

The importance of leadership as a teacher's competence in higher education



Colaboración

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RESUMEN: En este artículo se ha resaltado la importancia de lo que es un profesor líder y cómo se debe ejercer el liderazgo efectivo, con el fin de transmitirles a los estudiantes la forma de ser líderes, además de actuar y expresarse de manera correcta ante las diferentes circunstancias que ocurran tanto en su carrera profesional como en su vida personal. El liderazgo ejercido por un grupo de profesores definitivamente impactará en la calidad de la formación que reciben los estudiantes y de la misma institución. El liderazgo y el trabajo en equipo deben ser competencias que se tomen en cuenta dentro del perfil docente. Los profesores deben ser elegidos cuidadosamente para cumplir con las tareas encomendadas, y que estén conectados emocionalmente con el resto del equipo de trabajo para sentirse motivados por el proyecto educativo que van a desarrollar. Un equipo de alto rendimiento necesita de líderes que cumplan objetivos, que tengan la creatividad suficiente para proponer mejoras en los procedimientos a fin de innovar y alcanzar mejores resultados con menor esfuerzo. Incluso estos docentes sobrepasarán los objetivos propuestos y plantearán nuevas formas de hacer las cosas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Líder, liderazgo, Educación Superior.

ABSTRACT: This article covers the importance of what is a leading teacher and how effective leadership should be exercised in order to convey students to be leaders as well as act and express themselves properly in the different circumstances that might occur in their professional careers as well as their personal life. The leadership provided by a group of teachers definitely will impact the quality of the education received by students and the institution itself. Leadership and teamwork skills must be taken into consideration in the teacher's profile. Professors must be carefully chosen to fulfill the tasks assigned, and should be emotionally connected to the rest of the working team and feel motivated by the educational project they will be developing. A high-performance team needs leaders who accomplish objectives, with enough creativity to propose improvements in the procedures in order to innovate and achieve better results with less effort. Even these teachers will exceed the proposed objectives and will discourse new ways of doing things.

KEYWORDS: Leader, leadership, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

We are all aware of the importance of education in any society, to its growth, development and proper functioning. Nevertheless, the education of a persons is not static, is dynamic and must remain constantly changing to adapt to the variations that occur. The 21st century is identified by multiple movements in society, politics, economy, technology, education and jobs that are taking place in the world. One of the features of these fluctuations is globalization as a pop-up concept, the imposition of models of life and thought, transmitted by the mass media communication, the weakening of the proper authority, the important role of information as a source of wealth and power, the astonishing increase in technological progress, the rise of individualism, the obsession with efficiency and

the passage of a technological society to a society of knowledge [1].

All of the above are brewing a new reality, something that we do not achieve truly to understand and which in the field of education is perceived as the need to train people as they may be able to select, update, and use knowledge in a specific context and globalized world; to accomplish learning in different scenarios and patterns presented to them throughout their lives so that they can understand the potential of what they are learning in order to adapt their knowledge to new and unexpected situations. For universities this is a challenge and a source of permanent restructuring to adjust to the demands in this international context [1].

In schools the role of the teachers and their leadership style is very important. As Matthew Lynch says: Regardless of the course's level or subject, teachers provide direction, instructions, guidance, and motivation to their classes, stepping directly into the responsibilities of a leader within any business. Yet, only the most accomplished teachers — those recognized with awards and praise — view themselves as leaders; in fact, most teachers lack the training to provide the leadership their students need to excel.

For the sake of the students, it is vital that more teachers learn leadership skills and qualities. By examining how renowned teacher-leaders think and act and by exploring how teachers can develop the proper mindset, more schools can benefit from having true leaders in classrooms. [2]

Higher education has proven its viability over the centuries for its capacity to transform and bring about change and progress of society [3]. The pace of technological innovations and knowledge has gone beyond what one could expect, which is why educational institutions must improve and continuously renew at the same rhythm, as the education that is presently provided is not adequate to the challenges facing us and will not be significant for the students, in conclusion, it will become obsolete.

During the second half of the 20th century a profound change occurred regarding the paradigms in educational systems of the world, including the Mexican educational system. So as these changes are made, usually they have as background some transformations in political, economic, social and cultural systems. This is why we need to introduce deep renovations in the paradigms of vocational training currently offered by institutions of higher education [4].

The change of paradigms in the field of education must be reaffirmed structurally and qualitatively in higher education programs and even in conditions of a context of multiple forms of leadership and an effective exercise of academic leadership and management in educational

institutions [4]. "Therefore, school systems must actively develop teacher-leaders through carefully designed culture and programs" [2].

In the last three decades of the 20th century changes in educational policies at the international level have affected the social role of institutions of higher education. Have indeed encouraged competition between them and their forms of administration are becoming more standardized in matters such as legislation and internationalization through common degrees, exchanges, inter-institutional research and common methods of assessment [5]. The Universities that maintain a level of quality and academic leadership are those that will survive any change that might take place.

Universities are experiencing a process of evolution of their identity in order to transform into a flexible structure allowing broad social access to the knowledge and development of persons based on the needs to today's society [1] that assumed demand, because we are not sure of the direction in which our planet will pan out. Headed for the presence of this uncertainty our duty is to train our students, and if they are not educated by leaders they will not be constituted as the leaders which need to be to develop, both ways, professionally and personally.

Importance of leadership teaching as impact on the quality of education

Any institution should consider a standard of quality in the service provided. The higher education institutions are no an exception. It is of great importance to consider quality within education systems in order to keep them at the forefront [6].

Let's start by defining what quality is. In general, quality, in Latin, means "quality, way to be"; meaning "property or set of properties inherent to one thing, that allow appreciate it as equal, better or worse than the others of its kind". Another concept is offered by Noori and Radford who claim that the quality is the "perception about what clients have as well a product meets its total needs". According to the standard ISO 9000, the quality is: "Level in which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements" [7]. In education quality should go one step further than these definitions, by the importance of it and by the social responsibility in which it is immersed. Despite this, the definition of Quality in Higher Education is a multidimensional term, simultaneously dynamic and contextual, but may some authors, like Garcia & Mulrooney [8] say that it is also perceived differently by different stakeholders groups: providers, users of products, users of outputs and employees of higher education. Others considered from the perspectives of public accountability (value for money), the organizations that hire the graduates, teachers and the culture of the institution.

Quality in the Higher Education area facilitates the measurement of efficiency, but unlike the business area which

is aimed at the satisfaction of individual needs, the University allows competition to achieve the social relevance, i.e., the extent to which the objectives that manages the University are aligned with the needs of society and contribute to their development [7].

Strategies aimed at improving the quality of education should have as goal to meet the needs and requirements of the economic, political and social development of the community to which they are integrated and beyond, to the global needs. The quality has to do with compliance with the purposes and objectives, the effects it produces and the degree of satisfaction experienced by those who use it or to take advantage of it [6].

The quality is always an organizational culture which favors the development of persons that meets the institutional mission and the promotion of human values [6]. One of the essential components that impact the quality of education is the leadership that teachers manage, in addition to the formal leadership of each Higher Education Institution. It is an issue which must be considered of the utmost importance and dealt with it deeply. The authority of any educational institution must strive to achieve that his formal leadership will become transformational leadership, at all levels, which will make a change in the structure of its system. It is essential to communicate clearly the institutional mission, live their commitment to the values sustaining the Organization and encourage human and professional persons involved [6]. The leadership provided by the teaching staff must be transformational and updated, so that it can accomplish high levels of efficiency.

The leadership as competence in the teaching profile in higher education: it's importance for higher education

Teachers are one of the pillars of any educational system. The University teaching society requires efficient student's education. The Higher Education Institutions should generate knowledge from scientific research as well as promoting the development of society from innovation, respecting and taking in consideration the values and ethics of their social and global environment. The complexity of these tasks requires the presence of teachers with multiple facets whose skills have been acquired in a systematic and diffuse manner, based mainly on experience and collaboration with other professionals. Therefore, the teacher's profile and their training is an indispensable tool through which the University prepares proposed professors for the new social scenarios [9].

The concern for the quality of higher education, regarding to the proper development of their purposes and processes, is related in a very special way to the teaching and research task conferred by the legislation in force to the Higher Education Institutions. In recent years we have seen in the universities that one of the options when assessing the quality of the service is based on

the satisfaction of the outlooks and expectations of the users. This assessment criterion is based on the conviction that achieving high levels of quality occurs if it covers the expectations of students, their interest is focused on the subjective criteria of young people, which provide information about the features or attributes that employ the learners to evaluate quality. Following this approach, the objective would be to adapt the service to the needs and demands of the students, which would lead us to having to provide the resources and capacities available in the University institution to achieve this goal [10].

In the integral formation of a person, and throughout his life, two types of skills are developed, Soft Skills and Hard Skills. The professional profile of every person is also constituted by this. If we consider that one of the objectives of college education is the achievement of the optimum training of the professionals that society requires, with soft and hard skills developed, is of vital importance to have teachers ready and able to reach the purposes which are placed to them and to properly build the knowledge needed to achieve this. The university teacher must respond to a clearly defined profile, determined by reaching the goals educationalist and that proper action is based in quality and efficiency [10]. The professional profile of teachers refers to a set of competences that identify the formation of a person. So for a teacher to have the necessary qualities he must have a transferential, flexible and versatile profile, able to adapt to the diversity and continuous changes that are taking place in the global society in which we live and that students perceive in different ways [1].

To develop a teaching profile appropriate to the reality and professionalism they must have at least three key tools: sensitivity, flexibility and knowledge. Only the teacher who knows the limits of discipline and the language in which it is expressed may explain why a particular question is not legitimate in a given context [11]. It is expected for the educator to have the knowledge and facts of the specific topic that he conveys, to commit with the results of his teaching action, being capable of teamwork with colleagues, and to handle their own training permanently [11]. The profile of the University teaching staff is conditioned by a historical evolution, marked by the educational, institutional, legislative and social model of the teaching process. His role will be framed in a systemic and interdisciplinary model where the teaching, research, their knowledge, know-how and will to monitor its educational action will shape their professional activity. It demands that the teacher develops the student with generic competences: personal, interpersonal, and instrumental as well as achievement and professional skills that shape the immediate professional future plan. It is expected that teachers, more than conveying abundant information, promotes the development of competences as a guarantee so that young people can continue learning throughout their lives and develops in a proper and satisfactory manner in complex and changing world.

Sunnie Gil [12], completed the first round of a study of 195 leaders in 15 countries over 30 global organizations. Participants were asked to choose the 15 most important leadership competencies from a list of 74. The author selected the top ones into five major themes that suggest a set of priorities for leaders and leadership development programs. The leadership competencies that must be developed are:

1. Demonstrates strong ethics and provides a sense of safety.
2. Empowers others to self-organize.
3. Fosters a sense of connection and belonging.
4. Shows openness to new ideas and fosters organizational learning.
5. Nurtures growth.

The teaching competence¹ of higher level, demand a re-evaluation of its conceptualization, characterization and classification, as well as its application in curriculum processes, evaluation and development. It is of utmost importance that the didactic strategies that teachers need to identify and manage to ensure the teaching-learning process, at the same time to develop these capabilities or competences required to address global challenges that will face them.

Sometimes the teaching profile is defined in a simplistic manner, where the competences required to teach any subject are not specified. The teachers are only expected to be an expert in their area of professional expertise. Therefore it is necessary to find an intermediate position in order to deliver a clear and precise message that account of the complexity of the necessary profile, but also seeking to focus attention and rank conditions to be [13]. Teachers should handle pedagogical didactic-competences that facilitate learning processes in a more autonomous way; where students learn to solve problems and to seek creative ways of doing things. That is why professors should know, select, use, evaluate, upgrade and recreate or create effective didactic intervention strategies. The University is responsible for providing teachers with various refresher courses to develop these specific skills. Educators must also comply with institutional competences, they must have the ability to articulate the macro with the micro: what is available in the educational system which develops level institution, be it workshop, yard classroom, etc. and outside the school space [13]. If the teacher does not dominate these said competences he may not be at the level of what is expected of him. Hence, the need to define a new teacher profile to ensure efficient, effective and satisfactory professional performance [1].

¹ The term competence is used herein to refer to the ability to "do with knowledge" and to be conscious of its consequences. Any competence concerns simultaneously, knowledge, ways of doing things, values and responsibility for the results it implies [13].

A teacher profile based on competence, serves two important functions in the continuous improvement of the profession [1]:

- 1) An articulated role between initial training and lifelong learning.
- 2) Energizing function of professional development throughout the career as well as the same profession.

The professor must be a critical and reflexive professional, autonomous and responsible for his professional performance. He must, in his level, establish educational alternatives and participate in concerning educational decisions in the appropriate areas. He must be in constant training and development in knowledge and skills in full. Also needs to be aware of the importance to adapt with flexibility to social demands and to teach the students in a comprehensive manner [1]. Teachers need to be supported by the Higher Educational Institutions to achieve this.

Some international agencies as ECLAC⁽(Economic Commission for Latin America) [13] express core competences that the teacher must have in order to practices a teaching - learning quality in the 21st century are:

- a) Ensure universal access to cultural codes of modernity; that is, form skills to participate in public life, to engage productively in modern life and the construction of the foundations for lifelong learning.
- b) Driving innovation through the adoption of measures to establish relationships between education, science and technology, and to encourage innovation in working practices.

Professors are prepared to carry out their professional work in the best way. But now the loss of meaning resulting from the change of unprocessed claims for years, unexpected changes that have occurred, the need to take charge of a high volume of administrative and supporter work, the need for curricula and programs that are constantly changing, using textbooks written by others, making this process that could be characterized as the loss of professionalism effectiveness of standardized skills, even if they had been well learned [13], have caused that teachers do not often meet their objectives effectively. They are overburdened by administrative work and it's difficult for them to concentrate on updating to be at the forefront.

It is currently intended that teachers and students, as a team, create learning situations to guide their cognitive and social capacities to provide solution to social needs. In itself, the curricular contents will no longer be themselves as to become the means to achieve such capacities who seek to educate students in the analysis, inference, prospecting, solving problems, continuous learning, adapting to changes, the proposition of values conducive to solidarity in reality intervention, more important issues that simply be recipients of data ([13]. Learning by competences must take into account the context, real work

situations and is the result of a process of integration associated with execution or performance criteria that implies commitment by the student as an actor responsible for their own learning.

As professors are to achieve skills and profile as required, it is needed to implement capacitation and training courses that commits them to increase their observation skills, sharpen reflective practices, strengthen the sense of their own training, develop multiple intellects and respond to the values which are followed in the educational institution to which they belong [13].

One of the aims of education is to educate students so that they can function in society efficiently and effectively. Any educational institution should manage a leadership style at all levels that constitute it. The required educational change at present times needs to be in accordance with the leaders that carry it out and also as part of competences than any manager, professor and student develop. If the traditional forms of management based on bureaucratic control and the technical authority are not sufficient by themselves, it is when it becomes essential to expand the idea of improvement of leadership including the professional and moral authority of everyone that works in an Institution of Higher Education [14].

The development of studies on leadership during the 20th century has contributed changing the conventional perceptions about what a leader is. In the early 20th century, in the field of Psychology existed yet the idea of the leader as a person possessing special and innate qualities as a source of his influence on others, already by mid-century the situation was completely opposite. Attempts to discover and measure special qualities of leadership had been found with multiple, often contradictory characteristics among themselves, which did not allow establishing a fixed pattern to characterize people perceived as leaders [15]. Now, in the 21st century, with all the constant change and disruption, where people's lives and work has been greatly influenced, like the technological innovations (personal computing, entertainment), invention of the smartphone, emergence of digital as a platform and the advent of social media, are some of the groundbreaking events that have taken place in a short span of time. They have significantly impacted how universities are educating, organizations work and how business are conducted globally [16].

As many human manifestations, leadership is a function both, as a person's potential and their motivation. In this century teachers must be updated with the existing different models of leadership and to apply them according to their personality. As mentioned by John Adair [17], an effective leader must control their emotions, maintain a social distance whitening their groups, earn the respect of followers, be fair and objective in their appreciations, and should know where he is heading and what he is doing; and then, with enthusiasm, communicate the ob-

jectives to others. He must listen and ask advice before taking important decisions, but it will be his responsibility to choose the adequate behavior or decisions to be taken. A teacher, as a leader, engage with students giving them recognition and appreciation. Correct them without damaging their self-esteem and without using negative criticism, being firm and disciplined, establishing his care and concern.

The teacher who wants to be a leader with his groups should develop a high self-esteem and feel noteworthy and competent. The University must support and appreciate their educators as to make them feel secure in order to perform the competence of an effective leadership.

Personal resources, i.e., all those characteristics that allows the person to be in a controlling situation of power (abilities, knowledge, skills, etc.) that might vary depending on the contexts to apply. On the other hand, this potential will not progress if the person does not have a strong desire to be a leader or is not externally motivated to assume as such [15]. In the 1950s, several theoretical models such as the "circumstantial" were developed, which defined different styles of a leader, and conceptualized the leadership as an interaction between styles of leadership and certain situational variables, particularly those referring to attitudes and behaviors of followers. This enabled the formation of leadership as the product of certain forms of relationship between a leader and his followers. From this framework, two basic types of leader were identified: the instrumental leader and charismatic leader.

Instrumental leader is the one that satisfies the instrumental expectations of his followers, thanks to the processes optimization and refers above all to the leadership that takes place in working environments. The charismatic leader, however, bases his leadership in the emotional bond with his followers. In this case, the influence on others is not due to logic, the position of authority of the leader or the confidence of the follower, but in the natural form of control and style of authority of the leader [15]. Martin Roll [16] tells us that one of the most important soft skill that leaders must have in the 21st century is resilience.

Some authors have established and recognized a variance between the charismatic leadership meaning the use of their captivating personality and the socialized one. The latter use their power to serve others, align their vision with the needs and aspirations of their followers, keeping an open communication with them and are supported by universal moral principles. In contrast the charismatic personality leaders use their power only in self-centered in order to promote their personal vision, maintain unambiguous communications and rely on external moral precepts to satisfice their own interests. They are characterized by the need for power, authoritarianism, selfishness,

neglecting the needs of their followers [15]. Following Popper [15], we recommend to develop a kind of charismatic leadership of a socialized type. This is an example of what teachers should be aware of to develop the kind of leadership that will exert in their professional practice.

Teachers should be conscious of the kind of leadership they will apply in their classrooms. They need to handle every situation that arises in an appropriate manner. In a world of collaboration, communities and networks, teachers need to develop leadership skills in their students focused in the abilities of listen deeply, encourage sharing of information and viewpoints and foster an environment of trust. Teachers must be able to developed the ability to take decisions in ambiguous environments, helping teams manage conflicts, acting as a guide in uncertain times or leading with conviction, courage and empathy [16]. For example, teachers can use one of the most widely followed leadership models, the Hersey and Blanchard situational leadership model, arising from the study of the conduct of leaders in diverse situations, helping in the diagnosis of each distinctive situation.

By 1969, Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard published an article entitled "theory of the life cycle of leadership: is there a best style of leadership?" In this paper, the authors propose a model where they explain that leaders can change its methods of leadership. Hence the idea that teachers being leaders, can achieve a more efficient and effective practice that really works, so the leader depends on how your leadership style interacts in a certain situation. Everything lies in the maturity (or acceptance of responsibility for his actions) and level of preparation (capacity) of his students to do a particular task, which are extremely important situational factors. This model is based on the behavior of people.

It is important to identify the needs of the students rather than the lecturer or leader. If the teacher does not well understand these ideas, it will be a constraint to exercise the situational leadership effectively. Such would be the case of educators who decide to use coercive power and do not seek an effective communication with students, preferring to be obeyed by fear or threats, rather than accomplishing that young people follow them with respect, admiration and its own will [17].

All teachers must be leaders and develop this competence properly so students can be trained in leadership that will exert in their personal and professional life. We do not mean only that students take a course of leadership, they should live it in each of their lessons and teachers have to exercise effective leadership all the time, being able to influence and guide pupils as models to be followed. To achieve the educational challenge that will develop each one of the professors as a competent leader, with a worthy performance, not only depends on the goodwill of the teacher, nor being asked by their superiors to become one, they need an effective teacher

training program to improve these competences and professional skills that are required.

High performance team work in teachers leadership

We need to set clear aims in order to achieve an effective and efficient teacher profile. One of the main aspects to be taken into consideration is the ability of educators to be able to work well as a team. That is why we need to form educational teams that can accomplish high performance results², both, among them and with their students. Professors must be carefully chosen so they can fulfill the tasks assigned, and that are connected emotionally with the rest of the team so they can feel motivated by the educational project which will be developed. Training, emotions and motivation must work in a balanced way. It is not enough that educators working teams have a technical standard or appropriate knowledge; if they do not rely on others they will fail to be properly team integrated; therefore, their students will not be able to achieve their goals.

A high-performance team needs leaders to accomplish the objectives, with enough creativity to propose improvements in the procedures in order to innovate and achieve better results with less effort. Even these teachers will exceed the proposed goals and propose new ways of doing things. Therefore, they must be heard.

It might be a good idea to consider implementing a leadership profile in each Institution according to their vision, mission and goals, so that their teachers can and will be working in high performance and interdisciplinary teams, influencing their students in an individualistic form. A teacher is ruled by ethical and moral standards, but it is essential to live them day by day in their professional work. All professors must be charismatic leaders. The teachers, who choose to be effective leaders with their students, should guide them to work as high-performance teams and overcome the objectives proposed in the course.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays educational leadership performance is quite important, since teachers are those who can reach making a difference in the quality of the educational training given to students.

Over the last 50 or 60 years, many types and approaches of leadership have been developed and tried, so we can establish that, including teachers, we all must learn how to be better and professional leaders. Experience is our best tool to improve our professional performance, and

² The term competence is used herein to refer to the ability to "do with knowledge" and to be conscious of its consequences. Any competence concerns simultaneously, knowledge, ways of doing things, values and responsibility for the results it implies [13].

knowing the different leadership models that have been developed; we can adapt them to our personality and apply them on each of the situations arising in the classroom. The academic planning of our educational training is very important in order to achieve the objectives that were projected. This will leave a permanent imprint in our students.

If professors are aware of the different theories of leadership and understand the leadership profile of the Institution that they are working for, can exercise them to perform in a better way in their professional practice, and gives them new tools to be competent teachers.

A professor that is respected and recognized by his students denotes that he applied his leadership correctly, making a balance between his moral and formal authority, understanding their students and giving them the recognition they deserve. This is how the students feel satisfied with the education they are receiving and recognize the quality they were expecting. This is the way that professors receive the unconditional support of their students and manages to work with them in a convincing and volunteer way, rather than with demands and pressures to obtain grades. The student attends class because they are interested in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the teacher provides and not because they need those points to gain a passing grade.

Higher Education Institutions needs professors who have empathy with their colleagues and with their students, to be persuasive, consensus and supportive, in the proposed activities and goals.

A teacher who exercises an effective leadership style will feel confident in being innovative, creative and propose new ways to bring their students to academic success. This teacher will be able to make a foresight the problems that might arise and be able to resolve them with less pressure. This professor is the one that inspires students and generates an energy and enthusiasm that is transmitted to all those around him. This in turn will bring various benefits to the University, since the satisfied students with the education and service they are achieving will be the example for other students that will want to study this career, because they feel confident to recommend it. It is a social commitment of the Higher Education Institutes that their teachers develop their professional leadership.

“When you are committed to something bigger than yourself and you reach down inside you will find the strength to continue (joy in the labor of) [18].”

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