Good practices in the selfevaluation of graduate distance learning programs

Buenas prácticas en la autoevaluación de programas de posgrado a distancia

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Keywords
Virtual learning modality; higher education; self-evaluation processes

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to share the good practices installed in the virtual postgraduate programs of the Universidad Arturo Prat (UNAP), Chile associated with the continuous evaluation of quality processes. Our focus is on the continuous improvement of good practices through the accreditation process with the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Education (CALED) and the self-evaluation that the institution carries out to deliver quality service. The methodology used in this work is the documentary review and description of experiences under a qualitative approach. The results reveal that the UNAP has promoted the self-evaluation and international certification of its programs, in a context of normative change in Chile, which establishes new criteria and standards under the new Law of Higher Education Nº v 21.091, in wich are recognized as good practices: the institutional policies, the planning of the self-evaluation process, the updates of the technological platform, the virtual education enviroment, the virtualization adequate to the context, the active-participative academic actions, the rol of the teacher and the student, the academic training, as well as the components of the self-evaluation process, that must be constantly monitored and evaluated, in order to deliver quality services in the training of people participating in graduate programs under the virtual learning modality.

Palabras clave
Modalidad virtual de aprendizaje; educación superior; procesos de autoevaluación

RESUMEN

El propósito de este ensayo es reflexionar sobre las buenas prácticas instaladas en los programas virtuales de posgrado de la Universidad Arturo Prat (UNAP), Chile, asociadas a la evaluación continua de procesos de calidad. El enfoque se centra en la mejora de estas prácticas a través del proceso de autoevaluación con el Instituto Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Calidad en Educación Superior a Distancia (CALED) y la autoevaluación que la institución realiza para entregar un servicio de calidad. La metodología utilizada es la revisión documental y la descripción de experiencias bajo un enfoque cualitativo. Los resultados revelan que la UNAP ha promovido la autoevaluación y la certificación internacional de sus programas en un contexto de cambios normativos en Chile, que establece nuevos criterios y estándares bajo la nueva Ley de Educación Superior Nº 21.091, en la que se reconocen como buenas prácticas: las políticas institucionales, la planificación del proceso de autoevaluación, las actualizaciones de la plataforma tecnológica, el entorno de educación virtual, la virtualización adecuada al contexto, las acciones académicas activas participativas, el rol del docente y del estudiante, la formación académica, así como los componentes del proceso de autoevaluación que deben ser supervisados y evaluados constantemente para entregar servicios de calidad en la formación dentro de los posgrados en modalidad virtual.

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INTRODUCTION

It has become imperative for educational institutions to meet the evaluation criteria that allow them to demonstrate compliance with quality criteria in their study programs. There are national and international accrediting bodies that establish the criteria that must be considered to achieve accreditation in the various learning modalities, which is why the institutions assume within their policies and strategies actions that contribute to the monitoring and compliance with performance standards.

Given this reality, Universidad Arturo Prat (UNAP) in Chile, included in its Strategic Development Plan 2016-2019 internationalization actions, with which the Directorate of International Relations was created to strengthen the international cooperation network and the curriculum. Regarding the virtual learning programs offered by UNAP, the process of internationalization of master's degree programs is carried out through self-evaluation, in which the institution presents strengths, under the auspices of the Vice-Rectory for Research, Innovation and Graduate Studies.

In addition to the face-to-face programs offered, the possibility of approaching the Latin American community and complying with the institutional principles of education with a broader scope was considered. Actions were developed to improve access to training in virtual and distance learning modalities. An initial self-evaluation was carried out regarding the existing capacities of the institution and the technological support that allows delivering a quality service in the training of people. It was found that one of the critical points has been the lack of academics who have the necessary skills to teach in this modality, who are willing to change in the form and substance required, as well as the technological support to support the use and development of a stable and friendly platform for academics, administrators and students.

The objective of this essay is to share the good practices installed in the UNAP associated with the continuous evaluation of the quality processes in postgraduate programs -especially academic training and technological support- that indicate how programs with virtual learning modalities are established.

The methodology was developed in two stages: in the first, a documentary review was made of the guidelines offered by certifying bodies, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education (CALED) for the evaluation of distance programs under quality conditions; subsequently, the criteria of the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) of Chile were considered with respect to the evaluation of graduate programs, with special attention to the guidelines established for graduate programs taught under the virtual learning modality.

Once this frame of reference was known, we proceeded to develop the second stage -as a situated systematization, in the words of Pérez (2020)-, inasmuch as it reflects experiences, observable facts and shared experiences within a certain historical, cultural and institutional context. This represents a particular way of producing and communicating knowledge, since paths are reconstructed, situations are interpreted, critical reflections are made on problematic situations, bottlenecks are made visible, actions are designed and learning is socialized. Based on these considerations, good practices in the evaluation of virtual programs in the Chilean context are systematized.

Accreditation of careers and programs in Chile: the role of the CNA

The CNA, as an autonomous body created under Law No. 20.129 (Library of the National Congress of Chile, 2006) and in charge of the accreditation processes in Chile, both for institutions and for degree programs, is responsible for defining the quality criteria. Initially, this process was not carried out for graduate courses in virtual learning modalities; it was until the end of 2018 that the criteria were adjusted to initiate their accreditation. The only known guidelines in Chile in relation to virtual education are the four delivered by the CNA (2017) for graduate programs:

1) It should be evaluated whether the institution has an adequate academic structure that responds to the teaching, support and feedback needs required by the virtual modality, including teachers and tutors, as the case may be, to ensure the quality of the teaching-learning process.

2) The institution must apply quality aspects necessary for the implementation of programs in virtual modality in its strategies for recruitment, evaluation, follow-up, improvement and renewal of the academic staff.

3) The improvement processes analyze aspects related to the construction, teaching, tutoring and coordination of programs in virtual mode.

4) The necessary mechanisms and resources must be available to guarantee students in the virtual modality access to the research and innovation activities of the professors.

According to the above, four central ideas are observed: academic management criteria, teachers trained for the virtual modality, as well as accessibility and improvement in the virtual area for them. From the above, it can be deduced that the elements worked on by the CNA are the teachers, the pedagogical model of the programs, the tools and technological environments, among other criteria and categories relevant

to the quality of virtual education, which leaves aside the students (Escobar, 2019).

According to data obtained from the CNA, in Chile only 528 of the 19 745 programs offered are not face-to-face; of these more than half are higher level technicians, although recently regulations are being made in this regard. The publication of the Higher Education Law 21.091 in the Official Gazette included a series of changes and requirements for all members of the higher education subsystem, which leaves a legal vacuum until the standards and criteria regulations come into force, which must be created and socialized by the CNA. At present, the same evaluation criteria have been applied for face-to-face and virtual programs, despite the fact that there are significant differences between the two modalities.

Approximation to quality models of distance education in Latin America

Over the years, several quality models have been developed for distance education programs, but there is no consensus on the most appropriate one. Some studies indicate what they are and the dimensions they measure; for example, Marciniak and Sallán (2018) consider the 25 models and 42 evaluation dimensions that have been proposed to universities to improve the quality of their virtual education.

It is important to remember that "in Latin America there is a diversity of national evaluation and accreditation models (monopolistic, mandatory, voluntary, competitive, private, and even nonexistent) that are deriving in turn a diversity of international accreditation models" (Rama, 2009 p. 299). For this reason, the UNAP, through its authorities, began the self-evaluation process with CALED, an agency specialized in advising on quality assessment processes, which also grants the corresponding international certification in distance higher education (CALED, 2015).

The self-evaluation process in search of international certification is based on the scorecard (SCCQAP), which originated at CALED in collaboration with the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), which presents 91 quality indicators grouped into nine categories, through the Evaluation Guide for Virtual Continuing Education Courses. This guide is based on an online portfolio (CALED platform), where evidence is uploaded, indicator by indicator, through its categories. This tool was agreed upon by different organizations: Distance Education Network Consortium (CREAD), higher education institutions such as the Open and Distance University of Mexico (UnADM), among others. The maximum score is 273 points and the portfolio consists of tools that help to qualitatively complete the self-assessment report (Covadonga, 2016).

From the latter arises a series of questions that, as part of the work, CALED finds its answers through guidance and counseling in this regard. It is important to highlight the categories of support to teachers and

technological aspects in order to identify which indicators must be met for the processes of quality assessment and accreditation in higher distance education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Aspects to consider in the self-evaluation process

The internationalization of the curriculum is a process that must be developed, since it is not possible to internationalize an institution without its programs having a global and regional outlook. At the European level, Barblan (1998, cited in Valdés, Chávez and Ossandón, 2015) indicates that: "the Europeanization of curricula under the Erasmus/Socrates programs have been received with moderation and caution by European universities, mainly due to the limited funds available and the differentiated projects of each one of them" (p. 2), therefore it is stated that "curriculum internationalization strategies aiming at internationalization have not been very successful, neither in Europe nor outside it" (Reichert and Wachter, 2000).

In graduate academic programs, as Valdés, Chávez and Ossandón (2015) point out, innovations and updates are expected that seek to approach the language of the global village, where interculturality is an aspect to work on to homologate world vision and competitiveness, in order to keep up with other institutions and survive the constant changes that occur at regional and global level. Thus, the vision on the curricula will seek to make them more flexible with the intention of migrating to the formation of competencies, where each skill must be developed in the theoretical, procedural and attitudinal aspects; the latter had taken too much importance, so that the use of languages, the incorporation of technology and the strengthening of the value aspects should work with greater attention.

For more than a decade, the relevance of lifelong learning in people has become more important. The constant challenges and new scenarios lead to reflect on higher education institutions, since "the only way we will be able to survive is through commitment to a process of individual, collective and global learning throughout our lives and for all of us" (Aspin *et al.*, 2001, p. 19).

It is essential to consider the need for universities and higher education institutions, as well as to be in line with the dynamism of changes, within which is the explosion and proliferation of virtual users in recent years; this requires institutions to be strategic and systematic in order to find an educational relevance adequate to internationalization processes (Hudzik, 2011; Gacel-Ávila, 2012; Correa, Valdés, & Escobar, 2019).

In accordance with the above, it is important to seek tools that allow criteria to be unified and to find common ground and measures that

contribute to achieving this. One of the tools worked on since Bologna is transferable credits, according to Aboites (2010):

At the end of the 1990s, the initiative called the Bologna Process materialized in Europe, which initially represented the interest of 175 institutions and 29 governments to advance in the creation of a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The aim was to establish common standards, a harmonization of the architecture of the higher education system in Europe in order to facilitate the mobility of students and professional graduates in an increasingly common market in that continent (p. 130).

PROPOSALS FOR GOOD PRACTICES IN SELF-EVALUATION OF VIRTUAL PROGRAMS

Institutional distance education policies

This aspect is central to the decisions of institutions, from institutional educational projects (PEI) to academic activities. This learning modality should be reflected in institutional policies, as well as in the mission, vision and strategic objectives, so that the programs of this modality are not isolated activities or are generated according to the motivation of some academic or authority. The virtual learning modality could be a catalyst for some of these policies (such as collaboration and cooperation between universities), since the tools it incorporates will provide not only effective and immediate means of communication, but also common interests in the same space.

The UNAP, after having agreed with each of the higher hierarchical levels, changed the scope of all its study modalities through its strategic objectives, which was expressed in the institutional mission. This was also reflected in the strategic objectives under the Vice Rector's Office for Research, Innovation and Graduate Studies. This is essential to clearly express the direction of the institution and how it faces the challenge of educating and training people in today's society for the future.

Planning of self-evaluation processes

The use of a timeline is associated with the permanent evaluation of teaching capacities in the teaching of graduate programs, related to the indicators that must be met for national accreditation and international certification processes (see Figure 1).

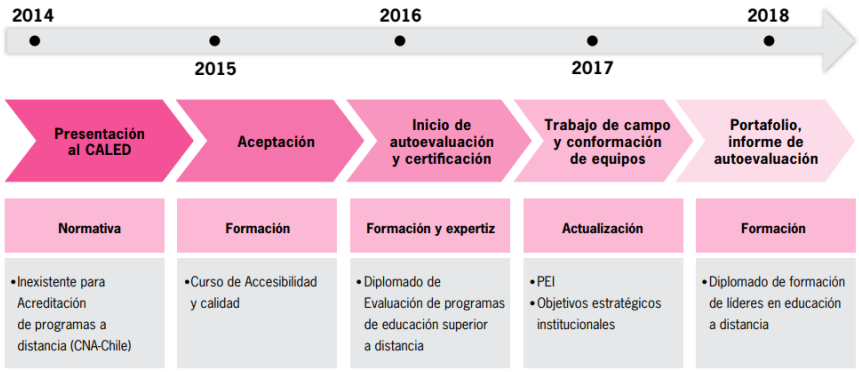

Figure 1. Self-evaluation process of UNAP graduate programs.

Due to the fact that in 2014 the institution did not have a regulatory framework in Chile to teach these programs, a formal request was made for participation and evaluation by CALED to access international certification. It is necessary to indicate that the academics began their participation in the training activities that CALED teaches on a permanent basis (the first course dictated in 2015, was on accessibility and quality of virtual education); this allowed to start incorporating institutional policies to participate annually in refresher courses that could be implemented later in Chile for UNAP academics.

During 2016 CALED authorized the start of the self-evaluation process and began the conformation of work teams of teachers from three graduate programs, who carried out permanent support and delivered a calendar, as well as a follow-up and support program for the work teams, regarding the scorecard and construction of indicators.

In 2017 the fieldwork clearly showed that the institution needed to make strategic changes associated mainly with updating the mission, vision and strategic guidelines. When modifying the contextualization of the dictation of careers and programs, the phrase: "Dictation of careers and programs in all its modalities" was added. This led managers, administrators and academics to increase their participation in these activities and in their areas of specialization; as a result, a group of UNAP academics took the Diploma in Quality in Higher Education and in Leadership in Distance Education, in search of permanent improvement in this modality.

Finally, the institution developed the diploma course Didactic-methodological and technological strategies for tutorials and preparation of instructional content for national and international e-learning modalities, whose dictation was carried out during 2020 at UNAP, so that the academics of this institution are always perfected to implement these programs.

Technological platform updates

The UNAP graduate programs with virtual mode are taught through the Moodle platform, which is a web-based learning management system (LMS), developed on MySQL databases, as Ros (2008) puts it:

[It] is very useful as a teaching tool. It allows the management of the subject, and its utilities are many, from uploading the most diverse multimedia content (notes, videos, images) to being able to evaluate the different tasks of the students. It is essential for creating "learning objects" or "didactic units" and for encouraging self-learning and cooperative learning (p. 1).

The usability of Moodle in UNAP graduate programs has had a variation over time since the accreditation process of virtual programs with the CALED institute began. This means that the platform has been modified according to the quality evaluation requirements of the distance higher education programs evaluated by this entity.

The platform is in service to deliver tools that optimize the teaching-learning processes, where the environment is constantly denoted towards the student (see Figure 2).

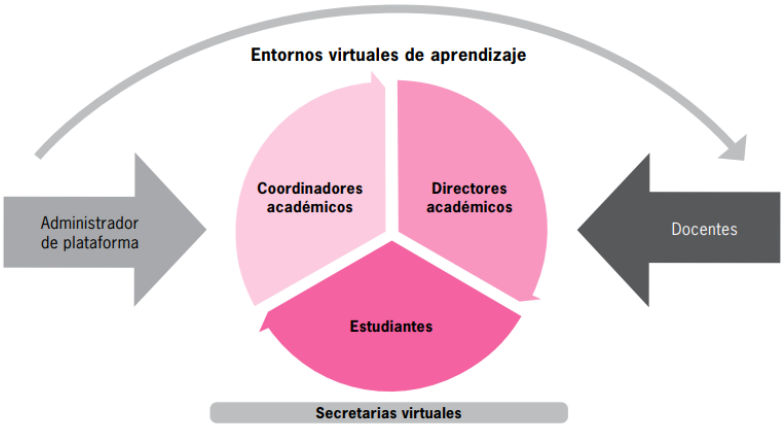

Figure 2. Virtual education environment scheme.

Efficiency of virtual platforms

The authors Ramírez, Cortés and Díaz (2020) provide categories and strategies to improve the efficiency of a virtual tutoring platform, these can be observed in the table.

Table. Virtual education environment scheme

Category 1. Physical environment	**Category 2. Comunication**
Specify space recommendations / Establish temperature conditions / Recommend lighting conditions / Specify the relevance of ventilation / Consider the minimum technological infrastructure / Mention minimum ergonomics specifications	Implement synchronous communication through a meeting chat / Establish asynchronous means of communication, such as forums / Send messages about news, updates and notices / Socialize contributions / Include a means of contact with the platform administrator / Provide feedback on learning activities / Send notifications about important or urgent activities through alerts
Category 3. Contents	**Category 4. The role of the virtual tutor**
Facilitate meaningful learning / Encourage reflection / Generate new knowledge through development activities / Provide tools for professional training / Provide tools for problem solving / Introduce students to the topics through introductory activities / Align contents with the educational model / Diversify materials / Define objectives for each session / Establish the academic requirements of the course / Consider pedagogical implications	Guide the student / Provide group and personalized counseling in a timely manner / Channel the student when a special need is identified / Manage the teaching-learning process/ Orient students in a timely manner / Instill institutional values / Encourage student motivation / Resolve doubts in a timely manner / Moderate group interactions / Encourage participation / Facilitate collaborative work / Encourage student responsibility / Review the VPA periodically / Provide feedback on closing activities / Consider the learner at the center of the teaching-learning process
Category 5. Interaction with students	**Category 6. Computer mediation**
Provide feedback on closing activities / Consider the learner at the center of the teaching-learning process / Generation of diverse scenarios / Showing follow-up of activities / Feedback on learning activities	Manage technological resources / Manage time control / Facilitate collaboration / Enable participation / Assessment of learning through closing activities / Make use of multiple tools / Facilitate the use of didactic resources didactic resources / Ownership of the information / Specify technical requirements for taking the course / Maintain group control / Maintain availability at all times Maintain control of groups / Keep the VPA available at all times (ubiquity) / Promote students' self-construction the VPA (ubiquity) / Promote self-construction in the students

Source: Ramírez, Cortez y Díaz (2020).

Virtual education environment

The directors, the academic coordinators, the student, the virtual secretary, the platform administrator and the teachers have a user account in the Moodle platform, in which they enter their name and personal password. In this platform:

- The student finds different information, such as: personal and academic data, the calendar, courses, videos of the professors, educational videos, virtual library, as well as messaging with the virtual secretary, academic coordinators and teachers.

- The professor has digitized subject content (articles, publications, videos and consultation links), class recordings and planned assignments, among other resources.

- The secretary follows up on student participation, attends to their queries through messaging and refers them to the appropriate person to obtain the answer or solution.

- The directors and coordinators are responsible for ensuring that all learning processes are carried out through the platform, and follow up on the methodological structure implemented in the virtual programs.

- The platform administrator is in charge of ensuring that the platform works for the proposed objective and provides technical support to all the people who use it.

- This platform allows all members to communicate through messaging and forums.

- In the forums, debates and opinions are generated based on the contents studied in each unit of the subject. The teacher starts with a discussion question and the students respond, which encourages collaborative learning. This is an asynchronous activity, where the teacher and the student do not coincide in time or physical space, but they do manage to engage in reflective communication.

- On the platform, students attach the work requested by the professor, who subsequently evaluates, grades and gives feedback in a particular way, in addition to indicating the strengths and weaknesses of each work.

- When students finish their academic program and begin their final master's degree work, the platform serves to store the progress of the work they do together with their professor guides.

Some of the advantages over the use of learning environments are:

- This modality focuses on the student's interests and possibilities.
- It allows stimulating critical thinking because the student participates in forums and reflective discussions.
- Multiple media are used to present information, such as: link of interest, YouTube videos, PowerPoint and Prezi presentations, articles, publications, webinars and videoconferences through different platforms.
- They offer adequate conditions for cooperative learning when interacting in synchronous classes and forum participations.
- They allow the teacher to privilege his role as a learning facilitator and the student as the manager of his own learning.
- They make the student a more active and autonomous learner.

Camarillo and Barboza (2020) present findings regarding learning in virtual environments. In their research, they make a preliminary approach in which they argue that the teaching-learning process under this modality can favor the self-construction of knowledge of law in students of the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. This is a qualitative research, in which interviews were conducted with eleven students who took at least one virtual course, and the following items were found:

- General aspects related to constructivism are identified.
    - It highlights the centrality and essential nature of the student and how he/she learns through his/her cognitive processes.
    - Emphasis is placed on research and discovery.
    - The central actor in the learning process is the student, who learns at his own pace.
    - The importance of self-learning is emphasized; it is up to each student to carry out his or her activities.
- Aspects related to Piaget's approach are identified: internal cognitive processes.
    - Students are managers of their own knowledge.
    - It assumes an internal cognitive process, oriented to the fact that the student must investigate everything.

- Aspects related to Vygotsky's approach are identified: social interactions.
    - A context mediated by ICT and digital culture is identified.
- Aspects related to Ausubel's approach are identified: meaningful learning.
    - There is willingness and disposition of the student.
    - The student learns to investigate more than one topic in which he/she wants to go deeper.
    - The development of skills for reasoning and understanding.

Virtualization appropriate to the context

Virtualization is an essential tool for distance education, since it makes it possible to digitize the didactic and instructional material used in educational platforms, including Moodle. These processes are not limited to the adaptation of a face-to-face study program to the virtual modality, but the type of student and the conditions that this implies must also be considered, in order to tailor the program to these needs. For this reason, teachers who prepare teaching materials and those who provide administrative support or student care and follow-up must have relevant training in this context.

At UNAP, virtualization begins with a review of the competencies to be acquired by each student and how they can be achieved with the tools available. Each teacher works on his or her own syllabus with the permanent help of an instructional designer, which makes it possible to have a guiding thread for the course - in this case they are modular, with a duration of four weeks, and between each module there is a week's break.

This booklet should indicate all synchronous and asynchronous activities. Among the asynchronous ones is the forum, a tool with a high percentage of participation that allows starting with a motivating question that encourages problem-based learning (PBL), considering that this "is a didactic technique that seeks to promote critical thinking" (Olivares and Heredia, 2012, p. 1). The challenging question not only encourages the student, since each answer can contribute to the learning of the other. In addition, the forum is one of the instances where this interaction is plausible, an example of this is the inverted class technique, evidenced by the intervention among peers (Flipped Learning Network, 2014, cited in Chan, 2016):

> If we compare the definition of flipped learning and the definition of the method of Celestine Freinet, a 19th century pedagogue, we can see that there is no difference in its principles: the flipped classroom is a pedagogical stance in which

> instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space. The group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive and creative environment in which the educator acts as a guide for the application of concepts of a subject (p. 2).

On the other hand, as Escudero and Mercado (2019) indicate, "learning analysis presents unprecedented opportunities to adequately evaluate new didactic strategies that incorporate digital technology, such as the inverted classroom" (p. 72). This strategy has been mostly employed in knowledge areas such as engineering, mathematics and computer science, while in the area of natural sciences and social sciences it is used less frequently; moreover, "it is convenient to initiate empirical research to address all areas of knowledge and to propose procedures so that learning analysis is able to measure and improve teachers' perception of the flipped classroom" (Escudero and Mercado, 2019, p. 82).

Distance education is a way of teaching and learning with tools that are conducive to motivation and participation, in addition to the fact that it stimulates self-teaching and allows redefining the roles that educators and learners play in the educational process. Thus, an important factor of innovation is virtual or distance education, and in this it should be considered how structured and bureaucratic university educational systems are, without losing sight of the fact that the important thing is to lay the foundations for more in-depth studies of the particularities of the educational process in tertiary and quaternary education (Correa, Valdés and Escobar, 2019).

It is important that students have access to the mandatory and complementary materials of the subjects they are studying. One of the tools linked to the subject is the digital library, which has databases of world-class academic journals, such as Web of Science (WOS), Scopus, Springer, Oxford Academic, ScienceDirect, ScienceNature, International Journal of Science and Clinicalkey.

The virtualization of social practices happens in other areas, such as health, urbanization, environmental care, energy management, government, social organization and in all scientific and professional fields (Mateos, García and González, 2015). In UNAP's graduate programs, the areas in which it is applied are mainly social sciences, such as master's degrees in education and business sciences, as well as in the environmental context; each of them has mostly social activities in professional fields, which allows for constant collective reflection.

Active-participatory academic actions, role of the teacher and the student

The students and the teacher have an active-participatory role in the development of the subject and, thus, the commitment assumed by the teacher in the framework of this methodology is of a proactive nature, that is, he/she motivates and permanently accompanies the learning activities of his/her students, besides giving them feedback according to what is indicated in the description of the teacher's functions, where each of the interested parties will be clear about their roles. In this case, a document called Methodological Structure was designed (published in each subject) that establishes the following points:

- In each subject the student is assigned a virtual room and a teacher, who acts as a motivator and facilitator of learning.
- The teacher will prepare the class for each unit of the subject, which consists of content and additional or complementary material. In addition, he/she will plan forum activities, developmental work and a final paper.
- The teacher will record the following activities: presentation of the subject, introduction of each unit, forum question and closing of the subject. This recording will be available on the Moodle platform.
- The teacher has an active communication with each student in the weekly academic activity of forums, and interacts with them about the content studied in each unit of the subject.
- The professor conducts synchronous meetings with students through the Zoom platform at least once during the subject to expose topics, give feedback on the content and give instructions regarding the work handed in by the students.
- The professor of UNAP's virtual learning programs has the necessary skills to work on the Moodle platform, where he/she interacts with students, evaluates and grades academic activities, communicates through messaging, among other activities.

Academic training

The teachers of each subject should be part of the continuous training activities. This from the propaedeutic, which aims to teach the uses of the platform and its virtues, from considering the rules of good behavior within virtual environments, according to important topics such as evaluation in these environments, materializing the educational model of the institution, practical workshops of didactic tools, learning based on competencies, curriculum and evaluation.

Unesco (2008), through the ICT Competency Standards for Teachers project, stated that the training of future teachers should consider the development of the necessary competencies to help them face the current and future labor market.

CONCLUSIONS

The installation of good practices is essential for quality processes to be better assimilated by managers, academics and administrators who participate in programs with virtual learning modalities, especially in a changing environment, both in terms of knowledge and access to technologies. These two areas of improvement and the technological platform allow the provision of services to be of higher quality; however, if the institution does not have a relevant regulatory framework, it is difficult to justify these actions.

Furthermore, the need for the country to have a regulatory framework for quality assurance in all learning modalities is imperative for the demands of today's international environment. For this reason, the institution will continue with this challenge until the Higher Education Law is in place and gives stability to the higher education subsystem in Chile.

This work has presented several good practices that were developed as the academic progression of students was evaluated, which were directly related to the improvement of teachers, as well as the usability and access to the platform, which was reflected in the approach to the use of timelines for the two areas, and which allowed generating evident improvements through the proposal of a virtual environment model for graduate programs, as well as an improvement program for UNAP academics. It also reflected the importance of institutional policies regarding this modality. Most of these activities and initiatives in higher education are susceptible to change or extinction due to multiple variables such as fragility - not being agreed or implemented through an institutional policy.

When institutional policies are clear, they show the course and educational purposes, and also allow people with direct or indirect participation to recognize the prioritization of institutional objectives, goals and purposes. Accordingly, society is constantly driving new changes, and one of the most notorious in recent decades is the emergence of the Internet and the need for immediacy of communication, which shows the need for institutions to internationalize through collaboration and cooperation between educational institutions.

Another factor to consider will be the planning of activities with short, medium and long term goals, enriched with a constant improvement and feedback plan that will allow a continuous evaluation of the necessary changes for each process. It is true that this type of institutions does not tend to have short-term changes, but if this is not promoted, society will

be the plaintiff and the institutions will be stagnant entities with inflexible structures.

One of the key aspects in the virtual learning modality is the technological platform, which must be constantly evaluated and updated. In this virtual environment, the participating actors play a fundamental role as providers and beneficiaries in meaningful learning experiences.

The current situation, since the covid-19 pandemic, has led us to live in confinement for long periods of time and, therefore, has made distance education a viable, albeit emerging, alternative. This modality requires careful consideration, since virtualization is a phenomenon that goes beyond remote monitoring through a platform; it is a systematic process that includes an educational project, the identification of competencies to be developed in each subject, and the applicable strategies that can ensure meaningful experiences, accompanied by specialized personnel who receive ongoing training.

Finally, and when considering future research, different topics should be considered, such as delving into various elements of management and the design of quality indicators applicable to distance postgraduate education, in accordance with national educational policy, which allow institutions to provide the necessary tools to their students and society in general, in order to continue advancing every day in the quality of life of all the people.

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