


Original article



The preparation for the extension work of the teachers of the Municipal University Center: diagnosis



La preparación para la labor extensionista de los profesores del Centro Universitario Municipal: diagnóstico

Preparação para o trabalho de extensão dos professores do Centro Universitário Municipal: diagnóstico

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a study on teachers' preparation for extension work, a topic of high relevance in the current context due to its connection to the economic and social development of local communities. The study was conducted at the Municipal University Center (CUM) in San Luis, with the objective of diagnosing the current state of such preparation. Theoretical methods such as historical-logical analysis, induction-deduction, and analysis-synthesis were used, as well as empirical methods such as documentary analysis, surveys, interviews, and observation of methodological activities. Descriptive statistics were used for data processing. The main findings

reveal limited teacher preparation for extension work, characterized by isolated actions, poorly integrated into the socio-community context, and with a focus on specific activities rather than on ongoing training processes. Likewise, a low recognition of the value of university extension in the development of values and attitudes committed to social transformation was observed, which compromises the comprehensiveness of the process. A weak appreciation was also identified among professors and administrators regarding the role of extension in the development of critical and transformative professional skills. In conclusion, there are evident deficiencies, both theoretical and practical, in the extension training of teachers, especially in methodological aspects. These results underscore the need to refine the training process to ensure more committed, contextualized, and transformative performance by university professors.

Keywords: process; preparation; local development; extension work.

RESUMEN

El artículo expone los resultados de una investigación sobre la preparación para la labor extensionista de los profesores, tema de alta relevancia en el contexto actual por su vínculo con el desarrollo económico y social de las localidades. El estudio se realizó en el Centro Universitario Municipal (CUM) de San Luis, con el objetivo de diagnosticar el estado actual de dicha preparación. Se emplearon métodos teóricos como el análisis histórico-lógico, la inducción-deducción y el análisis-síntesis, así como métodos empíricos como el análisis documental, encuestas, entrevistas y observación a actividades metodológicas. Para el tratamiento de los datos, se recurrió a la estadística descriptiva. Los principales hallazgos evidencian una limitada preparación de los docentes en torno a la labor extensionista, caracterizada por acciones aisladas, escasamente integradas al contexto sociocomunitario y con un enfoque centrado en actividades puntuales, más que en procesos formativos continuos. Asimismo, se constató un bajo reconocimiento del valor de la extensión universitaria en la formación de valores y actitudes comprometidas con la transformación social, lo que compromete la integralidad del proceso. También se identificó una débil valoración por parte de profesores y directivos respecto al papel de la extensión en el desarrollo de capacidades profesionales críticas y transformadoras. En conclusión, se evidencian carencias, tanto teóricas como prácticas, en la preparación extensionista de los docentes, especialmente en los aspectos metodológicos. Estos resultados subrayan la necesidad de perfeccionar el proceso de formación para garantizar una

actuación más comprometida, contextualizada y transformadora por parte del profesorado universitario.

Palabras clave: proceso; preparación; desarrollo local; labor extensionista.

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa sobre a preparação dos professores para o trabalho de extensão, tema de grande relevância no contexto atual devido à sua ligação com o desenvolvimento econômico e social das localidades. O estudo foi realizado no Centro Universitário Municipal (CUM) de San Luis, com o objetivo de diagnosticar o estado atual dessa preparação. Foram utilizados métodos teóricos como a análise histórico-lógica, a indução-dedução e a análise-síntese, bem como métodos empíricos como a análise documental, pesquisas, entrevistas e observação de atividades metodológicas. Para o tratamento dos dados, recorreu-se à estatística descritiva. As principais conclusões evidenciam uma preparação limitada dos professores em torno do trabalho de extensão, caracterizada por ações isoladas, pouco integradas ao contexto sociocomunitário e com um enfoque centrado em atividades pontuais, mais do que em processos formativos contínuos. Da mesma forma, constatou-se um baixo reconhecimento do valor da extensão universitária na formação de valores e atitudes comprometidas com a transformação social, o que compromete a integralidade do processo. Também foi identificada uma fraca valorização por parte dos professores e gestores em relação ao papel da extensão no desenvolvimento de capacidades profissionais críticas e transformadoras. Em conclusão, evidenciam-se lacunas, tanto teóricas como práticas, na preparação extensionista dos professores, especialmente nos aspectos metodológicos. Estes resultados sublinham a necessidade de aperfeiçoar o processo de formação para garantir uma atuação mais comprometida, contextualizada e transformadora por parte do corpo docente universitário.

Palavras-chave: processo; preparação; desenvolvimento local; trabalho de extensão.

INTRODUCTION

University extension is recognized as a substantive function of higher education. In Latin America, over the past decades, universities in the region have adopted various forms of extension, such as the development of institutional programs and projects, community activities, applied research and the formation of alliances with civil society organizations, as pointed out by Tommasino and Cano (2016). Through extension, universities not only seek to contribute to the development of their communities, but also to train critical and committed citizens to solve social problems, as indicated by Cano Menoni and Flores (2023).

However, the diversity of approaches to preparing actors, both within and outside the university, has prompted researchers to more deeply explore the impact it has on their axiological capacities. Furthermore, recognized as a formative process (González Fernández-Larrea and González González, 2002), it extends beyond the classroom and fosters active engagement with the community, enriching the educational experience and strengthening the ties between the university and society in an exchange that benefits both parties.

Tommasino and Cano (2016) emphasize in their postulates that there is a challenge, both at theoretical and programmatic level, in the creation of a unified and transformative pedagogical proposal, highlighting its concept of "integrality", which has been one of the most influential in the region, Consolidating them as key figures in the field of university extension.

González Aportela et al. (2021) highlight the importance of university extension, both in vocational and social training. The university extension is now reinforced by the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which allows for better management of the extension in a more efficient way, in the performance of teachers and the extension work that they must develop in the territory, involving local actors in the identification, prioritization, execution and evaluation of extension actions. Thus, the university extension is based on its dual function-process character (González Fernández-Larrea & González González, 2002), which contributes to cultural development.

The strengthening of the Latin American Union of University Extension stands out in the region as a space for cooperation, exchange, and reflection on extension and engagement with society (Valenzuela Tovar, 2018); the promotion of articulation with research to improve the management of university extension, generating pertinent, relevant, and applied knowledge to territorial problems

(Valenzuela Tovar, 2022); and the promotion of the role and commitment of university extension in the current Cuban context, through the active and critical participation of the university in the processes of social, economic, and environmental transformation that the country is experiencing (González Fernández-Larrea *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, university culture and its promotion make it possible to transform diverse scenarios. This substantive process is possible not only in physical spaces but also in virtual environments, which opens up new possibilities for interaction and learning.

However, the existence of a diversity of approaches to how to train actors, both inside and outside the university, has prompted researchers to explore more deeply the impact that this preparation has on the axiological capacities of actors. Furthermore, recognized as a formative process (González González and González Fernández-Larrea, 2002), it extends beyond the classroom and fosters an active commitment to the community, which enriches the educational experience and strengthens the ties between the university and society in an exchange that benefits both parties; current assumptions in the National Program of University Extension for Cuban Higher Education, postulated by both authors, in which university extension is defined as a process that is based on the system of University-Society interactions, with the purpose of promoting culture in the university and its environment and that in this way interrelates with the other processes of Higher Education. The Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca University of Pinar del Río is a pioneer in implementing the program, which has been extended to the rest of the country. The program, as a national standard, has a branch in each of the universities and the CUMs.

Centers (CUM) are called upon to play a transcendental role in this process, given their proximity to communities and their capacity to adapt to territorial conditions. However, there is a digital divide that hinders access to information and technological tools, especially in the most remote and marginalized communities. Furthermore, social and economic inequality continues to be an obstacle to the full and equitable participation of communities in university extension processes (Rojas Valdés *et al.*, 2018).

In order to obtain empirical evidence of the recognized social problem, an exploratory study was carried out in the 2023-2024 school year on the state of teacher preparation for extension work in the San Luis CUM.

To this end, it was conducted document analysis, classroom observations, interviews with professors, and surveys of students from different programs. The analysis revealed the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- The existence of the Municipal Development Strategy.
- The CUM university extension strategy.
- It has an excellent teaching staff.

Weaknesses

- Inadequate training for teachers in extension work limits the effectiveness of this process and hinders the participation of amateur movements in all their forms and the integration of the CUM with the community.
- There is little coordination between the various university and regional actors involved in the process, which manifests itself in a disjointed, unsystematic, and decontextualized manner.
- The training activities carried out are primarily aimed at the research process and teaching.
- Little use is made of the potential offered by university extension and its sociocultural dynamics.

When evaluating the current situation, it can be seen that there is a problematic situation, given that the preparation of teachers for extension work at the CUM San Luis is not systemic, articulated and contextualized.

From this approach, the following scientific problem is formulated: how to improve the preparation for extension work of teachers at the CUM San Luis?

The object of research It is part of the preparation of teachers for extension work at the CUM San Luis and the objective is to present the diagnosis of the current state of preparation of teachers for extension work at the CUM of San Luis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted on a dialectical-materialist methodological basis, which begins with the general contradictions of the object as the source of development and genesis of the problem posed. This basis also allows for the understanding of universal laws, principles, and categories that operate in objective reality and enables the application of theoretical and empirical methods and statistical procedures.

Theoretical methods made it possible to discover, analyze and systematize the results obtained, in order to arrive at reliable conclusions that would allow the problem to be solved.

The historical method was used to establish the most essential connections in the preparation of teachers for extension work and to explain the history of its development, the construction of assumptions, the formulation of conclusions, and the determination of regularities in the preparation of teachers for extension work at the CUM San Luis.

As procedures of theoretical methods, analysis and synthesis, as well as induction and deduction, were used throughout the research to arrive at conclusions and make generalizations.

Empirical methods enabled the discovery and accumulation of a data set to answer the scientific questions. Document analysis was used, which included official documents issued by the Ministry of Education (MES) on the university outreach process at universities, as well as those issued at the university level and by the San Luis University of Montevideo (CUM).

Classes and other activities, such as those organized by the Senior Citizens' Chair, the Honorary Chairs, and others, were also observed as a way to evaluate the university outreach process. Interviews and surveys were used to gather information about the process.

The research population consisted of all CUM professors, a total of 40, representing 100%. They were distributed as follows: 32 part-time professors, eight full-time professors, one assistant director of training, three career coordinators, and the center's director.

RESULTS

To facilitate the research, and as part of the development of the investigative tasks, a diagnostic assessment was conducted among CUM professors regarding their preparation for extension work. To this end, various investigative actions were developed to triangulate the information and obtain a scientifically valid characterization.

Diagnosis was an essential process that allowed for the evaluation of potential based on the goals or objectives to be achieved; that is, it made it possible to determine the actual state of the object of study. This process represents continuous feedback and improvement, taking into account the state of the phenomenon throughout its history and with all its interrelationships.

When the questionnaire was administered to CUM professors, 100% recognized university outreach as a process of higher education; however, not all were familiar with the activities carried out as part of it. The promotion of science and community work was recognized by 35%; 98% of respondents identified cultural activities, sports games, and festivals held in the communities. Regarding responses related to university outreach training, 80% considered it to be a topic addressed very superficially, as more time is devoted to research and teaching; the other 20% stated that time is indeed devoted to it, although not enough.

The diagnosis, supported by the operationalization of the variable, revealed that the process presents significant shortcomings. The results show that teachers perceive limitations in both the theoretical preparation and the practical application of extension knowledge, evidenced by the low ratings given to methodological aspects and the coordination of training stages. Furthermore, the indicators reflect a significant gap between the availability of resources and the consolidation of attitudes and skills, which underscores the need to perfect the process.

Diagnostic regularities

- There is evidence of limited action, with a narrow focus that tends to concentrate on incidental extension activities, with insufficient training of the teachers responsible and poor integration into the socio-community context.
- There is limited recognition of the role of extension work in developing values and attitudes committed to social transformation, which reduces the comprehensiveness that should characterize this type of training.

- There remains a lack of appreciation among teachers and administrators for the importance of university extension in developing the transformative professional skills necessary for critical action.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of preparation for extension work at Municipal University Centers (CUM) has identified several key trends that influence teachers' preparation for extension work, both globally and regionally.

There is a global trend toward integrating extension with teaching and research. At the global level, there is a growing tendency to view university extension as a comprehensive training process that transcends theoretical learning. This approach highlights the need to integrate extension into teaching and research processes, enabling practical and transformative learning. The university, by connecting with its social environment, facilitates local development and contributes to the transformation of communities. This model emphasizes the comprehensive training of both students and teachers, promoting an education with a social impact.

In Latin America, particularly in Cuba, a critical extension model is being promoted. This approach seeks to go beyond the traditional provision of services to communities, moving toward the co-creation of knowledge between the University and communities. In this context, extension is seen as a process of social transformation, in which faculty play a fundamental role. However, despite the importance of this approach, CUMs face significant difficulties in implementing this model effectively, due to structural limitations and a lack of specialized faculty training.

Several barriers to the effective implementation of teacher preparation for extension work were identified in the CUMs. The analysis of relevant documents on university extension provided valuable insights into trends in Latin America, highlighting the importance of extension as a driver of social change. It also underscores significant barriers, such as the lack of adequate teacher training and low community participation in extension projects.

The results obtained reveal that the integration of extension into the teaching process in the CUM is still insufficient, which limits the comprehensive training of future teachers and their ability to perform effective extension functions. It is essential that teacher preparation programs incorporate innovative methodological approaches that promote greater active community participation in

extension projects. Teachers must be trained not only in theoretical extension content but also in practical skills and intervention strategies that allow them to work effectively with local communities.

A key finding is the need to professionalize extension management in CUMs. Extension project management must be systemic and contextualized, which implies adequate planning, efficient execution, and constant monitoring (Jiménez Morejón *et al.*, 2022). CUMs must develop capacity within their teaching and administrative teams to ensure that extension projects have a lasting impact on communities.

Teachers' preparation for extension work in CUMs must incorporate collaborative and cross-disciplinary approaches, with both students and teachers actively participating in project design and implementation. Furthermore, it is crucial that extension projects not be limited to providing services but focus on knowledge co-creation processes that foster innovation and social transformation in the communities they serve.

Although there is a solid theoretical framework for preparing teachers for extension work, CUMs face significant obstacles that limit the effective implementation of these approaches. In this regard, it is concluded that extension management must be professionalized, systemic, and contextualized to achieve a true impact on local development and the comprehensive training of teachers, enabling them to perform effective and transformative extension functions.

The preparation of teachers for extension work in CUMs must be characterized by a cross-cutting approach that organizes, energizes, and structures the creation, preservation, dissemination, and enjoyment of culture in various stages. This approach is carried out primarily through extension projects (Vento Ruizcalderón & Ordaz Hernández, 2019), which not only facilitate the transmission of knowledge but also the creation of meaningful relationships that foster comprehensive cultural education.

This professionalized, systemic, and contextualized nature implies the appropriation of a series of theoretical and methodological foundations, which allow for the integration of the substantive processes necessary for the preparation of future teachers. Furthermore, this training must be closely connected to research and training processes, enabling those involved to effectively direct the training process (Álvarez Bencomo *et al.*, 2020). Extension training must be systematically updated, adapting to the demands of the social and cultural context in which it is developed.

Professionalization is approached as a process inherent to university education, with direct repercussions on solving problems in social practice. According to Rojas Valdés *et al.* (2018), the link between science and profession must creatively integrate scientific content with the educational aspects of university students. This integration constitutes a central axis of professionalization, favoring the development of research closely linked to the profession. Thus, extension training becomes a key tool for the creation of committed and skilled professionals, both in their teaching work and in social intervention.

The relationship between research, creation, and promotion is essential, as it contributes to the comprehensive training of future teachers. In this sense, extension training emphasizes that preservice teachers acquire not only knowledge and skills, but also attitudes, values, and capacities that enable them to actively contribute to solving sociocultural problems in a critical and transformative manner.

Experiences in Latin America have demonstrated the importance of implementing extension training policies for graduate students, updating the theoretical frameworks that guide this type of training in light of new educational paradigms. However, there remains a lack of a clear vision that integrates the teaching department as a central actor in this process, which limits the expansion of this training approach. The implementation of extension projects with a strong student focus not only strengthens academic training but also enhances the university cultural movement, oriented toward transformative education that positively impacts society. In this context, professors must be highly trained.

The diversity of actors involved in extension processes -coordinators, facilitators, promoters, leaders and multipliers- requires that preparation for extension work be a conscious and reflective process. This approach becomes even more relevant when working with vulnerable environments, both within and outside the university context, where actors must be aware of their transformative role.

Landini (2022) highlights the importance of designing learning environments in which extension training processes are not limited to a one-off training plan, but rather include ongoing and comprehensive training. This would allow for the selection, retention, and training of facilitators, in addition to the creation of exchange spaces. This perspective is fundamental for CUMs, which require dynamic and adaptive training to effectively respond to the social demands of their communities.

For their part, Ferrero de Roqué y Occelli (2019) reinforce the need for an innovative approach that is committed to sociocultural characteristics and local challenges. In line with the postulates that advocate for the professionalization of extension training, Rojas Valdés *et al.* (2018), García González *et al.* (2019) agree that both the academic and social dimensions must be considered. Furthermore, the studies by García González y Falcón Pi (2019) agree that training must transcend the classroom and connect directly with the needs of the community.

Taborda (2010) reinforces the need to prioritize university outreach and integrate it into training programs, emphasizing that outreach must transcend the academic sphere and become a transformative process. Students must assume responsibility for identifying and responding to the social needs of their communities, contributing to local and regional development. This perspective also corroborates the importance of refining the research object, introducing new modalities such as virtual environments. In this sense, preparation for outreach work should not be limited to physical spaces but should leverage digital tools to strengthen the relationship between students and communities, broadening the scope of projects and facilitating more accessible continuing education.

Finally, Cano Menoni and Flores (2023) emphasize the need for a critical and reflective approach to extension training, which integrates teaching, research, and extension in a contextualized manner, responding to local problems but with a global vision of Higher Education. This aligns with the purpose of improving the training of extension teachers in the CUMs, ensuring that they are capable of contributing to social transformation and guaranteeing that extension processes are not merely instrumental, but correspond to the social commitment of the university.

The preparation for the extension work of teachers in the CUM should be a continuous, multidimensional and dynamic process that integrates teaching, research and extension in a critical and contextualized way. Only through this integral approach will it be possible to guarantee the preparation of teachers committed to social development, capable of transforming their environment and responding to the needs of the territory with effectiveness and social commitment.

The theoretical analysis of the teacher training process for extension work at the San Luis University Center (CUM) highlights the importance of understanding university extension as an integrative process. The conceptual foundations drawn from previous studies show that teacher preparation must transcend the transmission of knowledge, integrating theoretical, practical, and transformative dimensions that enable teachers to act as agents of change. The literature review demonstrates that

the integration of extension with teaching and research is essential for achieving comprehensive development, in which preparation is defined as a continuous and adaptive process, in line with the demands of the environment.

The diagnosis, based on the operationalization of the variable and the definition of its dimensions, reveals that the process at the San Luis CUM presents significant shortcomings. The results show that teachers perceive limitations in the theoretical preparation and practical application of extension knowledge, evidenced by the low rating of methodological aspects and the coordination of training stages. Furthermore, the indicators reflect a significant gap between the availability of resources and the consolidation of attitudes and skills, which underscores the need to improve the process.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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