

What will happen to the internationalization of higher education and student mobility after Covid-19?

Pamela Gómez López

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana - Azcapotzalco

Ciudad de México, México

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2346-8074>

Recibido: 21/09/20 Revisado: 01/10/20 Aceptado: 04/11/20 Publicado: 05/12/20

Abstract

Internationalization is a process that is carried out in higher education institutions with different objectives and with its implementation it seeks to integrate an international and intercultural perspective in the functions of universities; This process is made up of various strategies, and among the best known is student mobility. In recent decades, internationalization has become more relevant, however, it is a process that still lacks a comprehensive understanding and is carried out in accordance with the intentions and resources of the institutions. With the arrival of the COVID-19 disease, internationalization and student mobility are facing an uncertain future, faced with the urgency of solving other needs in institutions, which is why other ways of implementing it are being explored.

Keywords: Internationalization of higher education; student mobility; tertiary education; Latin America.

¿Qué sucederá con la internacionalización de la educación superior y la movilidad estudiantil después del Covid-19?

Resumen

La internacionalización es un proceso que se lleva a cabo en las instituciones de educación superior con diferentes objetivos, y con su implementación se busca integrar una mirada internacional e intercultural en las funciones de las universidades. Este proceso se compone de diversas estrategias, y, entre las más conocidas, se encuentra la movilidad estudiantil. En las últimas décadas la internacionalización ha cobrado más relevancia, sin embargo, es un proceso que aún carece de un entendimiento integral y se realiza de acuerdo con las intenciones y recursos de las instituciones. Con la llegada de la enfermedad COVID-19, la internacionalización y la movilidad estudiantil se encuentran ante un futuro incierto, ante la urgencia de resolver otras necesidades en las instituciones, por lo que se comienzan a explorar otras formas de implementarla.

Palabras clave: Internacionalización de la educación superior; movilidad estudiantil, enseñanza superior; América Latina.

Qual é o futuro para a internacionalização do educação superior e mobilização de estudantes depois a COVID-19?

Resumo

A internacionalização é um processo que se realiza em instituições de ensino superior com diferentes objetivos e com a sua concretização procura integrar uma perspectiva internacional e intercultural nas funções das universidades; Esse processo é feito de várias estratégias, sendo que entre as mais conhecidas está a mobilidade estudiantil. Nas últimas

décadas, a internacionalização tem se tornado mais relevante, porém, é um processo que ainda carece de uma compreensão abrangente e é realizado de acordo com as intenções e recursos das instituições. Com a chegada da doença COVID-19, a internacionalização e a mobilidade estudantil enfrentam um futuro incerto, face à urgência de resolver outras necessidades nas instituições, razão pela qual estão a ser exploradas outras formas de o implementar.

Palavras-chave: Internacionalização do ensino superior; mobilidade de estudante; ensino superior; América Latina.

How to cite this article:

Gómez, A. (2020). ¿Qué sucederá con la internacionalización de la educación superior y la movilidad estudiantil después del COVID-19?. *Revista Digital de Investigación en Docencia Universitaria*. 14(2), e1348. <https://doi.org/10.19083/ridu.2020.1348>

The process of internationalization within higher education institutions has developed strongly in the last decades. This work begins with the planning of its conceptual definition, situating this practice as an opportunity to provide students and institutions with the possibility of acquiring competencies that allow them to integrate into the dynamics of globalization. Subsequently, some background on the actions of universities in the context of pandemics is discussed, taking as a precedent the outbreak of H1N1 influenza in 2009. It ends with some considerations on the effects of a new pandemic on the internationalization of higher education and student mobility, and some options that have been put on the table to give continuity to the process in a post-COVID-19 era.

Background

A Conceptual Approach

The internationalization of higher education, according to one of its best-known definitions, refers to a process in which the international, intercultural and global dimensions, or at least one of them, are manifested in the functions of tertiary education institutions (Knight, 2003). Another proposal, stated by Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009), points out that internationalization is a response formulated by governmental and institutional levels to participate in the phenomenon of globalization, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of the beneficial nature of the international dimension. In addition to the above, De Wit (2011) points out that

the evolution of internationalization has mutated from a cooperative tradition to competitive actions between higher education institutions (HEIs).

The inclusion of the international dimension in HEIs is aimed at achieving various objectives, which vary according to the orientations defined by each institution. However, as suggested by the analysis carried out in 2012 by Hénard, Diamond, and Roseveare for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one of the main purposes of internationalization is quality academic training for the acquisition of competencies in students, which will enable them to interact effectively in the context of globalization; and the second refers to the positioning of university institutions within the educational market through the construction of an international profile that can attract resources and prestige, among other benefits.

In order to implement internationalization, it is necessary to implement various strategies that allow the integration of internationalization at the higher education level. Although educational policies outline actions to enable internationalization, it is the institutions that are responsible for outlining various strategic axes from the institutional development plans to achieve the main objective of this process. However, this is conditioned by the intentions and financial resources available to carry them out.

The ways of internationalizing institutions

The internationalization of higher education, as is expected in any process, has evolved both

in its definition and in the strategies that can contribute to its implementation. In order to carry it out, it is not only important to establish activities, but also to take into account aspects such as the educational context of the country and the type of institution (De Wit, 2011).

In addition, for proper internationalization, it is necessary to distinguish its facets. In this regard, several studies have emphasized the diversification of this process. On the one hand, De Wit (2011) points out that internationalization can take two directions: one of them, *internationalization at home*, refers to the activities carried out to achieve the development of intercultural competence within the university centers; and the second, *internationalization abroad*, considers the actions that involve the circulation of knowledge, human resources, and the establishment of various networks and agreements, "including forms of teaching across borders" (p. 81).

Around these axes of internationalization, two aspects can be found: endogenous internationalization, which refers to cooperation and reciprocity between institutions; and exogenous internationalization, permeated by competition and the elements of the education market, as analyzed by Oregioni, Taborga, & Piñero (2014). Another more detailed proposal by Knight (n.d.) establishes that internationalization is carried out considering four approaches: activity, competency, *ethos*, and process; and each of them responds to different logics, among which are the identification and professionalization of the actors involved in internationalization, the establishment of an international culture within the campuses, the modification of the curriculum to include the international dimension, and finally the approach that links each of the aforementioned to achieve comprehensive internationalization.

One of the most relevant studies to identify the strategies associated with internationalization is that of Gacel-Ávila. The researcher distinguishes the differences between organizational strategies, i.e., those proposed at the institutional level and embodied in institutional development plans and programmatic strategies, where the objectives of HEIs are transferred to operational activities, i.e., those that involve "internationalizing teaching, curriculum, research, and extension" (Gacel-

Ávila, 2017, p. 68). It can be commented that programmatic strategies are the culmination of the intentions, objectives, and purposes of internationalization that institutions and university centers have.

Student Mobility, the Best-known Resource for Internationalization

Student mobility has been practiced since the founding of universities, with purposes that have varied throughout their development. Since the Middle Ages, the movement of students has been carried out in order to access knowledge that was not available at the university of origin. In the sixteenth century, the movement of students entered the category of *Grand Tour*, i.e., trips that involved the building or strengthening of diplomatic relations, as Ascari (2016) points out. In both cases, mobility was reserved for the elite and those who could afford the expenses of moving to another place.

Perhaps the most widely recognized strategy is student mobility, which is incorporated into the field of the internationalization of the curriculum. This has been defined by various organizations and in countless works and, as pointed out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC, 2019), the multitude of approaches to mobility activities can be limited to foreign students who move to another country to carry out various activities related to science and research.

With the emergence of new university models and the evolution of higher education itself, student mobility was carried out under other guidelines. Teichler (2008) mentions that, in the case of Europe, this was facilitated in the 1990s with the establishment of the Erasmus¹ program and

¹ Erasmus is the student exchange program, active since the 1980s, for the member countries of the European Union. The transfer and recognition of credits, as well as the inter-cultural and international component, are two of the attractions of this program; it also offers financing for the stay of students and the diversifications of the program's purposes, such as volunteering, internships, work-study, and training programs in various institutions. Available at <https://www.erasmusprogramme.com/>

cooperation between university institutions to facilitate not only the movement of students, but also the homologation of credits and diplomas; and although mobility became an accessible option for most students, it continued to be carried out by those with sufficient economic capital to assume the costs of travel and stay.

In the Latin American context, Didou (2017) emphasizes that, although mobility is the best-known strategy for internationalizing education, at the regional level it is still at a level far below the numbers produced by surveys conducted elsewhere. On the other hand, one indicator that stands out, according to Didou, is that the percentage of foreign students enrolled in Latin American institutions is not high. A fundamental contribution of the authors research highlights other issues involved in the mobility decision, such as language learning, intercultural immersion for a successful adaptation in the receiving university, and scholarships that sometimes are insufficient to cover students' expenses while they are away from their place of origin.

The definition of mobility has also been subject to various modifications. One interpretation is offered by Donnelly and Gamsu (2018), where they explain that a definition of mobility can be constructed from the measurement of distance between the place of origin and the target university. The contribution of Góngora (2018), meanwhile, emphasizes the temporality of mobilities; while Jung (2016) points out that, on the subject of mobility, there are various senses "some empirical, others ideological, as well as phenomena that Western states are able to influence, and others that belong to the register of the symbolic" (p. 21).

In short, student mobility involves different factors, and its definition will be linked to the purposes for which it is intended. The proposal presented is to establish that national and international student mobility is a move from the university of origin to a destination university, with the purpose of carrying out a stay with different time periods and different purposes, such as the course of subjects, field work, insertion in a project or research group, among others. It is also considered that mobility, although carried out on an individual basis, is framed by institutional

dispositions that, to a large extent, make possible or not the transit of students.

The definition from UNESCO² describes that students become internationally mobile when they cross borders to temporarily reside in a country other than the one in which they are studying for the purpose of academic activities. According to the above definition and data from *International Organization for Migration's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre* (GMDAC), the number of mobile students in the period 2011-2017 was almost five million. The highest outbound mobility is reported in North America, Europe, and Asia; while Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania have a lower number of mobility students, as reflected in the reports of UNESCO's *Institute for Statistics*³. On the other hand, with respect to the destinations chosen by students, the same constant is maintained as in outgoing mobility, with North America, European, and Asian countries receiving more international students per year.

Thus, we can see that inter-nationalization and its best known and most implemented strategy, student mobility, have been processes present since the founding of the university. In the report *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution* for the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO, Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley (2009) pointed out that the globalization process had made universities more competitive, in the search to remain within the rankings⁴, which to a certain extent constrain the imaginary of the educational actors and, therefore, their inclination to choose or not a certain university for the continuation or complementation of their studies. Internationalization could, therefore,

2 <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/international-or-internationally-mobile-students>

3 <https://migrationdataportal.org/infographic/internationally-mobile-students>

4 Downing, Lock, & Leung (2018) indicate that the history of university rankings can be traced back to the 1980s in the United States. A ranking has different indicators that, together, seek to demonstrate the quality of institutions, based on the number of enrollment, educational programs, terminal efficiency and even internationalization.

be an attractive factor for the image of the institutions.

The above seeks to provide a general overview of the process of internationalization of higher education and student mobility. Higher education, over time, has modified several of its processes and, in its massification, enrollment has reached up to 250 million students enrolled in the various tertiary education programs, and of these, the mobility rate is approximately 2% (considering the data presented above, of the nearly 5 million mobile students, Calderon, 2018).

However, despite the attractive approach to internationalization, in recent years it has been noted that this process is at risk. Shared strategies such as the construction of international research networks, chairs, cultural events, and academic mobility, among others, have found a relative equilibrium without further growth within the university institutions, as the diversification of strategies has been exhausted to a certain extent by focusing on the promotion of only some of them and maintaining the vision concentrated on a single type of internationalization.

In addition, political issues have played a determining role in the slowdown of some actions for the establishment of the international dimension. On the one hand, the growth of political and social movements, coupled with ostracizing attitudes toward individuals of foreign origin that have been on the rise in recent years, have called into question the ease to carry out migratory procedures, especially for those who will not reside for a long period in a host country, as in the case of mobile students. Then, as Altbach and De Wit (2018) point out, there are the conditions that some countries have implemented to filter more strictly the entry of students to university institutions, the actions to reduce the use of English as a scientific language, and the tuition costs for foreign students.

Some other specialists also point out that another of the problems encountered by internationalization is the non-return to the country of origin (Remedi & Ramírez, 2016), the economic crises and the decrease in resources granted for international cooperation (Jaramillo, 2016), and even the "scientific colonialism that may be implicit in cooperation policies"

(Schwartzman, 2009, p. 69).

Despite these circumstances, which could have a negative impact on the internationalization of higher education, authors such as Didou (2013) mention that in the area of mobility, although there are gaps in the data on the number of mobile students and academics, conditions of foreign students, and the validation of credits at the end of the displacement, it is possible to appeal to the positive side of the process, such as the continuous collaboration between specialists from various disciplinary fields for the dissemination of knowledge. Meanwhile, Camacho (2017) mentions that the fundamental reasons for internationalization can have a positive impact on the establishment of agreements and alliances, and the comprehensive, international and personal training of students who undertake mobility.

Discussion

Higher Education in Times of Pandemic

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic. Other pandemics, such as the one caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and H1N1 Influenza, had led to the issuance of communiqués to warn about the emergency and measures to curb the spread of the disease. As of March, 118,000 cases and 4,291 deaths had been reported. By August, the figure had risen to 23,752,965 cases and 815,038 deaths⁵.

In recent times, it was the last disease that represents the closest precedent that triggered actions in different areas that were carried out to overcome the emergency. The AH1N1 influenza outbreak was detected in Mexico in 2009. The issuance of different informative notes by the WHO during the development of this disease highlighted the health measures, the list of symptoms, the risk of spread, and the recommendations for the population that had been infected, among other topics (Reynoso, 2010). The aforementioned author indicates that within

5 According to figures presented in WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID 19) Dashboard. Available at <https://covid19.who.int/>

these notes there was a special reference to the suspension of school activities since these spaces represented areas of high risk of contagion due to the number of people within the educational premises, which is why this measure was followed in different countries, especially Mexico, as it was the epicenter of the origin of influenza.

On September 11, 2009, the WHO issued another information note, indicated for schools, in which it stated the reinforcement of preventive health measures and also recommended the closing of schools to significantly halt the increase in cases, although this recommendation was left in the hands of the different governments.

In the case of higher education, particularly in student mobility, the measures established were the return of students and the temporary suspension of exchange programs and stays outside the country of origin. In addition, when cases were detected among students, the most appropriate measure was to remain in quarantine and, as Redden (2009) indicates, in some North American institutions, although there was no cancellation of student travel, in the event of the student's decision to travel to Mexico, two options were offered: the first was to carry out the stay while maintaining continuous contact with their tutors and universities; and the other, perhaps the most pertinent, was to choose another host country.

Another view of the preventive measures applied in schools comes from the case study by Katz, May, Sanza, Johnston, & Petinaux (2012) where, based on the analysis of the actions of school authorities in the face of the H1N1 influenza, they initially resorted to the dissemination of preventive measures through the use of information and communication technologies, preventive vaccination, and the implementation of the use of masks. Although this last action was not particularly liked by the students, social distancing was one of the most widely accepted actions.

This leads to the report *H1N1 and Higher Education. Lessons learned: tools, tips, takeaways* prepared by the Center for Infectious Disease Research (CIDRAP, 2010) of the University of Minnesota, where it was reported that, in the first detected cases of students infected by H1N1, it was known that they probably contracted the virus on *spring break* trips. However, a particular feature of

the response of certain North American institutions was the preparation for the pandemic scenario, based on the different diseases that emerged in Asia and had the potential to become lethal.

Thus, this report could even be interpreted as a manual for the implementation of various containment measures for an emerging situation. In the case of student mobility or *study abroad*, it was cancelled for Mexico, but not for other countries, and mobile foreign students could resort to so-called *emergency housing*⁶ if they were unable to return to their countries.

After reviewing the literature associated with the action patterns of universities during this pandemic, it was not possible to corroborate the actions carried out by continent, country or institution.

However, no information was found on the impact of the disease on internationalization plans, but in the case of student mobility, it can be inferred that the global spread of the disease had a similar effect on travel actions in a high percentage of universities since the priority was to stay away from the territory of origin of the influenza, change the choice of host university or temporarily suspend any academic activity outside the country of origin.

On the other hand, the preventive closure of schools, including universities, made it necessary to create action protocols that would provide a short-term solution in the face of the uncertain outlook and the evolution of the pandemic. Undoubtedly, providing information about the disease was one of the first actions to be taken. Based on this knowledge, strategies could be devised to address the problem of suspended courses. One of the immediate solutions was the adoption of the so-called MOOCs (*Massive Online Open Courses*), which as Trucano (2014) points out were considered a viable, low cost, and relatively easy access option for continuing studies, although in the background, the move to this

6 Within the aforementioned report, *emergency housing* refers to the construction of institutional and community support for the hosting of foreign students in the host country. Although it is indicated that this plan did not require its activation within the development of the influenza pandemic, it worked to strengthen the cohesion between university-society.

type of education required planning and teacher training for the effective use of information and communication technologies (ICT), as well as the development of educational programs that could be facilitated virtually.

For student mobility, the most drastic action was to cancel, suspend or reschedule student stays in other countries, especially in Mexico. Briefly, it can be said that the health contingency did not represent a major change in the internationalization of higher education. However, it did function as a mechanism to address the protocols implemented by institutions at different levels in the event of emergencies.

The Emergence of COVID-19

The spread of the COVID-19 disease at the beginning of this year once again raised the alert on the various measures to mitigate its effects. Thus, the communiqués from different organizations focused not only on disseminating the seriousness of COVID-19, but also the various strategies to control it. Of course, the social, economic, and political consequences immediately followed. Measures to mitigate the outbreak of the disease, given the lack of knowledge of how it spread, included hand washing, social distancing and various indications to avoid crowded places. Subsequently, a gradual closure of businesses, recreational centers, entertainment venues, and schools of all levels, including institutions of higher education, began.

The limitation of activities at universities, including administrative work, was a preventive measure that, to a certain extent, responded to the indication from national and international health organizations to maintain a strict social distance. Nevertheless, another problem, in addition to the suspension of school cycles and the exchange of virtual activities, was about to alert higher education institutions: the stays of academics and students abroad.

Throughout the world, embassies began to issue alerts and travel restrictions due to the coronavirus, in addition to closing borders to avoid the maximum number of contagions. These actions were carried out in stages, as not all countries had cases or clear guidelines to follow. Humanitarian flights were used to return

people to their places of origin or housing. In contrast to the situation in 2009, on this occasion emphasis was placed on the urgency of limiting the movement of people and planning the return home of those who were away from their place of origin by means of humanitarian flights. Another possibility was to remain in the foreign country for the duration of the contingency.

Notes on the Development of Internationalization in Latin American Higher Education

Regarding internationalization, Gacel and Rodríguez (2018) indicate that the reasons for internationalization differ by country, by institution and are conditioned by institutional management structures. In agreement with Marmolejo (2018), they mention that at present, the internationalization budget has increased and, although activities are diversified to attract resources, public higher education institutions still depend on public resources to sustain international activities, as they face some risks and obstacles to carry them out, among them, the unclear understanding of the strategies proposed to include the international vision in the institutions.

A clearer picture of internationalization in the region can be found in the "First Regional Survey on Internationalization Trends in Latin America and the Caribbean" conducted in 2016 by the Regional Observatory on Internationalization and Networks in Tertiary Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OBIRET, 2018). In a particular way, it will be necessary to refer to the obstacles to internationalization to comprise subsequently, as it has been affected by the health emergency. Thus, Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez (2018) mention two types of obstacles to the inclusion of international practice in activities, detailing:

- **Internal (or institutional) obstacles**

These are those that are structurally immersed in the institutions and are linked to economic issues such as financing; academic issues, related to the lack of integration in the curriculum and language learning; and administrative issues, which refer to the lack of training in matters related to this process by those in charge of the internationalization offices.

- **External obstacles**

Insufficient public funding, lack of clarity in the processes of homologation and validation of credits, and visa restrictions (for outgoing and incoming mobility).

The analysis of Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez (2018) provides guidelines that help to understand the affectations of the pandemic in the institutional environment for the internationalization of tertiary institutions. Some of the reports that have gained great relevance are those issued by UNESCO, in conjunction with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2020), where it has been shown that the suspension of classes is, in cases of emergency, the most appropriate measure to reduce the impact.

However, it is necessary to recognize that the above action was carried out at a global and regional level; therefore, it was not a specific strategy for higher education institutions. Internationalization took a back seat to the more urgent needs of universities, such as the continuity of school cycles and admission processes. Some sentences, such as those issued by Francisco Marmolejo and Renato Balderrama at the second edition of the forum *Challenges and Opportunities for the Internationalization of Higher Education*, organized in May 2020 by the Mexican Association for International Education (AMPEI), pointed out that indeed the pandemic shed light on the complexities of equity in access and permanence at this level. Nonetheless, the issue of internationalization was downplayed in the face of travel restrictions which, in the end, put a halt to various strategies, including the mobility of academics and students.

This would seem to place the role of internationalization far below its potential to support cooperation and collaboration between countries and universities. Despite this, this process has positioned itself as a *must* for globalization. According to Marmolejo's opinion expressed at the AMPEI forum, in a situation such as the one we are currently experiencing, it is possible that internationalization may have new understandings and, thus, break down the negative connotations attributed to it.

Meanwhile, Sylvia Ortega said within the same discussion space that internationalization should be disruptive, focused on the construction of regional projects. To conclude this section, we can consider that the internationalization of universities is at a fragile stage. Undoubtedly, its advantages and disadvantages are diverse, although it is undeniable that, thanks to its implementation, it has brought institutions that promote ideals of cooperation closer together. On the other hand, it is decisive that in a post-pandemic scenario, actions that contribute to the understanding of internationalization in the educational sphere and proposals that include other possibilities for internationalization, in addition to mobility, are promoted again.

Suspension of Academic and Student Travel

Up to now, we have provided some details about the future of internationalization. In this sense, it is of utmost importance to recognize the prospects for student mobility at present and the possible future turn it will take.

Student mobility refers to the temporary movement of students to host universities to carry out different academic activities. According to the report "Mobility in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges and opportunities of a renewed agreement for the recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas" signed by IESALC (2019), the percentage of mobile students with international destinations and within the region in the period 2012-2017, reached 2.3 "in figures: from 4 to 5 million in just five years" (p. 11).

Although the figure is low compared to mobility numbers in other continents and regions, it has not stagnated and is gradually increasing. As the report shows, mobility choices are directed towards destinations such as the United States and Europe for travel experiences, although Latin American destinations such as Mexico, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic are also emerging as an attraction for foreign students.

Since the cessation of university activities, the students' flows were also interrupted, and different measures were taken to offer a solution for the incoming and outgoing mobilization. In some countries, they were provided with

lodging, support in migratory procedures and continuity of online activities. But nor everything was positive: some were left stranded in the destinations chosen for their mobility, unable to complete the procedures to return home, with economic insecurity and possibly with negative effects on their state of mind.

Some reflections were recovered for this section. First, that of Altbach and De Wit (2020) stated that there would be a decline in the number of mobile students in the face of a period of uncertainty regarding the resumption of activities at universities. They recover Marginson's ideas to project the recovery of mobile student flows in five years' time, but with significant changes in the choice of destinations and a decrease in funding for stays abroad.

The consequences of COVID-19 are not only in the pause in student mobility. The global economic crisis has a negative impact on the budget foreseen for education as indicated by Schleicher (2020), taking into account the reports of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In addition, this economic detriment includes the loss of income from student fees and the benefits of increases in the gross domestic product, as studied by Pawlowska (2011) in her research on the economic spillover of mobility students as participants in cultural tourism. Similarly, Quinteiro (2020) recognizes that the economic factor will be transcendental for the continuity of mobility actions, as there will be increases in air transportation and the institutional budget allocated to mobility.

The advantages and disadvantages of student mobility have been defined in different research studies, but despite some of the risks it represents (such as the possible brain drain), it has been considered as an activity that can favor the acquisition of so-called global competencies⁷ and

also intercultural competence⁸ as an added value. In the academic field, mobility is considered as an activity that can allow the construction of research networks, the approach to new theoretical perspectives and, in general, can be qualified as a positive experience. The cessation of travel, as has been discussed, has an impact in different areas and, therefore, also halts cultural encounters, which are of great importance for mobile students, so in addition to the adaptation of mobility programs, there is a new need to replace them by resorting to the use of technology until face-to-face meetings are resumed.

Technology as a Resource for Internationalization: Bringing the Other in Through Virtual Resources

Since the establishment of social separation measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, our lives and daily lives have been immersed to a large extent in technology, replacing physical presence with a virtual presence that favors the processes of socialization and communication.

In schools and university centers, the classes have been replaced by online courses that seek to give continuity to the school cycles, both at the beginning and at the end. UNESCO has established various mechanisms: teaching in the areas of resources, software, online courses, video communication platforms, access to repositories, as well as tools for teachers⁹, and several educational systems worldwide have opted for remote teaching.

But this transition uncovered an inequality gap in which it is recognized that not all students have access to the Internet and do not have the technological devices to continue their education. In the case of the institutions, it has been revealed that there is insufficient training of teachers in the field of technology and there is a lack of adequate

⁷ According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) definition, global competence is the "ability to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate worldviews and the perspectives of others, to engage in appropriate, open and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for the collective good and sustainable development" (Teaching for Global Competence in a Rapidly Changing World. <https://asiasociety.org/sites/>

default/files/inline-files/teaching-for-global-com-petence-in-a-rapidly-changing-world-edu.pdf).

⁸ They have been defined as the abilities that favor a perspective of recognition of the diversity of cultures and lifestyles that allow for effective interrelation and communication among individuals. Taken from Intercultural competencies. Conceptual and operational framework. UNESCO-Universidad de Colombia. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000251592>

⁹ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions>

strategies to transition to virtual education as well. In addition to the above, Barrón (2020) points out that a structural reform of education in which technology can be included as a pedagogical resource is necessary. It is worth adding that only through its use aimed at generating good practices for the teaching-learning process can we speak of a positive aspect of the use of ICTs in education and not only as a mere tool for the transmission of content that is not meaningful to students.

In the case of higher education, the measures have been the same as in other educational levels: opting for distance learning, in times of pandemic, has been perhaps the only viable alternative for educational institutions and actors. The addition of other challenges such as access, coverage, and permanence at the higher education level have undoubtedly been relevant in this new context and the challenges will probably multiply once the contingency is overcome. For the time being, universities and other higher education institutions have had to migrate to virtual spaces in order to continue serving the millions of students affected by the pandemic in the Latin American region.

In this regard, Toro (2020) maintains that there are two scenarios in tertiary education: one, of institutions that had already gone through the online schooling experience and were able to quickly meet student demands; and the second, which points out the urgency of the virtual incursion of institutions that, in short, require institutional efforts and those of teachers to maintain learning spaces. In the area of international education, the researcher reinforces the idea that internationalization at home is the most convenient strategy for acquiring global competencies when it is not possible to physically travel to other educational centers. Meanwhile, Gacel-Ávila (2020) emphasizes that the strengthening of internationalization at home can provide space for the creation of innovative strategies and the reformulation of curricula, although first, the problem of the lack of understanding of this facet of the internationalization process from the institutional and administrative level should be solved.

Thus, the internationalization at home that emphasized the acquisition and development

of global competencies without the need for travel (Beleen, 2011), as well as the inclusion of the international dimension in the curriculum, research and academic activities (Gacel-Ávila, 2017), has begun to be explored in greater depth in order to recognize its benefits within the universities. But again, within many institutions, particularly those in Latin America and underdeveloped countries, internationalization is not an urgent topic on the agendas, although it can undoubtedly be the subject of discussion once the current situation is transcended. On the other hand, Schleicher (2020) brings to the table the fact that, for students seeking to study abroad, the change to the virtual mode could not be attractive since it eliminates the possibility of face-to-face experience with other contexts.

With respect to this response, and given the impossibility of physically moving to other universities to complement academic training, there has been a resurgence of interest in what is known as COIL (*Collaborative Online International Learning*). This type of learning from the perspective of pedagogy refers to “fostering the development of intercultural competencies with the use of technology to connect classrooms in different geographical locations” (Appiah-Kubi & Annan, 2020, p. 109), so that students can be confronted with other cultural and academic perspectives without the need to travel, which would also provide an opportunity for underprivileged students to access the internationalization experience.

One of the recent studies on this topic, “*How Covid-19 has affected young universities*,” signed by Gomez and Colella (2020), points out that among COIL strategies can be found virtual mentoring and intercultural trainings. Both can sustain international networking and fructify internationalization efforts through language training and mentoring, while the push for virtual mobility can build a transitional ground for face-to-face experience that can facilitate students’ adaptation to new scenarios.

Levinson and Davidson’s (2015) research yielded positive results regarding virtual experiences, classifying them into three categories: virtual experiences with international teams in pursuit of project development; hybrid experiences, i.e.,

linking virtual and face-to-face activities; and finally, extended activities that seek to prolong the virtual mobility experience throughout the course of studies. The aforementioned activities not only require a well-established institutional internationalization plan, but can only function properly if there is peer-to-peer collaboration between teachers and if they are adjusted to time zones since, although international working groups are established, not all students can be present synchronously in the virtual sessions.

More precisely, Guth, Doscher, and Haug (2020) point out that the COIL method (translated into Spanish as Aprendizaje Colaborativo Internacional) is not new, but like internationalization, it requires an understanding of the terminology associated with its strategies and, moreover, it is necessary to transcend the term *virtual mobility* to *virtual exchange*, which finally specifies more precisely one of the objectives of COIL, which is the interaction and assertive dialogue between peers that can result in experiences that trigger intercultural competence.

One of the alternatives in Latin America is Espacio de Movilidad Virtual en Educación Superior (EMOVIES)¹⁰ promoted by the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education, which offers students the option of taking courses in foreign universities, with credit homologation in the institution of origin, which reflects the intention of some institutions in the region to balance access to international experiences, eliminating tuition fees, but dispensing at all times with face-to-face experiences in accordance with the virtual nature of the program. The virtual mobility alternative has also been adopted by the Erasmus Program, one of the most recognized in the world for the cultural and academic experience it provides to students.

Of course, integrating internationalization innovations into institutional development plans (or at least into protocols for emergencies such as the one we are now experiencing) requires effort at the institutional level, at the level of academic programs, and at the level of the students themselves. On the other hand, it is inevitable

to think that virtual mobility is not enough for the development of different competencies in students, although it must be recognized that it favors the inclusion of students in a process that has been formulated as a response to the demands of globalization.

Final Thoughts: What does the Future Hold for Internationalization and Student Mobility?

The outbreak of COVID-19 in the world has had devastating consequences. The scientific, economic, political, social, and educational sectors have suffered the onslaught of a disease that has forced us to rethink many of our practices and acquire others in order to adapt to a world where the normality is, perhaps momentarily, to suspend face-to-face encounters that have forced us to resort to technology as a kind of artifact that keeps us close in a scenario where social distancing is the new norm.

Of course, the school environment has been one of the most affected areas. The multiple textures of the educational systems of each country have led to drastic decisions, such as the closing of schools and the forced entry into on-line learning, which was intended to be equitable and egalitarian and, paradoxically, does not adjust to the realities of thousands of students who, due to multiple factors, are unable to continue with distance classes. In the area of internationalization, various voices have stated that this process has been moved to the last rung of relevance since, as it has been mentioned on several occasions throughout this paper, the urgency leans toward planning on the fly strategies that allow for the continuation of the students' learning processes.

Collaboration between countries has been observed in recent months through the various actions being carried out jointly to find a cure for the virus that has claimed the lives of thousands of people. This same collaboration has been taken to the field of higher education, with cooperation networks, agreements, co-authorships, the integration of international teams, and the reception of foreign students in all latitudes of the planet.

Internationalization, present in the history of universities, has been one of the processes that continually diversify, along with a changing

10 Virtual Mobility Space in Higher Education (eMOVIES). Available at: <https://oui-iohe.org/es/emo-vies/>

world. The future of this practice requires greater flexibility in its implementation and strategies that, given this scenario, should not only refer to student mobility, but that in favor of equality and equity actions can be directed towards new scenarios where everyone can participate in meaningful encounters with other cultures.

So far, according to the maps prepared by The British Council¹¹, higher education institutions in most of the world remain closed, so face-to-face interaction is relegated only to the virtual realm. Other data provided by the same council indicate that in this month (September 2020) the flow of students has increased, which does not mean that travel restrictions have ended, but reflects the return of students to their countries of origin and the acceptance of some others in universities abroad, but not in a face-to-face manner, waiting for the resumption of face-to-face activities that still seems far away.

Some recommendations established by UNESCO emphasize that cooperation links must be strengthened between university institutions today more than ever. Therefore, we repeat that these actions can be strengthened in the face of the new challenge that the education sector (and many others) will have to face next year: the economic crisis resulting from the health emergency.

In short, higher education, internationalization and student mobility are at a point in time that may allow their processes to be renewed, in the light of a new normality that requires virtual rapprochement. Despite the negative aspects of these circumstances, it is important to think that intentions to travel, to get to know new environments and to have cultural encounters are desires that will not disappear from the students' minds because we recognize our particularities by reflecting ourselves in others.

¹¹ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/news/international-student-mobility-heatmap>

Referencias

- Altbach, P. & De Wit, H. (7 de marzo de 2018). *¿Está en riesgo la internacionalización de la educación superior? Distancia por tiempos*. Recuperado de <https://educacion.nexos.com.mx/?p=1047>
- Altbach, P. & De Wit, H. (Abril de 2020). Lo que pasaría con la educación superior tras la pandemia. Opinión, El Observatorio de la Universidad Colombiana. <https://www.universidad.edu.co/lo-que-pasaria-con-la-ed-sup-tras-la-pandemia-philip-altbach-hans-de-wit-abril-20/>
- Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2009). Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004406155>
- AMPEI. (26 de mayo de 2020). Retos y oportunidades para la internacionalización de la educación superior (2/3) [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tO2wZPA0vUo&t=344s>
- Appiah-Kubi, P., & Annan, E. (2020). A Review of a Collaborative Online International Learning. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy (IJEP)*, 10 (1), 109-124. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v10i1.11678>
- Ascarí, M. (17 de junio de 2016). How the young have forged European identity – from the Grand Tour to the Erasmus generation. *The Conversation*.
- Barrón, M. (2020). La educación en línea. Transiciones y disrupciones. En H. Casanova (coord.). *Educación y pandemia. Una visión académica*. (pp. 66-74) México: Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Universidad y la educación.
- Beleen, J. (2011). La internacionalización en casa en una perspectiva global: un estudio crítico del Informe del 3er Estudio Global de la AIU RUSC. *Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 8 (2), 85-100. <http://doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v8i2.1094>
- Calderon, A. (2018). *Massification of higher education revisited*. Melbourne: RMIT University. Recuperado de https://www.academia.edu/36975860/Massification_of_higher_education_revisited
- Camacho, M. (2017). Internacionalización en la educación superior. Práctica y estudio en constante evolución vista desde un estudio de caso. México: ANUIES.
- CEPAL y Unesco (2020). La educación en tiempos de COVID-19. Recuperado de https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45904/1/S2000510_es.pdf

- CIDRAP (2010). *H1N1 & Higher Ed: Lessons Learned Pandemic Influenza Tools, Tips, and Takeaways from the Big 10+2 Universities*. Recuperado de <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sites/default/files/public/downloads/big102webfinal.pdf>
- De Wit, H. (2011). Globalización e internacionalización de la educación superior. *RUSC. Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 8 (2), 77-84. <http://doi.org/10.7238/rusc.v8i2.1247>
- Donnelly, M. y Gamsu, S. (2018). Home and away. Social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in student mobility. Reino Unido: University of Bath – The Sutton Trust.
- Didou, S. (2013). Movilidades posgraduadas y científicas en México. En S. Didou (coord.), *La formación internacional de los científicos en América Latina* (pp. 87-163). México: ANUIES.
- Didou, S. (2017). La internacionalización de la educación superior en América Latina: transitar de lo exógeno a lo endógeno. México: UDUAL.
- Downing, K., Loock, P., & Leung, H. (2 de marzo de 2018). The history and development of higher education ranking systems. *QS WOW News*. <https://qswownews.com/history-development-higher-education-ranking-systems/>
- Gacel-Ávila, J. (2017). Estrategias de internacionalización de la educación superior: implementación, evaluación y rankings. México: UNESCO – IESALC.
- Gacel-Ávila, J. & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, S. (2018). La internacionalización de la educación terciaria en América Latina y el Caribe: avances, tendencias y prospectiva. En J. Gacel-Ávila (coord.) *La educación superior, internacionalización e integración regional de América Latina y el Caribe* (pp. 57-88). Caracas: UNESCO-IESALC Y Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba.
- Gacel-Ávila, J. (2020). COVID-19: Riesgos y oportunidades para la internacionalización de la educación superior en México. *ESAL Revista de Educación Superior en América Latina*. 37-40. <https://doi.org/10.14482/esal.8.378.721>
- Gómez, S. & Colella, C. (2020). How COVID-19 has affected young universities. Bruselas: Young European Research Universities. <https://www.yerun.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/YERUN-Covid-VFinal-OnlineSpread.pdf>
- Góngora, E. (2018). Movilidad internacional, trayectorias y posicionamiento en tres sociólogos mexicanos. En R. Ramírez y J. Rodríguez (coords.). *Internacionalización académica y científica: políticas, itinerarios, saberes e instrumentos* (pp. 63-90). Ciudad de México: CINVESTAV.
- Guth, S., Doscher, S. & Haug, E. (mayo 2020). *Virtual Exchange and Global Learning Webinar* organizado por Brazilian Virtual Exchange (BRaVE). Recuperado de <http://erasmusplusriesal.org/es/noticias/webinar-virtual-exchange-and-global-learning>
- Hénard, F., Diamond, L., & Roseveare, D. (2012). *Approaches to Internationalisation and Their Implications for Strategic Management and Institutional Practice*. OECD's Higher Education Programme. Recuperado de <http://www.oecd.org/education/imhe/Approaches%20to%20internationalisation%20-%20final%20-%20web.pdf>
- Instituto Internacional de la UNESCO para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (2019). *La movilidad en la educación superior en América Latina y el Caribe: retos y oportunidades de un convenio renovado para el reconocimiento de estudios, títulos y diplomas*. Recuperado de <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372629.locale=es>
- Jaramillo, V. (2016). La cooperación Sur-Sur. En S. Didou (coord.), *Reflexiones de expertos sobre la internacionalización de la educación superior* (pp. 147-149). México: CINVESTAV – RIMAC.
- Jung, N. (2016). Movilidad trasnacional posdoctoral y la vida después de la movilidad. ¿Me regreso, me quedo, o mejor no me hubiera ido? En R. Ramírez y M. Hamui (coords.) *Perspectivas sobre la internacionalización en educación superior y ciencia* (pp. 121 - 142). Ciudad de México: CINVESTAV.
- Katz, R., May, L., Sanza, M., Johnston, L., & Petinaux, B. (2012). H1N1 preventive health behaviors in a university setting. *J Am Coll Health*. 60 (1), 46-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2011.570398>
- Knight, J. (2003). Updated definition of internationalization. *International higher education*, (33).
- Knight, J. (s.f.). Capítulo 1 Internacionalización de la educación superior. Recuperado de <https://www.ugto.mx/internacional/images/pdf/4a.pdf>
- Levinson, N. & Davidson, K. (2015) "Linking Trajectories: On-line Learning and Intercultural Exchanges". *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9 (2), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstol.2015.090203>
- Marmolejo, F. (2018). La educación superior en América Latina y el Caribe en el contexto global. En

- J. Gacel-Ávila (coord.) La educación superior, internacionalización e integración regional de América Latina y el Caribe (pp. 41-56). Caracas: UNESCO-IESALC y Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba.
- OBIRET (2018). *Resultados de la I Encuesta Regional sobre tendencias de la internacionalización en América Latina y el Caribe*. Recuperado de <http://obiret-iesalc.udg.mx/es/noticias/resultados-de-la-i-encuesta-regional-sobre-tendencias-de-la-internacionalizacion-en-america>
- OMS (2009). Medidas para los establecimientos escolares Gripe pandémica (H1N1) 2009. Nota informativa núm. 10. Recuperado de https://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/notes/h1n1_school_measures_20090911/es/
- Oregoni, M., Tabora, A., & Piñero, F. (2014). Proyección Integral de la Universidad Argentina hacia la Región Latinoamericana. Agenda, actores e instrumentos. *III Jornadas de Extensión del mercosur. Tandil (Buenos Aires)*.
- Pawłowska, E. (2011). El turismo académico: un análisis económico para el caso de Galicia. Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (tesis de doctorado). Recuperado de https://minerva.usc.es/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10347/3376/9788498877243_content.pdf;jsessionid=OD366F8D42E8695C5F08E55D-6F9F09A4?sequence=1
- Quinteiro, J. (19 de junio de 2020). ¿Cómo afectará el COVID -19 a la movilidad académica internacional? Blog UNESCO. Recuperado de <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/2020/06/19/como-afectara-el-covid-19-a-la-movilidad-academica-internacional/>
- Redden, E. (12 de mayo de 2009). Swine flu and student flows. *Inside Higher Education*. Recuperado de <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/05/12/swine-flu-and-student-flows>
- Remedi, E. & Ramírez, R. (2016). La circulación del conocimiento en los procesos de formación, producción y comunicación científica. En S. Didou (coord.), *Reflexiones de expertos sobre la internacionalización de la educación superior* (pp. 87-91). México: CINVESTAV – RIMAC.
- Reynoso, C. (2010). La influenza A (H1N1) y las medidas adoptadas por las autoridades sanitarias. *Desacatos*, (32), 35-52.
- Schleicher, A. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on education: insights from Education at Glance 2020. Recuperado de <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>
- Schwartzman, S. (2009). Nacionalismo versus Internacionalismo en las políticas de formación de recursos humanos de alto nivel. En S. Didou y Gerard, E. (coords.), *Fuga de cerebros, movilidad académica y redes científicas. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* (pp. 63-73). México: IESALC – CINVESTAV – IRD.
- Teichler, U. (2008). Student Mobility: Where Do We Come From, Where Are We, Where Are We Going to Inside the EHEA. En *Presentation at the ACA Annual Conference*.
- Toro, D. (2020). Educación Superior en Latinoamérica en una economía post-COVID. *ESAL Revista de Educación Superior en América Latina*. 45-52. <https://doi.org/10.14482/esal.8.378.8>
- Trucano, M. (16 de septiembre de 2014). Education and technology in an age of pandemics (revisited). World Bank Blogs. Recuperado de <https://blogs.worldbank.org/edutech/education-technology-age-pandemics-revisited>.