUAP has understood the need of inserting in the process of internationalization, which represents a challenge, since a reengineering in curricula, infrastructure, school years, curricula flexibility, etc., was needed to provide students an education according to the international demands, including in its curricula sustainable human development that includes environmental, economic, political, cultural, social issues among others.

The General Direction of Foreign Affairs and Academic Exchange (DGRIIA by its Spanish acronym) in the university has its immediate background at the beginning of the 80's when the Coordination of Academic Exchanged and International Affairs was created (CIARI by its Spanish acronym) during the rectory management (1981-1984).

During the term 1980-2000 scholastic exchange and mobility were not made, there were only teaching exchanged with countries like Cuba, Russia and Chile.

The first international agreements signed by the university were signed with the University of Texas in San Antonio, particularly with the Health Center Science of San Antonio at the USA in 1987. In that year, an agreement of cooperation was signed in the area of natural sciences with the University of Valparaiso, Chile.

BUAP has 64 signed agreements with more than 50 countries. In the academic year 2007-2008 agreements were signed with the following universities:

In the American continent with the University of Colorado at Denver, USA, Autonomous University Gabriel René Moreno, Bolivia; University of Camagüey, Cuba; University of Quindío and Caldas, Colombia; University of Cuenca, Ecuador; Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia and University San Martín de Porres, Peru.

In Europe with: University of Lleida and University of San Pablo “CEU, Spain; University of Mostesquieu, Toulouse Polytechnic Institute, Paris 8 and Red n+1; Engineering Institutes, France, University of Birmingham, UK and University of Tilburg, Holland.

In Oceania with: Macquarie University, Australia.

In addition, BUAP is part of international networks of cooperation such as the UMAP (Asia-Pacific) and PROMESAN (North America).

The BUAP students can participate in mobility and academic exchange programs. Each semester a call is issued in which various options and the number of places are offered at each partner University are presented. The drive given to different programs of mobility and academic exchange in the past eleven years reflects the revitalization of the activities of the DGRIIA and the significant increase in the academic mobility.

Development

Below are some results that emerged from the analysis of the information provided by the BUAP's General Direction of International Affairs and Academic Exchange.

BUAP began its international mobility in the year 2001 with a student from Costa Rica who arrived in the Faculty of Medicine in the autumn Term on their own, i.e. without a scholarship.

In 2002 BUAP got in its international mobility a total of 11 students (10 female and 1 male), in the summer, spring and autumn terms. They came to the university from 7 countries, being England that most contributed; the largest number of students were welcomed at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters.

During the year 2003 the international mobility of BUAP was a total of 27 students (15 female and 12 male) who arrived during the 3 school terms with a BUAP's Scholarships Program. Most of the students from 12 countries, with France being the country that most contributed, came mostly to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. Most of the students came from other universities.

In the year of 2004 the international mobility of BUAP had 26 students (19 female and 7 male) who arrived during three school terms from 10 countries; Germany and Paraguay were the countries that provided more students. Most of them had a program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the largest number went to the Faculty of Administration.

In 2005 the international mobility amounted to a total of 83 students (55 female and 23 male) who arrived in the spring, summer and autumn terms of the same year with a program of PMCSP (Program for Mexican Culture and Society in Puebla by its Spanish acronym), most of the students were from 23 countries. This year the USA was the country which brought more students. Most of the students came from the universities of Oberlin College, Smith College, Wesley College and Wheaton College.

During the year 2006 the mobility showed a total of 28 students (21 female and 7 male) who arrived in the spring and autumn terms with an academic exchange program. They were from 12 countries; France was the country from where the most students participated, most aiming the Faculty of Law and Social Science. Most of the students were from the University of Paris, 10.

In 2007 the university received a total of 90 students (54 female and 36 male), who arrived during spring, summer and autumn terms, coming from 14 countries. France was the country which sent the most students, most of them to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters with an indistinct exchange program, the largest number of students was from the University of Lyon, 2.

In 2008 the total number of students received by BUAP was 20 (9 female and 11 male) which arrived during the spring, summer and autumn terms, with a program of exchange of economic aid, from the DGRIIA University Institution. Coming from 12 countries, Colombian mostly, the most requested faculty was the Faculty of Administration where most of them came.

In 2009 the international mobility of BUAP had a total of 122 students (75 female and 47 male) which came during the spring, summer and autumn terms with a scholarship less exchange program. Most French and some others, the majority came to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, mostly from the University of Liberators.

Finally, in 2010 the international mobility increased, the university institution received a total of 133 students (76 female and 57 male) who arrived during the spring, summer and autumn terms, most with a scholarship less exchange program, coming from 14 countries, mostly French from the University of Lyon 1. The most requested faculty was the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters.

BUAP began its national mobility during the autumn of 2003 with 2 students from the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez through a program of national exchange of student mobility, both requested the Faculty of Architecture.

In 2004 the national mobility continued in the spring and autumn terms, that time with 8 students (6 female and 2 male) from 5 different universities, the majority from the

Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, the largest number of them requested to enter the Faculty of Administration.

Mobility was through a national student exchange program.

In 2005 BUAP hosted a total of 37 national students (13 male and 24 female) from 14 different universities, most of them from UNAM to the Faculty of Law and Social Science, which was the most requested in the spring and autumn terms. A large number of students arrived with a national exchange program of student mobility.

In 2006 the national mobility had a total of 58 students (38 female and 20 male) from 17 different universities, most from the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, who mostly requested the Faculty of Administration in the Spring 2006 term. Most of the students came to our University with an Exchange SANTANDER-ECOES program.

During 2008 the national mobility had a total of 92 students (58 female and 34 male) from 18 different universities. Most of the students were from the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo. The most requested was the Faculty of Administration in the autumn 2008 term; all the students came to our University with an IES-BUAP Exchange program.

In 2009 the national mobility had a total of 92 students (60 female and 32 male) from 18 different universities. Most of them were from the Autonomous University of Sinaloa. The largest number of students entered the Faculties of Administration and Law and Social Sciences in the Spring 2009, most of them from the State of Sonora. All the students had scholarship IES-BUAP.

In the year 2010 the national mobility received a total of 223 students (146 female and 77 male) from 28 different universities. The University of Baja California received more students and most of the students came to the Faculty of Administration in the autumn 2010 term, most of them from the State of Baja California, all students with an IES-BUAP exchange program.

In 2007 the exchange was in 17 several states of the Mexican Republic; however, in Mexico City especially UNAM received more students. It is important to mention that during this period there were no supports of any kind (scholarships).

In autumn 2008, 64 students, 14 male and 50 female, graduated from the several faculties of BUAP (the faculty with more mobility was the faculty of Administration).

Unlike universities located in 10 states of the Mexican Republic, UNAM one more time received more students, this time with the support of BUAP IES.

The mobility at BUAP, for autumn 2009, was of 94 students, 34 male and 60 female; of the 19 faculties of BUAP that participated, the Faculty of Administration one more time was

the one which sent more students to participate in an exchange program to 18 states of the Mexican Republic, being UNAM the university that received more students, all of them had the support of the program BUAP IES.

For 2010 the national mobility continued with 92 students, 34 male and 58 female, coming from 17 different faculties of the university, especially from the Faculty of Administration. During the autumn 2010 all of them participated in an exchange program in 14 different states, being UNAM the university that received more students; all of them had the support of the program BUAP IES.

In the same way the international mobility started in 2007 with 62 students, 25 male and 37 female, coming from 16 faculties of the university, especially from the Faculty of Administration. During the autumn 2007 all of them participated in an exchange program to 10 different programs, being Argentina the country that more students received, 61 students had the support of the program BUAP IES and 1 student had the support of Public Education Secretariat (SEP by its Spanish acronym) program, the majority went to Universidad Pontificia Católica de Valparaíso (PUCV by its Spanish acronym).

In 2008 the mobility was 124 students, 77 male and 47 female, from 17 faculties of the university, especially from the Faculty of Administration, to 8 different countries, Spain was the country that received more students especially the University of Almería; that time there was no support programs.

For 2009 there was no mobility call.

In autumn 2010, the scholastic mobility was 168 students, 95 male and 73 female, coming from 21 faculties of the university, especially from the Faculty of Administration who were welcomed in universities from 19 several countries; Spain was the country that received more students; the total amount of students mentioned worked out their exchange program with the support of the IES (Higher Education Institutions, meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla and University of Castilla La Mancha (IES, BUAP and UCLM by their Spanish acronyms).

Conclusion

The Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP by its Spanish acronym) has greatly benefited with the impulse of mobility, mainly that the students have the experience of knowing other higher education institutions, how classes are given, personal growth, knowing other cultures and costumes. The progress BUAP has made in relation to internationalization is little; however, the effort that it has been made is recognized, since taking into consideration the international and national economic crisis and therefore the low budget it has; during the period from 2001 to 2010, the total amount of students that have participated in an exchange program, both national and international, is 734 (422

female and 312 male), of which 66% had a BUAP scholarship. The number of welcomed students from foreign and national universities is 1052 (540 female and 512 male). It is important to mention that the national students in an exchange program who arrived at BUAP, 80% were benefited with a program of scholarship named BUAP IES and the rest with other kinds of scholarships; in relation to foreign students who achieved the program, the majority came with own resources.

It is important to mention that our students have broken the linguistic barrier and have been welcomed not only in Spanish speaking-countries but in Germany, France, United Kingdom, Japan, Russia, Canada, Morocco, Mongolia and Finland among others.

There is a lot of work to do for internationalization. However, the university has changed its College Model thus within its transversal axes the duty of performing practicum, nationally or internationally, is included that made students look for new horizons, and at the same time, the university has to look for the way to help them who decide to do an exchange program in Mexico or abroad.

The internationalization at BUAP is still a challenge that tries to improve the quality of development of human resources and explore paths to prepare students in order to perform in a social and labor aspect, in a responsible and competent way, immersed in a globalized world.

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