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Original article

Teacher professionalism seen by indicators in a university context of primary teacher training

**La profesionalidad docente vista
por indicadores en un contexto
universitario de formación de
maestros primarios**

**Profissionalismo docente visto
por indicadores em um contexto
universitário de formação de
professores primários**

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ABSTRACT

University teaching professionalism enters into the problems inherent in the quality of higher education, a relevant task for the sake of training competent university graduates in the conditions of highly complex contexts scientifically and technologically. The analysis of the relationships between teacher professionalization and professionalism in educational processes, in addition to its conceptualizations, constituted core aspects in both its theoretical and practical approach, necessarily with a dialectical approach. The study presented had the objective of evaluating the teaching professionalism in the teachers of the Department of Primary Education of the Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca University, for which indicators of teaching professionalism were determined and these were subjected to evaluation through written questionnaires built with the scheme of the Likert scale; information processing was done on the basis of percentage analysis, class grouping of data and data triangulation. Based on criteria established by the authors, the indicators of professionalism achieved, those not achieved and those in which successes are identified, but not sufficient satisfaction, were identified; in general, there was a high appreciation of the professionalism demonstrated by the teachers. The research was considered as a reference for other studies on the subject.

Keywords: educator; quality of education; professional development; teacher professionalism.

RESUMEN

La profesionalidad docente universitaria entra en los problemas inherentes a la calidad de la Educación Superior, tarea relevante en aras de la formación de egresados universitarios competentes en las condiciones de contextos altamente complejos científica y tecnológicamente. El análisis de las relaciones entre profesionalización docente y profesionalidad en los procesos educativos, además de sus conceptualizaciones, constituyeron aspectos medulares, tanto en su enfoque teórico como práctico, necesariamente con una perspectiva dialéctica. El estudio que se presenta tuvo el objetivo de evaluar la profesionalidad docente en los profesores del Departamento de Educación Primaria de la Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", para lo cual se determinaron indicadores de profesionalidad docente que se sometieron a evaluación mediante cuestionarios escritos contruidos con el esquema de la escala de Likert. El procesamiento de la información se hizo sobre la base del análisis porcentual, el agrupamiento de datos en clases y la triangulación de estos. A partir de criterios establecidos por los autores, se identificaron los indicadores de profesionalidad logrado, los no logrados y aquellos en los que se identifican aciertos, pero no suficiente satisfacción; en general, se constató una alta valoración de la profesionalidad demostrada por los docentes. La investigación fue considerada como un referente para otros estudios sobre el tema.

Palabras claves: educador; calidad de la educación; desarrollo profesional; profesionalidad docente.

RESUMO

O profissionalismo docente universitário entra nos problemas inerentes à qualidade do Ensino Superior, tarefa relevante para a formação de graduados universitários competentes nas condições de contextos científicos e tecnológicos de alta complexidade. A análise das relações entre profissionalização docente e profissionalismo nos processos educativos, além de suas conceituações, constituíram aspectos centrais, tanto em sua abordagem teórica quanto prática, necessariamente com uma perspectiva dialética. O estudo que se apresenta teve o objetivo de avaliar o profissionalismo docente nos professores do Departamento de Educação Primária da Universidade de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", para os quais foram determinados indicadores de profissionalismo docente e submetidos a avaliação. por meio de questionários escritos contruidos com o esquema de escala Likert. O tratamento das informações foi feito com base na análise percentual, agrupamento dos dados em classes e sua triangulação. Com base nos critérios estabelecidos pelos autores, foram identificados indicadores de profissionalismo alcançados, não alcançados e em que se identificam acertos, mas não se identificam a satisfação suficiente; Em geral, verificou-se uma alta avaliação do profissionalismo demonstrado pelos professores. A pesquisa foi considerada como referência para outros estudos sobre o tema.

Palavras-chave: educador; Qualidade da educação; desenvolvimento profissional; profissionalismo docente.

INTRODUCTION

Despite modernity and the high technological advance that exists today, the fundamental objective of university education continues to transcend time: the training of professionals with mastery of scientific knowledge and advanced methods of work and research, resulting in high quality results of Higher Education, a goal towards which, even when a certain level has been reached, it will be necessary to continue advancing in all countries.

A necessary starting point on teaching quality in Higher Education centers is the fact of considering that "defining quality is a complicated task, since its conceptualization entails a certain relativism" (Jiménez Moreno and Gutiérrez Zavala, 2017, p. 2).

The quality of this type of teaching is inserted in a global context called the information society by Dibut and Íñigo (2016). In this, the university and the role of the teaching staff have changed substantially so far in the 21st century and there are determining factors such as the accelerated increase and the vertiginous change in the forms that scientific knowledge and the products of thought adopt, as well as the vertiginous changes in the media and technology accompanied by profound transformations in the personal and institutional life of many organizations and people, elements highlighted by Imbernón and Guerrero (2018).

Teachers and students are the main agents of the quality of Higher Education; teachers become public figures bearers of the unavoidable teaching skills for the quality of the training processes in which they are involved, which implies the need for a contemporary configuration of the teaching staff in relation to the professionalization of the trade and the use of the new

technologies, according to the appreciation of Bernal Delgado (2019).

The use of state-of-the-art technologies for information and communications or any other form of knowledge self-management by Higher Education students does not totally replace the university professor. This is how Imbernón and Guerrero (2018) consider it, since this teacher is currently seen as a mediator in the individual and group teaching-learning process and not a transmitter of knowledge.

The quality of the university professor is a consequence of multiple factors, among them the quality of the training in the area of the specific science that is the object of study in the undergraduate degree and the combination of some components of the work practice that he or she exercises. However, this quality goes through a process of teaching professionalization that should be organized and deployed in several distinctive directions of the teaching task in Higher Education institutions.

The state and perspectives of teaching professionalization in universities have gained significant importance in the last two decades. Whether it is a process or a result, the concepts of professional, professionalization and professional development are inseparable from teacher professionalization, which is pointed out by Tejada (2015). However, to these concepts should be added that of professionalism, which does not coincide exactly with any of the above, but is connected to them.

The professionalization of the teacher, in addition to its permanent and gradual nature, is seen as "a continuous process aimed at professional and human improvement to respond to the transformations that are required in the knowledge, skills and professional qualities that must be integrated into their

performance." (Riol *et al.*, 2019, 174). This matter is not the object of attention only in the universities, but also in the multiple educational systems, fundamentally, the nationalized ones.

In order to obtain the model of the teaching profession that is aspired to, there are necessary aspects to take into account the purposes assigned to education constitutionally by the State, the establishment of educational laws and a normative development, elements already recognized by Ruiz and Oñorbe (2019). To these requirements should be added the consideration of specific and historically determined socioeconomic contexts.

The professional development of the teacher is a consequence of the progressive evolution in the performance of the educational function towards modes and situations of greater professionalism, which are characterized by the depth of critical judgment and its application to the global analysis of the processes involved in teaching, to act intelligently, an idea supported by the reflection made by Tejada (2015) in his studies on the subject. Other authors have highlighted reflective and critical practice as necessary conditions for an education projected from a new vision of teaching, including Moreno Hernández *et al.* (2020).

This evolution is given by the enrichment and progressive transformation of knowledge and skills to identify, study and solve problems of educational activity and scientific activity at the university; to understand and suitably assume the peculiarities of university educational work in all its complexity and at the same time find satisfaction and a sense of personal fulfillment in it, assuming the criteria of González González *et al.* (2019).

Didactic, academic, investigative, ethical, communicative, cultural and technological

competences are inherent to the teacher's performance in the university sphere, to whose effective demonstration Tejada (2015) attributes the condition of dimensions of the professionalism of the university teacher. These competencies are specified in the fulfillment of their teaching functions, basically, in three scenarios: a general context, an institutional context and the micro -context, according to Más Torelló (2011).

Matus and Linares (2016) highlight that one of the basic problems of current universities is that related to the training of their teachers and they admit that the above does not exclude professionals trained as teachers and professors for performance at the different levels of education, but not previously prepared for Higher Education, this has become a trend in Cuba, with respect to undergraduate teachers in pedagogical careers.

The deficiencies in university teachers, according to Matus and Linares (2016), are due to the lack of skills in the face of new educational challenges, such as student-centered learning, collaborative learning, training focused on the problems of professional practice, preparing students to learn autonomously and to take advantage of Information and Communication Technologies. Today we are faced with a diversity of "students who come to the classroom with interests, motivations and life experiences, often very different from the expectations of their teachers" (Moreno *et al.*, 2020, 1).

Evaluating the professional performance of university teachers implies reflecting on their professionalism, seen not only as "a set of cultural elements that shape the profession model generating recognizable and recognized educational practices" (Moya and Manso, 2019, 14), but also as a quality that expresses a high degree of performance quality and success in the exercise of the

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profession, which is aspired to and achieved as part of competent professional development.

This article shows the results of a research whose objective was to evaluate indicators of professionalism in university teaching of the faculty of the Department of Primary Education of the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca". The set of indicators assumed and the evaluation method applied become a proposal for other similar studies on the same problem.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Questionnaires constructed with the Likert scale scheme were applied to three groups of subjects: 25 students from 1st to 4th years, 12 heads of year or discipline and 20 teachers, all of them from the Primary Education career. Participating students represented 33% of the population and were selected randomly and proportionally in each year. The rest of the subjects freely responded to the call to participate in the study; In both cases - professors and heads of year or discipline - the amount of the sample exceeded 80% of the respective population.

In the questionnaires, it was requested to consciously assign values from 5 (maximum) to 1 (minimum) to 17 indicators of professionalism in teaching and other contexts attributed to the professors of the department. Those indicators were:

1. Teaching insight (easiness to guide, control and evaluate in a timely manner during the teaching activity).
2. Instructional and educational significance (influence evidenced in positive changes in student attitudes and behaviors).

3. Up-to-date knowledge of the specialty taught.

4. Overview of the teacher as a teacher educator.

5. Consistent action according to the context (in the class and in other group spaces).

6. Application of techniques for an active and productive teaching-learning process.

7. Communication (broadness of language, clarity of ideas, fluency when expressing oneself, expressiveness and cordiality in the transmission of the message).

8. Empathy (acceptance by others, measured use of criticism or praise, willingness to take initiative or assertiveness).

9. Student learning outcomes.

10. Knowledge of students (personality traits and learning styles).

11. Use of Information Technology and Communications (ICT) in the teaching-educational process.

12. Willingness to innovate (each class is different from the one given on the same subject at another time or by another teacher).

13. Use of another language in the preparation or delivery of the specialty.

14. Self-assessment (recognition of the qualities that one has and self-projection for improvement).

15. Organization of the content and the academic year.

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16. Participation in research (research results and scientific publications).

17. Transversality (interdisciplinarity, extrapolation).

From indicators 12 to 17 no criteria were requested from the students.

It was considered to group the five values of the scale into three classes: high values (4 and 5), neutral value (3) and low values (2 and 1). In the primary processing of the information provided by the participating subjects, the absolute frequencies and percentage frequencies were determined with respect to each of these three classes by indicator, for the three groups of subjects who provided the information separately.

Subsequently, the triangulation of the percentages by indicators according to the classes was applied, for which the three classes of percentage frequencies by indicator of the three groups of subjects that participated in the study were compared: students, heads of years or disciplines, and professors. This technique allowed finding states of coincidence and discrepancy between the perception that these groups of subjects have about the professionalism of the department's teachers.

To calculate the coincidence or discrepancy between the points of view of the groups of subjects with respect to each indicator, the following procedure was followed.

First: for each indicator, by group of subjects, the percentages corresponding to the categories of established values were searched. Subsequent work was facilitated by tabulating the data for each indicator in this way (G1, G2, and G3 respectively designate the groups that participated in the study).

Indicator	Lessons	%	%	%	Difference
		G1	G2	G3	
	high values				
	neutral value				
	low values				

The last column was filled by performing the second step.

Second: the difference between the highest and lowest of the three percentage values corresponding to each class was found.

Third: categories were assigned to each class of values: coincident values (at most, the difference was 10 percentage units), values with notable discrepancy (the difference was between 11 and 20 percentage units, both included), and values with high discrepancy. (From a difference of 21 or more percentage units).

Fourth: the search for coincidence, notable discrepancy and high discrepancy was made in the class of high values (4 and 5).

Fifth: analyzes were made on the other two categories of values, even though they do not represent the ideal of teaching professionalism to which one aspires.

For a final evaluation of the state of teaching professionalism in the teaching staff subject to this study, those in which two thirds or more of each of the three groups of subjects participating in the study assigned high values were considered as achieved indicators. Those indicators in which, in at least two groups of the three groups of subjects, two thirds of at least two of the groups in the study did not assign high values, are considered not achieved. Indicators that did not meet both parameters were considered as less achieved indicators.

RESULTS

Of the 17 indicators of teaching professionalism submitted to inquiry, 16 were evaluated with high values by 60% or more of all the subjects participating in the study. An indicator was evaluated with 4 and 5 by 39% of the subjects participating in the study. Among the non-high values, the rating of 3 prevailed, an intermediate value with little positively significant connotation. There were 6% low evaluations.

There was absolute coincidence in assigning high marks in only four indicators, the first two evaluated by the three groups of subjects and the other two only by the teachers themselves and the heads of the year and discipline.

The notable discrepancy prevailed in the assignment of high values in eleven indicators. Two with significant discrepancy were identified, that is, the percentage values of scores are more than 20 percentage units apart, even when the minimum value that determines the calculated difference comes only from one of the evaluator groups.

There was quite a lot of coincidence, but not absolute, due to a difference between them very close to 10 percentage units in the evaluation given to two indicators: the use of ICT in the teaching process and the learning results.

The evaluations of heads of year or disciplines and teachers regarding self-assessment (recognition of one's qualities and self-projection for improvement) and transversality (interdisciplinarity, extrapolation) were also quite consistent. The heads of the year and discipline gave fewer high categories to transversality than to the professors.

Non-absolute coincidence was also found in the communication indicator (breadth of language, clarity of ideas, fluency when expressing oneself, expressiveness and cordiality in the transmission of the message), on which the students declared a high estimate of their teachers and, to a lesser extent, measure, the heads of the year or discipline had the same assessment, but ultimately, high as well; however, a quarter of the teachers did not understand it that way, since only 75% rated themselves highly.

Most of the students assumed that the professors master the science they teach and are up to date with it. In turn, 100% of these also consider that they know their teaching subject sufficiently. But this opinion differs from that given by 33.3% of the managers of the year or discipline.

In a similar way, when evaluating the vision of the professors of the Department as teacher trainers, the heads of the year or discipline approached the position of the students, but they remained well below the high self-assessment made by the professors in that sense.

Slightly more than a third of the students were of the opinion that the teachers know them sufficiently; however, half of these had a different point of view, which coincide with that of the heads of the year or discipline. When comparing the three states of opinion of the groups providing information, the students' security of being sufficiently known by teachers is recognized; however, they still feel dissatisfied with what they actually know about them.

The opposite occurred with respect to the performance indicator. consistent according to the context (in the class and in other group spaces), while the teachers rated themselves very well in general; meanwhile, students and heads of year or discipline diverged from

that opinion when giving evaluations whose percentages marked a difference of 12 and 22 percentage units of difference. These scores reflect a high demand by students and heads of year or discipline to the behavioral model of university professors, regardless of the context in which they are.

The opinion of students and professors about empathy between them coincides, but the point of view of the heads of the year or discipline does not totally agree, even though the percentage difference in the granting of high values is small.

The vast majority of students expressed the appreciation that their teachers have teaching acumen (easiness to guide, control and evaluate in a timely manner), a criterion very close to that of the teachers themselves. This point of view differed a lot from that of the heads of the year or discipline, who reflected dissatisfaction with what had been achieved by their teaching groups.

The difference in appreciation between the heads of the year or discipline and the professors regarding two indicators was notable: organization of the content and of the academic year, and participation in research (research results and scientific publications). It was interesting that, between the high ratings given overall by the former (42%) and those given by the latter (60%), a difference of close to 20 percentage units was identified.

There were two indicators with significant discrepancy; Of these, the one with the lowest percentages is that related to instructional and educational significance (influence evidenced in positive changes in student attitudes and behaviors). The very positive state of opinion that the professors gave of themselves in this sense contrasts with that expressed by the heads of discipline and years, of which only a third gave high

values. The opinion of the students was not so discordant, since two thirds see the positive transformation of themselves as a result of the work of their teachers.

The percentages for the second indicator with significant discrepancy, the willingness to innovate, reflected divergent positions between the teachers' self-assessment and what the heads of the year or discipline think about it.

Absolute coincidence was found in the low percentage resulting from giving high marks to the indicator use of another language in the preparation or teaching of the specialty, an indicator evaluated only by the heads of the year or discipline (8%) and the professors (10%).

The students of the Department of Primary Education value the professionalism of their teachers, in general, very positively; the teachers show a high appreciation of most of the indicators of their professionalism and in turn recognize, indirectly, having certain inefficiencies in others. The appreciations of the heads of year or discipline reflect frequent discrepancies regarding high percentages of maximum evaluations given by the professors to most of the indicators and the one granted by them.

It is unlikely to give a categorical estimation of teaching professionalism as a whole in the faculty on which this matter has been investigated, but it is possible to affirm that eight indicators of professionalism have been achieved:

1. Teaching insight (easiness to guide, control and evaluate in a timely manner during the teaching activity).
2. Up-to-date knowledge of the specialty taught.
3. Student learning outcomes.

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4. Overview of the teacher as a teacher educator.

5. Communication (breadth of language, clarity of ideas, fluency when expressing oneself, expressiveness and cordiality in the transmission of the message).

6. Use of ICT in the teaching-educational process.

7. Self-assessment (recognition of the qualities that one has and self-projection for improvement).

8. Organization of the content and the academic year.

In accordance with the defined criteria, four indicators were not achieved, which, in order, starting from the most deficient, are:

1. Use of another language in the preparation or delivery of the specialty.

2. Transversality (interdisciplinarity, extrapolation).

3. Participation in research (research results and scientific publications).

4. Knowledge of students (personality traits and learning styles).

Five indicators were less achieved; that is to say, successes are recognized in them that still do not sufficiently satisfy the expectations of the students or the faculty itself:

1. Instructional and educational significance (influence evidenced in positive changes in student attitudes and behaviors).

2. Consistent action according to the context (in the class and in other group spaces).

3. Application of techniques for an active and productive teaching-learning process.

4. Empathy (acceptance by others, measured use of criticism or praise, willingness to take initiative or assertiveness).

5. Willingness to innovate (each class is different from the one given on the same subject at another time or by another teacher).

For the generality of the students, their teachers become a model of professional performance, without this meaning considering them perfect or being uncritical in the face of the teaching limitations that they do in the development of the processes in which they interact directly. The character of evaluators that the students have with respect to their professors is verified in the frequent coincidences that they have with the points of view of the heads of the year and discipline with respect to various indicators of teaching professionalism in the faculty studied.

The analysis of the information provided by the teachers about themselves implies the conclusion that they have a very high self-esteem in terms of their professionalism; for example, when it comes to the application of techniques for an active and productive teaching-learning process. The self-recognition of the shortcomings they have is weak, a potentially negative issue, since recognizing in oneself nonconformity with the needs for a high teaching professionalism can lead to reflection and the proposal of ideas and actions aimed at improving and perfecting what has been achieved in each indicator. The inconsistency of a high self-assessment in the indicator use of another language in the preparation and development of the subject taught is obvious, an objectively verifiable aspect in teaching practice.

In practice, the heads of the year and discipline become evaluators of the teaching professionalism of the groups of teachers in which they carry out their duties, including those related to various facets of the teaching process and scientific activity. They are not only evaluators *in situ*, but also, to a large extent, counselors, hence they have expectations about the professional performance of their teachers, expectations that, when contrasted with reality, generate disagreements or dissatisfactions with respect to what has been achieved, which usually constitute in turn contradictions with the high self-assessments of teachers.

This contradiction is evident in the relatively discordant positions taken by both groups; for example, on the application of techniques for an active and productive teaching-learning process, or also in terms of the need to demonstrate greater breadth and high updating of knowledge related to the subjects they teach, or the willingness to innovate, a need recognized, implicitly, by some heads of discipline and years and not by any of the teachers themselves.

In general, there is a high assessment of the teaching professionalism demonstrated by the teachers of the Primary Education of the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", even when giving high assessments to the indicators of professionalism the coincidence is not absolute between the students of the career, the heads of year and discipline and the professors themselves. There are few indicators in which there is a significant discrepancy from this high assessment.

DISCUSSION

The studies on real states of professionalization and teaching professionalism have permanent validity; are necessary with a view to raising the quality of Higher Education. Thus, for example, the one carried out by Rojas Zapata *et al.* (2018) also in a context of training professionals for educational activity.

More recently, focused on the task of the quality of educational processes and the teachers who execute it, we have research on competencies in the 21st century, typical of teacher professionalization, whose authorship corresponds to Ramírez Masariegos (2020). This work investigates the perception that a certain population has about the following competencies:

- Organize and put into practice learning situations.
- Manage learning progression.
- Promote inclusion strategies.
- Involve students in their learning and their work.
- Team work.
- Participate in school management.
- Learn and apply new technologies.
- Facing duties and ethical dilemmas of the profession.
- Continuously train.

Both investigations, plus the one presented in this article, allow an approach to three possible ways of approaching the problems of teacher professionalization and professionalism, especially when it comes to university teachers who train teachers for general education levels; in that case it would not be enough for these teachers to have a high knowledge of the science they teach, but, as much or more than that, the application of methods to educate in a multifaceted social context.

The declaration of evaluative criteria about the professionalism achieved or not by a teacher, whether they are criteria of researchers on the subject or of managers evaluating the teaching staff, should always go through the search for the opinions of the students because, regardless of the degree of acceptance or esteem that they have for their teachers and the technical ignorance of evaluation parameters, students receive the frequent effect of teacher performance and, to a large extent, their successes or failures are directly associated with their teachers.

Even when the results obtained in the study presented here are positive, it is pertinent to consider that the actions to continue raising the professionalism expected of teachers, both from the management and methodological bodies as well as from the personal performance itself, must agree with the proposals by Tejeda (2015); that is, to direct them to frequent reflection on the exercise of the profession, conducting research in the classroom, incorporating the results of research in the classroom and academic research into their teaching, evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and modifying them accordingly, the evaluation of their own learning needs, collaboration with other professionals in an interdisciplinary manner, and the incorporation of ICT and learning and communication technologies into their professional practice.

It is important and necessary to highlight once again the dialectical unity between professionalization and teacher professionalism, as they result in two different aspects of the same issue: the quality of institutionalized education. It is agreed that professionalization constitutes a continuous process of theoretical and practical actions, in historically specific moments and spaces, aimed at raising the quality level of teachers; but it is not always declared as the purpose of this process to

achieve the professionalism of teaching staff in general and of their members in particular.

Teaching professionalism should be assumed as a quality projected and intended by each teacher as a concrete expression of the satisfactory fulfillment of a set of indicators. The projective character towards professionalism represents a requirement for conscious and gradual action in search of it; It should be considered a goal, both personally and from the same teacher groups. That it is an intended quality becomes a condition to activate internal structures of the personality of each teacher, fundamentally those of his motivational sphere, that mobilize him towards the projection and personal execution of the appropriate professionalization actions.

The establishment of a totality of indicators of teaching professionalism for university education has a complex edge, among other reasons, because it is impossible to eliminate the high component of subjectivity by whoever intends to do so, whether natural or legal persons, and because the work teaching for the training of graduates of Higher Education is conditioned, fundamentally, by political, economic and social purposes; these in turn respond to macro objectives of the different States when it comes to public universities or to the interests of power groups that exercise economic and administrative control when it comes to private universities.

Pretending for a uniform determination, that is, a universal declaration, of how many and which would be the indicators of teaching professionalism would have little practical meaning, it would be to fall into absolutisms that are seriously questionable by the educational communities and the teachers themselves ; but, despite the recognized complexity, it is valuable to continue researching on this professional quality in the educational union as a fundamental

component of the quality of Higher Education.

parte de las IES y la evaluación de sus estudiantes al egreso de la licenciatura. Congreso Nacional de Investigación Educativa San Luis Potosí. Disponible en: <http://comie.org.mx/congreso/memoriaelectronica/v14/doc/2046.pdf>

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Conflict of interest:

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The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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