

PROFESSIONAL REAFFIRMATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

LA REAFIRMACIÓN PROFESIONAL Y SU CONTRIBUCIÓN A LA CALIDAD DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the need to improve professional reaffirmation among Mechanical Engineering students at the University of Moa, because of low retention and deficient academic achievement. To answer this question, a pedagogical strategy was proposed to build up professional re-affirmation and improve the quality of higher education through stronger collaboration between college and enterprise. Several research methods were used to fulfill this purpose including historical-logical, analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction, interviews, surveys and collective workshops that allowed assessing the proposal's relevance. The results obtained provide positive elements in the practical implementation of the strategy in mechanical engineering major with favorable appraisals confirming the viability of the strategy to higher educational quality.

KEYWORDS: study continuity; theory–practice link, professional performance; pedagogical professional reaffirmation

RESUMEN

La investigación surgió por la necesidad de resolver las insuficiencias detectadas en el proceso de reaffirmación profesional de los estudiantes de la carrera de Ingeniería Mecánica en la Universidad de Moa, marcadas por la baja retención y la baja calidad en los resultados académicos; por lo que, se propuso una estrategia pedagógica para la reaffirmación profesional y su contribución a la calidad de la educación superior desde la relación universidad, empresa. Se emplearon varios métodos de investigación: histórico- lógico, análisis-síntesis e inducción-deducción, entrevistas, encuestas y talleres de socialización colectiva que permitieron valorar la pertinencia de la propuesta. Los resultados alcanzados aportan elementos positivos de la concreción práctica en la carrera de Ingeniería Mecánica; se obtuvieron juicios favorables que connotan la viabilidad de la propuesta.

PALABRAS CLAVE: continuidad de estudio; vinculación teoría-práctica, desempeño profesional; reaffirmación profesional pedagógica

INTRODUCTION

Developing professional reaffirmation is a priority for ensuring study continuity in higher education. Students begin their higher education in a previously chosen major; however, they sometimes show demotivation when starting to interact with it. According to Cervantes (2019), a fundamental cause negatively influencing this is the development of a fragmented and unsystematic professional guidance process in preceding educational levels.

In higher education, this process holds special significance as students prepare for professional life, making it essential to establish basis for full satisfaction in professional practice. In technical science majors, the university faces new challenges stemming from the social context, which impact the formative

process of students, necessitating their professional reaffirmation. The link established with the context in which they carry out practical activities is decisive in this process, an aspect that gains relevance through the university-enterprise relationship.

A preliminary diagnosis conducted in the Mechanical Engineering program at the University of Moa, Holguín, revealed shortcomings in practice, related to:

- ✓ Low retention affecting the program's efficiency within the academic cycle.
- ✓ Low academic performance among students.
- ✓ Limited student interest in achieving adequate levels to link theory with practice as part of their preparation for future professional performance.

In a deeper study, it was confirmed that the fundamental cause points to insufficient work by the program directed at the professional reaffirmation process, characterized by unsystematic and poorly structured actions. Therefore, the objective of the present research is to propose a pedagogical strategy for professional reaffirmation of technical science majors and its contribution to the quality of higher education.

During the development of the research, theoretical conceptions related to professional reaffirmation in higher education were systematized. An important basis the definition provided by Trimiño (2008) regarding pedagogical professional reaffirmation, which refers to it as a process generated in higher institutions for teacher training, as well as in micro-universities, through which a set of political-ideological, psycho-pedagogical and didactic influences are integrated, aimed at the formation of the future teacher. This ensures they are equipped, from motivational-affective and cognitive-instrumental viewpoints, to guarantee the fulfillment of the goals of current Cuban education.

Studies by researchers who delve into the professional reaffirmation process from their perspectives include: Daudinot (2013); Forgas & de los Milagros (2017); Domínguez & Rojas, 2020; Saborido, 2020; Villalón, 2018; (Quiala Ferrer, 2021); Acevedo, Ruiz & Lión, 2021); Contrera (2022); Rodríguez & Díaz (2022), among others who have contributed important ideas with practical application in this process.

The link of students with enterprises contributes to educational quality, as they put into practice the theoretical knowledge acquired during the teaching process. Many authors have studied the university-enterprise link, among whom Mejía, Hanze & Zamora (2018) and García (2022) stand out. These researchers have proposed models, conceptions, monographs, strategies, criteria and procedures directed towards university-enterprise link for professional training, without deeply exploring a way to take advantage of this link in the professional reaffirmation process, which significantly contributes to educational quality.

The Mechanical Engineering student trained at the University of Moa begins interacting with practices in territory-associated enterprises related to their profile from the first year. This is new for them, but this initial reception in enterprises is interesting, as is developing skills in using specific tools of the profession. The professional reaffirmation process associated with the university-enterprise link is an enriching element, constituting an indispensable way for student formation and helping them to awaken personal expectations and aspirations.

DEVELOPMENT

To address the aforementioned purpose, theoretical methods were employed, including analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction from a logical perspective and theoretical systematization. These methods allowed an assessment of the theory, enabling the presentation of results based on the characteristics that typify professional reaffirmation.

Furthermore, specific methods to the empirical level were applied, such as documentary analysis, and information acquired from different sources was considered, namely: consulted bibliography, ideas obtained from critical opinion and collective construction workshops, group interviews with members of the academic year collective, as well as experiential workshops with other agents to systematize their professional experience in professional reaffirmation in higher education.

Discussing educational quality requires work from the least experienced in terms of their training and professional development to the most experienced regarding the continuous improvement of the teaching-learning process. We are in a new time of reflection where the basic pillars of a building to be constructed are being laid, a framework in which the first creative ingredients are beginning to be outlined, which also converge with educational quality.

The author considers that the two ingredients for initiating adequate vocational training in novice teachers, which should prevail in them, are vocation and creativity for what they do. A teacher must be enthusiastic, an empowered actor with an effective leadership spectrum.

Regarding leadership, the statement by Miranda (2024) in his short article «Letters to the Editor» is assumed; however, in the author's opinion and in adherence to the contributions of the analyzed article (de los Ángeles, 2019), leadership has transcended the scope of authority to involve the entire team in tasks, responsibilities and decision-making. Hence, the exercise of leadership from a different perspective is of vital importance, one where the perception held by team members is favorable; that is, the teacher perceives the assertiveness of the administrator's leadership.

In that context, Martínez (2021) highlights that while there is no consensus on the origins of distributed leadership, it does comprehend the influences, roles and functions of formal and informal groups within the administrative scope. The teacher must promote an environment free of discrimination and prejudices; it

is time to eliminate stereotypes in our classrooms if we wish to educate our teachers in values and principles, thereby fulfilling a more just, inclusive, equitable and respectful society of human diversity.

Therefore, the process of continuous improvement in higher education rigorously emphasizes guaranteeing the professional reaffirmation of students and establishing the university-enterprise link as a social priority for the individual preparing to be a future professional and for the territory.

In this sense, the university, understood as the institution training the new generation, constitutes the main link in the formation of these young people. It has the function of directing the educational process until culminating in the harmonious and multifaceted formation of students in each major and imposes challenges and tasks; hence, importance is also given to ensuring the university-enterprise link, as professional reaffirmation constitutes an effective way for achieving better entrepreneurship in enterprises. It is the university, with its advisory role, that can develop actions for greater harmony between these institutions to strengthen the professional reaffirmation process.

The way is to improve a didactic process that achieves these elevated aspirations in the university-enterprise link, where these two ideas are guided by the principle that, in the unity of instruction-education, the educational makes the instructive more effective and efficient; that is, the quality of instruction is elevated through the educational. In the context of the enterprise, the student's feelings, values, sensitivity and convictions are fostered; thus, competencies are formed.

Several authors have shared the philosophical referents in their research; as a philosophical approach, this research assumes Dialectical and Historical Materialism as the most general referent, as it provides the foundations to affirm that all social determinations act through human subjectivity (Daudinot, 2013).

For their part, other authors express that the new understanding of theory and practice in Marxist philosophy is elaborated in the very process of clarifying their dialectical interrelation. The indissoluble union of theory and practice is shown by considering theory as an inherent property or attribute, as a tendency towards the practical activity of men, and practice as an indispensable condition and moment of theory, as a mode of its effective realization. It is not a relationship of externality between the two of them, but their mutual presupposition within the context of human activity (Villalón, 2018).

The guidelines for education consist, among others, in preserving and elevating the quality indices achieved in the educational teaching process and in the formation of values in children, adolescents and youth, based on better integration with the family and continuing the development of informatization. Guidelines #91, 92, 94 and 95 refer to Education. In a general sense, their objectives are aimed at:

- ✓ Preserving quality indices.
- ✓ Paying attention to vocational work.
- ✓ Consolidating the role and development of the workforce.
- ✓ Strengthening work with production and service entities for the development of territories and, consequently, the country.

In the evaluation of the curricular design of Study Plan E in Cuban Higher Education, the following are assessed as variables:

1. The professional model.
2. The teaching process plan.
3. Methodological and organizational guidelines for the major.
4. Discipline programs.

In each variable, axes that contribute to educational quality are determined. For its part, Variable 3 considers that in the methodological and organizational guidelines for majors, the integral formation of students is evaluated, and work practice and the culmination of studies are taken into account:

- ✓ Ways are indicated to make effective the link between the academic, labor and investigative aspects in the student formation process for different types of courses.
- ✓ The role played by work practice in the integral formation of students is substantiated.
- ✓ Guidance is provided on the most suitable teaching units and base labor entities for the development of work practice.

Thus, these variables will allow an evaluation of processes within the university; however, the author visualizes from her perspective that in the work schedule of this evaluation process, retention is not evaluated as a deficiency that can affect these variables defined in universities.

The authors consider that professional reaffirmation is a process that offers motivation and more dynamism in its integration with enterprises; greater linkage would greatly enhance more sustainable development, process quality, increase productions, levels and scope of the educational teaching process, as well as unity among all.

Modifications to study plans, planning, curricular arrangements, and permanent changes in scientific, technical and technological development cause universities to become immersed in new actions, tasks and demands to transform university paradigms in correspondence with today's realities.

Facing this new challenge, the university must transform itself; but this change must occur without sidelining the pedagogical process. This means the conception of academic-investigative processes where students gain leadership, participating in projects that, while solving real professional problems, allowing their integral formation and, with it, the university-enterprise linkage as

essential bearers of the socioeconomic interests and problems of each territory. Assuming this change from the pedagogical process shared with the enterprise makes the university increase its role and continue to be a strategic pillar in the socioeconomic development of any territory.

In the 8th Congress of the PCC, Guideline 91 refers to consolidate the role of the University in the training and development of competent professionals, committed to our history and the values of our socialism; strengthening relationships with entities of science, technology and innovation, production and services; and achieving the introduction of research results for the country's development, with particularity in territories.

Through labor training, work practice is concretized, training and professional development of future professionals constituting a procedure that synthesizes into a whole the link between the academic, labor and investigative aspects. Specifically, for pedagogical majors, it groups specific subjects of professional practice, which will be distributed in the curriculum in each year of the majors, and where work is done with a single object of study: that of the pedagogical profession (Ducasse et al., 2021).

It falls to universities to have a future vision of what our students can do if, from the moment they begin their major, we are professionally reaffirming their motives, interests and intentions that led them towards this career. Subsequently, linking students to enterprises represents the possibility for new knowledge generated by academic-investigative processes to be incorporated into the university formative process (De Cuba, 2016).

It is necessary that professors not see themselves as detached from this linkage, as it contributes to enriching the intellectual capital of the university and, with it, to ensuring that economic production grows, as well as quality in each enterprise. Higher education and enterprises should be seen as an unavoidable way to facilitate academic, research and development activities (Ferreira et al., 2019).

For this, we must work based on fulfilling the objectives for the 2030 Agenda regarding educational quality. It corresponds to the university, faculties, departments and majors to identify the educational potentialities of the enterprise and use them consistently in forming integral professional demanded by Cuban society.

This integration is currently reaching the category of an invariant for Higher Education, seen as a harmonic, systemic and shared pedagogical process manifested between both entities, based on the coherent and mediating action of professors, specialists and tutors. This action directs academic, investigative and extension activities conceived throughout the formative cycle, enabling the integral formation of students as future professionals.

It is everyone's task that students become linked to enterprises during their training process, as it elevates their learning capacity regarding professional content, enhances the development of certain social skills such as entrepreneurship, communication, teamwork, creativity, project generation; the educational potentialities possessed by enterprises are innumerable, making them an essential context for the professional training process of students at the higher level.

Professional reaffirmation and its contribution to the quality of Higher Education are necessary for study continuity, for fulfilling accreditation processes in universities, for impacting sustainable development, solidifying the bases of a more integral future professional who will contribute to the social-economic development of the territory and, consequently, the country.

Pedagogical Strategy for Professional Reaffirmation

The author proposes a pedagogical strategy, applied to trainees who have demonstrated their vocation from the second year of the major as student assistants and wish to continue their passion for education. It consists of different stages: the preparation stage, the implementation stage and the evaluation of actions.

From the academic year collective, the pedagogical strategy is discussed to evaluate strengths and weaknesses. Based on this analysis, actions are prioritized, such as: methodological activities, instructive-methodological classes, demonstration classes, open classes, training, professional development, assurance of human resources and organizing postgraduate courses to advise on the advantages offered by Artificial Intelligence.

Many authors have addressed strategies and their impact on solving social problems; according to González et al. (1998), the strategy establishes the intelligent direction, and from a broad and global perspective, of actions aimed at solving problems detected in a certain segment of human activity stemming from a given social and/or educational project. Its design implies the dialectical articulation between objectives (pursued goals) and methodology (instrumented ways to achieve them).

Every strategy goes through a phase of obtaining information (which may have a diagnostic character), a phase of using information and a phase of evaluating that information. Furthermore, as the name indicates, it must have a margin for redirecting actions. The pedagogical strategy is the pedagogical direction of the transformation from the real state to the desired state of the object to be modified, which conditions the entire system of actions between the directing subsystem and the directed subsystem to achieve the highest-level objectives (Acevedo, Ruiz & Lión, 2021).

The authors assume pedagogical strategies with the aim of modifying the problem surrounding professional reaffirmation. The strategy is susceptible to being modified, specified and delimited constantly based on the very changes occurring in the object of transformation.

Strategies, as alternatives in the theory of advanced education, are seen as a model for improving the pedagogical professional performance of teachers. According to this theory, the pedagogical strategy is: that professional development program aimed at university graduates, with the purpose of

perfecting professional performance and contributing to work quality. It is systematically organized by universities and some authorized entities for its execution, or cooperatively between both. It certifies knowledge and, on occasion, is executed based on employer recommendations for occupying job positions. It uses diverse forms but only certifies courses, training and diplomas. It is generally highly schooled, with frequent practical activities. (Valcárcel, 1998).

This work assumes the definition of strategy provided by Acevedo, Ruiz & Lión (2021), who consider it a system of actions directed at achieving the set objectives, which allow the teacher's activity in favor of transforming the teaching-learning process.

For the elaboration of the pedagogical strategy, the stages proposed by Cervantes (2019), which are proposed for Technical Science majors, are assumed. It is essential to note that while stages are delimited with specific actions and a determined purpose, in practice a close relationship between them occurs.

Each of the stages and their contextualized actions are presented below.

1. Stage of preparation and design of professional reaffirmation actions.
2. Stage of implementation of professional reaffirmation actions.
3. Stage of evaluation of professional reaffirmation actions.

In the stage of *preparation and organization of professional reaffirmation actions*, all actions related to planning material and human resources at the university, in enterprises and contracting entities are carried out to ensure the development of the process. Coordination with other intervening socializing agencies is established, and the preparation of teachers and other agents involved in the university-enterprise relationship is ensured, as well as the design of actions for the professional reaffirmation process.

Actions to develop:

- ✓ Assurance of both human and material resources and strengthening of coordination relationships stemming from the university-enterprise relationship.
- ✓ Sensitization of socializing agents about the need to consciously apply the pedagogical strategy.
- ✓ Professional development of teachers participating in the professional reaffirmation process.
- ✓ Training of collaborators participating in the professional reaffirmation process.

In the stage of *implementation of professional reaffirmation actions*, all actions directed towards technical science majors designed with the purpose of developing professional intentions in students are put into practice.

- ✓ Design of actions for professional reaffirmation based on the coherence and harmony that should exist in the actions of agents from different contexts.
- ✓ Putting into practice actions for professional reaffirmation.

In the stage of *evaluation of professional reaffirmation actions*, an assessment of the validity of the actions is made with the purpose of developing professional intentions in students.

- ✓ Assessment of the effectiveness of professional reaffirmation actions.
- ✓ In determining the validity of the pedagogical strategy, a socialization workshop is used to analyze the relevance of the actions, allowing verification of the transformations occurring between the initial and final states.
- ✓ According to RM 47/2022, methodological activities, instructive-methodological classes, demonstration classes and open classes were conducted. Additionally, training sessions, postgraduate courses and dynamic activities were imparted.

Feasibility is shown in the applied ways when socializing with teachers about their application, as they are significant, both in work tasks within enterprises and in the university context.

In the validation stage, 94.37% of respondents express that this strategy largely solves the problem of retention and demotivation; 71.9% of them defend the idea that participation ways in projects and university-enterprise linkage are used as tools to solve territory problems, in which professors and students are immersed; 93.8% assure with great satisfaction and effectiveness the ways used in the pedagogical strategy for greater linkage of enterprises with the university based on professional reaffirmation; assimilation of the proposal by students and the faculty collective, which contributes to achieving goals regarding current trends and thus achieving professional reaffirmation to elevate quality.

CONCLUSIONS

This research allows for reflection that the motivation and communication of the academic year pedagogical collective determine pedagogical professional reaffirmation as a permanent process within student formation, thereby favoring their permanence and quality in their professional training. The evaluation of these results allows foreseeing the possibility of influencing the professional formation of students from the first year of the major. The pedagogical strategy towards the Mechanical Engineering major enhances the proposed professional reaffirmation, contributes to the quality of higher education, and fosters motivations from the university-enterprise relationship.

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