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EXPERIENCE OF EVALUATION OF THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN A DEGREE PROGRAM

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Abstract: In this work we show findings on the theme of mainstreaming the gender perspective in higher education, which is usually located from institutional policy, going through strategies, programs, mechanisms and specific actions, until reaching classroom realities, where certain study plans are specified. The research consists of an analysis of the discourses arranged in documents that make up the international, national and institutional frameworks regarding gender equality, in contrast to the appreciation of the students, who make up the reason of any educational project. The results show an acceptable level of congruence between the discourse and the practices, but, above all, the responses of the students participating in the study show a critical mass with high curricular awareness, which indicates the scope and areas opportunity to narrow the gap between the formal curriculum and the lived curriculum.

Keywords: Gender perspective, Higher education, Transversal content, Human rights.

INTRODUCTION

The approach to gender in education is an emerging issue that appears in practically all curricular proposals, embodied from a medium or long-term development plan, as far as higher education is concerned. However, tensions between discourse and action are also quite frequent, in this case, from the institutional level (based on international frameworks and national and state planning instruments) and practices in a specific educational program.

Therefore, from a brief analysis of documents and actions of the University on the gender perspective, we aim to investigate how it has penetrated the student body, how they perceive it and what they identify as areas of opportunity. The foregoing with the main objective of detecting how respect for gender

diversity is perceived -and lived- among the students of a career oriented in the Social Sciences and Humanities.

CONCEPTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL REFERENTS

Since gender-related concepts share borders that sometimes cause confusion, it is worth noting which meaning we adhere to in this document. The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations Organization defined the concept of gender perspective as the process of assessing the implications for men and women of any action that is planned, whether it be legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy to ensure that the concerns and experiences of women, like those of men, are an integral part of the elaboration, implementation, control and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and political spheres. and social, so that women and men can benefit from them equally and inequality is not perpetuated. (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997).

As can be deduced from the previous definition, the gender perspective, in the case of an educational institution, includes everything from institutional policies, through programs, strategies and mechanisms, to study plans, but it is not only the latter. By seeking to guarantee human rights and social justice for all people, the gender perspective exceeds the classroom sphere; but since it is closest to the students, it is logical that their responses focus on this area.

Regarding the institutional level, the 2010-2020 Development Plan was reviewed and updated in 2016; In this phase, a new program was added on the 11th, dedicated to Human Rights. Among the policies most relevant to this work, we recover the following:

Incorporate a general perspective of knowledge and respect for human rights

in educational programs, in teaching and research activity, in the performance of students and teachers, as well as in the conduct of individual authorities, officials and workers administrative. (PLADI 2010-2020, p. 62). The underlining is ours.

Consecutively, the instrument *in question* breaks down the strategies, from which we extracted the one that is directly related to this topic:

Promote a culture of gender perspective and the elimination of violence against women.

It is true that the two statements are part of a whole series of actions undertaken by the University, such as the establishment of the Institutional Program for Gender Equality Coordination; Likewise, it is worth noting the conviction of the authorities towards the gender perspective in the framework of human rights. All of this, plus what we cannot record on these pages, has contributed to an environment where speaking and conducting ourselves with respect and justice in the face of diversity must be a daily practice.

RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED

The educational program in which we place this study is inscribed in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities; it has level 1 awarded by the Inter-institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CIEES) and is accredited. It was recently modified, although the students with whom the research was carried out were studying the Study Plan that dates back to 2007.

As a program dedicated to the area of Social Sciences and Humanities, a good part of the learning units that make it up have to do with the study of society, its complexity, problems, and solutions; the foregoing, with an essentially humanist and comprehensive approach. Another important nucleus of the

Curriculum is made up of its object of study, proper to understand the labor field that the graduates can occupy.

According to the opinions of the external and internal evaluation, the Program is ahead of its time, it is well-founded, and it is attended by a faculty qualified both for the careers from which they come and for their performance profile ¹. The majority of full-time and part-time professors have postgraduate degrees; a good proportion are doctors and belong to the National System of Researchers. The total number of Full-Time teachers hold the PRODEP Profile, which gives certain guarantees of quality to the operation and development of the career.

Regarding the elements of the program that qualified it as ahead of its time (two decades after its creation are about to be completed), there is its disciplinary foundation, which can be seen both in the section corresponding to the design of the study plan and in the program. of each learning unit. It is possible to verify a critical apparatus that includes a series of classical and recent authors, from different latitudes, although, with some accentuation in Anglo-Saxon and Spanish authors. But above all, that he sees his main discipline far beyond the technical, or at least, from a perspective of several dimensions: the framework of policies, management, community development and training for all people throughout the world. of a lifetime, among others.

For this work in particular, it is worth highlighting some of the characteristics of the Study Plan of this degree, to try to locate where the gender perspective is; namely:

1. The degree is made up of 8 semesters.
2. During the first four semesters, all the learning units (subjects, subjects) are offered, from a common base.
3. From the fifth to the eighth semesters, students can focus on any of the four

¹ Comments taken from the external evaluation report of the program (2014) for accreditation purposes.

subject areas, choosing learning units from a series of selective subjects. Experience tells us that students prefer to combine subjects from two areas; in rare cases, three; and virtually no one focuses on just one area.

4. In addition to selective subjects, the Study Plan contains compulsory and optional subjects.

It is precisely the curricular space of the optional subjects that gives the opportunity to include the gender perspective, explicitly, in this Program; and said space is made up of a matter: Sexuality and gender. However, as occurs at this curricular level, the training and learning processes are not restricted to the programmatic contents, but are understood as a cultural construction through the interaction of people and subjectivities in certain socio-temporal spaces.. Therefore, how mainstreaming and the gender perspective are experienced goes far beyond an optional subject, on which the students also expressed themselves, but not exclusively.

METHODOLOGY

The first phase of the investigation was a documentary analysis, both of the international and national frameworks on gender equality, as well as of the policies at the national level and the Institutional Development Plan, of which we have reported in the first part of this text.

For the field work phase, the participating sample was chosen for convenience, it was made up of students from the 4th, 6th and 8th semesters. An email was sent to 32 students asking for their collaboration to answer three key questions about:

- a) Their appreciation of the gender perspective in the undergraduate degree.
- b) Their experiences on the issue of gender on campus.

c) Suggestions for the program and the academic community.

One week after the email was sent, 22 responses had been received, which are the ones we considered for this analysis. The 22 students (17 women and 5 men) who answered represent a little more than 20 percent of the total population of this program, which, since its creation, has maintained the principle of not opening groups of more than 25 students; Thus, the total regular enrollment is maintained between 95 and 110 students per school year. Up to 12-15% more students from exchange programs are added to this population, coming from other states within the Mexican Republic and from other countries, especially Spain.

A key was assigned to each of the answers, confirm they were received, being like, for example: Aa18 that indicates: student 1 of the eighth semester; Year 16: student 1 of the sixth semester.

Once all the answers were gathered, the categories that we present below were formed.

RESULTS

The results correspond to the categories that we have obtained and that we illustrate with textual answers from the students; We also allow ourselves to write down general comments, given the impossibility of reproducing all the responses received.

CATEGORY: GENDER AS A SUBJECT IN THE CURRICULUM

The review of this category goes through two diametrically opposed opinions, represented by Aa18 and Aa28:

I believe that, as such, the objective of including a gender perspective in the training of students is not explicit in the degree curriculum, and although it is taken for granted, in the classroom it is a subject that is rarely addressed, Well, it depends on the preparation and beliefs of the teachers

that they talk about or not” (Aa18)

Of course [that the gender perspective is addressed] since, within the Degree, various learning units that are related to culture are mentioned in its planning, knowledge about the history of women in education and in society. (Aa28)

These two opinions are worth noting, since they are students who have shared a good part of the training spaces as they are from the same generation, however, one was enrolled in group A and another in group B in the first four semesters and, although they took common subjects (with the same professor), it seems that the difference weighed much more. Another reason is that at the time, they have leaned towards different thematic areas. Finally, given the knowledge we have of both, we assume that personal interest in certain academic axes and, even, professional vocation, has weighed much more than the presence of a subject in the study plan that directly touches the subject. of gender, and of several more that, in a less explicit way, also touch this field.

In the middle of these poles are the other responses. For example, Aa14, comments:

... although on occasions I have been informed about this subject, the readings that the teachers have given us, added to their own personal and professional experiences, have given me the opportunity to form a much broader gender perspective, with better and more information, with more criticism towards other women, men, people in general and towards myself.

In other words, although the gender perspective is not a mandatory curricular space in the Study Plan, this does not mean that it is absent; Furthermore, several students agree with the opinion of Aa14, in relation to the fact that gender is addressed in different academic and experiential opportunities for teachers.

I did not take subjects on gender, but I did take others that teach respect for diversity, including sexual diversity. But the best learning I have achieved with the elaboration of my thesis, which has to do with the study of the constructions of gender in basic education. I have had to read a lot to substantiate the theory and, in the seminar, [research and graduation] we have the opportunity to delve into this subject.

As it can be seen, the students do not perceive that learning about gender has to go through a subject in the curriculum, since they affirm that they live it, as Aa14 already recounted and it was confirmed:

...in the subject of Sexuality and Gender, but also other teachers touch on the subject and, in addition, it shows in how they treat you and talk to each of us both in classes and in the corridors... there you can see how much they believe in respect and how they can teach it to students.

We can anticipate that the matter in question is not usually one of the most popular, so, if it were the bulwark for the realization of the gender perspective, it would have to be substantially modified, from its presentation and promotion, through the approach and development, even, perhaps, changing its optional nature.

CATEGORY: RESPECT FOR GENDER DIVERSITY

The gender perspective goes through the entire institutional culture, even if we focus on a study plan and classroom practices. But in the case of a program that develops social and educational awareness, it was not difficult to obtain responses such as the following, regarding respect for gender diversity. Aa58 accuses:

In one subject I met a classmate who was pregnant and a professor (one of the most critical in this degree) told her on more than one occasion what she wanted there, that she had already ruined her life because she

was pregnant. I believe that the partner had all sexual and reproductive rights and that teacher had no reason to single her out and discriminate against her [...] I know of other “male” teachers who are still very annoying with their partners... and others who ask for girls from the social service to have their cubicles fixed ‘because the women are the ones who do the chores. The worst thing is that they accept!

The previous comment coincides with that of Aa106: *“There are teachers (men and women) who continue to reproduce gender stereotypes: when it comes to turning on the cannon or the computer, they always go to a man... women can do it too.”*

Regarding the part of the student body, Aa78 notes: *“ In this degree it is hardly noticeable... but I took some subjects [in another degree] and there yes: the students obeyed the teachers more (so to speak) ... the teachers are more good people”.*

Ao64’s response provides other information in this regard:

We all know that there are gay classmates in this school... among the kids we get along very well and nobody pays attention to those things; We still go on a party if we want. I think it has worked that it is handled with great discretion. I haven’t heard of any of them being teased or anything like that. But it’s not the same among the girls... there are lesbians, but that’s not known by everyone here... women still don’t dare to come out of the closet as much as men... they are bullied more.

The previous answers, as an example, allow us to say that, although there is a level of progress, respect for gender diversity is not a total reality and here, the formal and lived curriculum still have a lot to do. It is in this aspect that we notice a greater area of opportunity, a more manifest tension between discourse and reality.

CATEGORY: GENDER AND FORMATION

This category is derived from the answers of the students who give suggestions to make inclusive education a reality, with respect towards gender diversity. Ao44 suggests that:

The University’s campaigns must continue, it must not be only on March 8 or just because a case of sexual abuse is being denounced in the press; there must also be more workshops in each school and make them mandatory.

It is recognized and proposed:

Our teachers are very respectful and I can compare this because I have done another degree and they didn’t treat you the same there [...] the teachers must continue to be very respectful, because the students see them, we see how they get along with each other, yes there are small groups [of teachers], but in front of us they respect each other; from the director to the administrators.

Finally, Aa88’s comment is central to this discussion:

Gender mainstreaming would require that all teachers be trained in gender. How many will have that formation? Because otherwise, it’s like teachers who want to teach math without them knowing math. The only transversal I saw in the degree is reading... because we have to read in all subjects, every semester. I imagine that this is how it must be with the genre... but we need teachers who are first trained to teach.

Other student comments more or less coincide with those noted here. Due to their training, especially those in the 8th and 6th semesters, they know what it means to mainstream a curriculum, so, although they suggest more optional subjects, they know that this path does not mean achieving the objective, nor does it mean celebrating the Day of the Women. They also respond that good practices that occur around the subject must be rewarded, that essay contests or artistic exhibitions be held with gender motives, that

more international forums be held to find out about other experiences, that the teaching staff and administrative conduct with respect towards gender freedom and that stays abroad are privileged to learn from other institutions that are advanced in the matter.

As a general comment, we can note a high awareness of the subject in the responses of the students in the sample. At least, all of those who answered are aware of this topic, are aware of the institutional policies and are very critical of the reality of the classroom and its program. With equal development, they give suggestions to make gender mainstreaming a reality in the curriculum and recognize what has been done in the reality in which they live. Finally, they recognize that, despite the fact that it is not easy, the task of recognizing and respecting gender diversity must continue.

CONCLUSIONS

Higher education entities have adopted policies to institutionalize and mainstream gender; In the case to which we refer in this work, it includes in its main planning instrument the aspects of the international frameworks and the national policy regarding gender equality. It must be noted, also for the particular case, that the approach lies in respect for human rights, which adheres to the broader concept of seeking inclusive education, without any distinction, including gender.

As a declaration of principles and supreme objectives, educational institutions present solid and well-founded policies and strategies for the gender issue, but we wanted to investigate how these go beyond the level of discourse to materialize in daily life in the classroom.

The educational program that has been the unit of the research, is framed in the Educational Model of the University, so it is not surprising that the Study Plan is also

immersed in the approach of technical, professional and personal competences, from there that the discourse of inclusive education, respect for diversity (including gender), is the domain of the students. Also, given their training in the area of education, a good dose of criticism is perceived, both of what exists, and of the areas of opportunity they perceive around the gender issue.

The responses of the students agree that it is not precisely through a subject that gender is approached; Perhaps it is necessary to review concepts, but not to live the value of respect and ensure the dignity of each person. For this, they give examples of how teachers represent a guide, a paradigm, both in the approach to their classes and outside the classroom. Given the strength of the example that students perceive, the most complicated, but necessary path is recommended: training teachers in the gender perspective in order to concretize the so-called mainstreaming of the curriculum in this area. The rest, the speech, there it is.

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