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QUALITY EVALUATION OF VENEZUELAN HIGHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Since 1999, there have been changes in Venezuelan higher education, such as the establishment of new forms of university access, attempts to reform Universities Act, enacting a new Organic Education Law, among others. Consequently, one wonders what the real situation of Venezuelan higher education subsystem is and whether it has been building a new model of higher education in the last decade. In the present study, we attempt to answer these questions, in light of specific policies and plans established by the State regarding the education sector, quality management strategies, administrative-governance organization basic forms, and the methodological framework for assessing quality.

KEY WORDS

Higher education, quality management university, model education, education policy.

INTRODUCTION

In Venezuela, university management is an ongoing concern for governmental agencies; public universities depend almost exclusively on them. Traditionally, education costs have had high economic significance as a management, political and institutional problem, as Venezuelan State invest a percentage lower than the one recommended by UNESCO in this sector and that within this budget, the amount aimed for higher level exceeds the allocated in other Latin American countries such Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and in

developed countries like Great Britain.¹ To this is added, the lack of evaluation and monitoring of university academic and administrative processes, which requires results quantification, the classification of different situations and resources distribution according to each institution's internal efficiency and hence all higher education subsystem.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current status of Venezuelan university sector, taking into account State policies and plans, the changes that have occurred over the last decade, and the behavior of certain indicators which explains operation, within the quality assessment methodology.

VENEZUELAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Starting from a conception of higher education as "the complex academic behaviors resulting in its various participants: students, faculty, staff, workers and that is at the same time, an important economic market, because higher education generates economic and financial activities inherent to society."² In this context, the Venezuelan university has provided a significant legacy to the country, not only for its invaluable contribution to professionals and intellectuals training, but also for its contributions to scientific and humanistic research, for technological production and services that has permeated to society's all levels and groups.

Contemporary history has shown the problems that Venezuelan public university has confronted, its changes, strengths and weaknesses, the various reorientation and transformation proposals in a globalized context and changes resulting from a society founded on goods production to a knowledgeable one, in which the university is as an institution dedicated to create and spread knowledge, so it is called upon to play a leading role.

This research will address Venezuelan higher education case at present time specifying its purpose, legal basis and structure as well as changes that have taken place over the last decade.

Higher education in Venezuela is intended to deepen the integral training process of critical, thoughtful, and sensitive citizens, socially and ethically committed with the country's development initiated in previous educational levels. Its function is the creation, dissemination, socialization, production and preservation of knowledge in society and the stimulation of intellectual and cultural creation in all its forms. Its purpose is to prepare the highest quality professionals and researchers and support their permanent updating and improvement, in order to establish a solid foundation for humanistic, scientific and technological advancement and progress for autonomy, independence and sovereignty of all country's areas.³

¹ Inter-University Centre Development (CINDA, in Spanish: Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo), *Statistical Report*, Caracas 2007, p. 102.

² O. Albornoz, 'Some notes on higher education in Venezuela', 2011, at <http://psicoexcesos.com//la_cuestion/doc/albornoz4.html#2>, 25 April 2012.

³ See: 'Organic Law of Education', Official Gazette of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 5929 (Special), 15 August 2009, Article 32, at <<http://www.me.gob.ve.leyorganica.pdf>>, 28 April 2012.

The legal foundation of Venezuelan higher education is determined by the current Universities Act, in Article 26 of the Education Law (2009), as well as various Regulations and Decrees that have arisen to the extent of new circumstances in this area, which had not been foreseen in the Law, as is the case of national experimental universities governed by the Executive⁴. In the case of private ones, they are governed by the Act provisions in Chapter IV and by their own internal laws. On the other hand, colleges are regulated by the Institutes and Colleges Regulation decreed by the National Executive in 1974 and by each institution internal regulations which must be approved by the Education Ministry. The coordination of the university sector activities corresponds to the Universities National Council, UNC (In Spanish: Consejo Nacional de Universidades), which is composed by the Higher Education Minister, who presides it, National, experimental and private universities Rectors; three representatives of teachers, one for each type of institution, three students representatives for each college; two teachers appointed by the Assembly and a representative from the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research, CONICIT (in Spanish: Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas). In addition, its structure is described in Article 21 of the University Act, the Council's procedural rules consists of three offices: University Planning Sector, Coordinating Internal Controls and Central Universities Admission Guidance and Higher Education. It also has permanent committees called Nuclei, which are structured as follows: Academic Vice-Rectors, Administrative Vice-Rectors, Secretaries, National Universities Planning Directors, and Faculties Deans or Schools and Programs Directors: Engineering, Architecture, Medicine, Social Communication, Humanities and Education, among others. Later, National Advisory Council of Graduate Studies was added and established in 1984. The colleges sector reports directly to the Education Ministry on matters relating to institutional development policies, monitoring, control, coordination and evaluation of activities, through the Higher Education Sector General Direction, which should also monitor and evaluate the academic functioning of national and experimental university administrators as well as private universities endorsing certificates issued by these institutions.

With respect to its structure, there is a "subsystem" consisting of the university and higher education institutes sectors. The first sector is constituted by experimental autonomous national and private universities, and the second by official institutions of teacher education, polytechnics, technical institutes, colleges, Armed Forces training institutes, religious training colleges, fine arts colleges and research institutes.

By 2011, there were 170 institutions including public and private universities, colleges and junior colleges which reached 2,340,000 students enrolled according to the University Sector Planning Office OPSU (in Spanish: Oficina de Planificación del Sector Universitario).

⁴ See: 'University Law', Official Gazette of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 1429 (Special), 8 September 1970, Article 10, at <http://www.ucv.ve/fileadmin/user_upload/auditoria_interna/Archivos/Material_de_Descarga/Ley_de_Universidades_-_1429_E.pdf>, 10 May 2012.

In this distribution, the number of public and private institutions is almost similar for each sector. Similarly, it can be observed a wide range of study opportunities, classified by Universities National Council (UNC) in eight major knowledge areas: Basic Sciences; Engineering; Architecture and Technology; Agro Sciences and the Sea; Health Sciences; Educational Science; Social Sciences; Humanities and Arts; Military Arts and Sciences, which are included in more than 370 careers distributed in all public and private institutions registered in this Council.

This complex picture is often called "higher education subsystem", however it should be noted that the major structuring factor of a system which forms a set of relations among them is established in order to achieve common goals, but this characteristic is not exactly what defines the group of institutions that constitute Venezuelan higher education.

The situation inside Venezuelan universities can be summarized in isolation and lack of communication between faculties and schools, to the extent there are several schools in the same faculty, subjects with the same name, similar programs and departments throughout the university.⁵

To this, it is added the creation and functioning of 14 experimental universities with different structures patterned according to the current University Law (article 26 of the Education Organic Law, 2009), which causes a certain anarchy in relation to their operative functioning, including autonomous universities as a whole and for each one in particular.

Taking into account the existence of the so called institutes and colleges, ruled by a different legislation, as well as private institutions, there are therefore undeniable reasons to establish how confusing the term "system" is because it denies its basic characteristic that is the relationships between its components.

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

From the time when institutions began to be studied and managed under a systemic approach, organizational effectiveness, also known as quality, productivity, success, or excellence, has been practically the *raison d'être* of organizations. In this sense, the specific approach for assessing educational institutions quality should be based on a definition of quality to guide this process.

Thus a meaning that is generally attributed to quality, which has its origins in the total quality management movement, led by Deming (1950), Juran (1954), Ishikawa (1955) and Crosby (1960) among other researchers who designed strategies to improve organizations, refers to users' degree of satisfaction and /or beneficiaries of the system (employees and customers), mainly associated with products quality.⁶ By analogy, it is also possible to

⁵ S. Herrera, 'Venezuelan Educational System', at <<http://www.cice.org.ve/descargas/Sistema%20Educativo%20Venezolano.pdf>>, 12 May 2012.

⁶ See: M. Ramirez, 'History of Quality', 2003, at <<http://www.tecnologiaycalidad.galeon.com/calidad/6.htm>>, 12 May 2012.

determine processes quality and in our case we have taken the educational experience as a process that could be evaluated regarding what was mentioned before.

In the educational field, the use of this concept has received strong criticisms in some cases by regarding it as a forced adaptation or for having been applied as a mere management tool for managers. However, experiences have been assertive recognizing the importance of quality philosophy as an alternative for school transformation.⁷

According to Toro and Marciano⁸, in the discussion and emergence of the category "education quality", two historical moments can be clearly seen: the first emerged during the mid-sixties linked to the Economic Commission for Latin America, CEPAL (in Spanish: Comisión Económica para América Latina) criteria about development in which the curriculum as well as schools, educational resources and teachers generally given by the State, should have quality; and the second, in the early nineties, the coupling processes of globalization and educational systems decentralization.

However, the seventies dramatic results with a massive expenditure on education and low economic growth rates caused a deep uncertainty about school power in social transformation, moreover, twice in history, the notion of quality was modified conceptually evolving from quality inputs into learning results quality.

For the purpose of this research, the definition of quality education that will be taken is as follows: *the degree to which goals and intended purposes have been achieved, considering the resources used, the leading mechanisms to equity and relevance of educational work related to the regional, national and international context.*⁹

In Latin American countries, the evaluation of educational systems has experienced a remarkable development through the creation of policies and projects aimed at improving the educational quality. Particularly in Venezuela, the University Planning Sector Office (OPSU) created in 2000 the project called 'Venezuelan Universities Assessment and Accreditation System AAS' (in Spanish: SEA, Sistema de Evaluación y Acreditación de las Universidades Venezolanas).

According to Velásquez¹⁰, this project handled a definition of institutional quality understood as the application of three evaluative categories: relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. Relevance is tied to objectives consistency and learning situations, emphasizing the appropriateness of subjects' evolutionary and cultural level. Efficiency is associated to economic and administrative rationality and optimal use of available resources with a clear conception of means and ends.

Thus, an institution will be considered acceptable if it fulfills the quality standards set out in these categories. There is also the possibility that some universities could exceed these standards and can be considered of excellence, establishing a difference be-

⁷ A. Toro, L. Marciano, 'Quality and Venezuelan Higher Education', *Science Education*, 27 (2006), pp. 217-236.

⁸ See: *ibid.*, p. 232.

⁹ *National Curriculum Commission. Guidelines for the Transformation of Higher Education. Scenarios Curriculum*, Caracas 2002, p. 16.

¹⁰ C. Velásquez, 'Criteria and indicators for assessing the quality of education', Caracas 2009, p. 7, at <www.ucv.ve/fileadmin/user.../velasquez_de_zapata_carmen.pdf>, 25 July 2012.

tween quality and excellence. The AAS project is being oriented for quality assurance in all national universities, courses and programs through self-evaluation and external, mandatory and permanent evaluation.

It should be noted, at this point, that another important national contribution is the study carried out by Villarroel and Campero¹¹ on university quality assurance, by which it is intended to implement Article 103 of Venezuelan Constitution, which provides the necessary quality to and for education. This institutional evaluation system of Venezuelan universities has been designing, testing and validating, based on functions, moments, factors, variables, indicators and standards.

In this respect, once there is a referential definition of “education quality”, the dimensions to be considered for evaluation must be specified, since in some cases the methodology used could lead to an illegitimate estimation, even more for a variable as complex as institutional quality.

The definition by Stufflebeam¹² will be taken; it states that quality assessment is *the comprehensive assessment of education and training programs quality at various stages of its evolution; which are beginning, consolidation and maturing*.

Finally, quality is an important variable in any system; the above considerations offer an idea of what aspects should be taken into account to give an opinion about the services offered by higher education institutions.

DIFFICULTIES IN ASSESSING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY

Despite the efforts for introducing a permanent evaluation as a mechanism of higher education quality assurance in Venezuela, there has not seemed to have produced the desired effects on the country universities dynamics. This is due to the lack of accurate and consistent legal frameworks that has not allowed making clear the issue of quality assurance in Venezuela and accepting to design the necessary mechanisms and procedures in order to achieve it.¹³

According to Alborno¹⁴, Venezuelan higher education quality evaluation has become complex due to political, administrative, technical, methodological and cultural difficulties, and very much characteristic of our society, involved in defining indicators.

As Political-Administrative difficulties this author points out, among others: the State's problems for designing and implementing a comprehensive institutional assessment in higher education, especially due to political and administrative changes that

¹¹ See: *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹² D. Stufflebeam, ‘The CIPP Model for Evaluation: An update, a review of the model's development, a checklist to guide implementation’, presented at the Annual Conference of the Oregon Program Evaluators Network (OPEN), Portland, Oregon 2003.

¹³ Inter-University Centre Development (CINDA), *Statistical Report*, Caracas 2011, p. 5.

¹⁴ O. Alborno, *La educación bajo el signo de la crisis*, Mérida 1987, p. 27.

prevent the stability and feasibility of special projects. It also has to do with the adoption of a traditional conception of evaluation as an activity that generates mutual distrust between regulators and the regulated.

In Venezuela, the major technical and methodological difficulty is the application of models to assess institutions quality, because their heterogeneity implies that there should be drawn particular assessment strategies for each of the existing types.

According to Albornoz¹⁵, there are two different positions: those who are interested in focusing on the process from the evaluation research perspective (sometimes academic) and, on the other hand, those who prefer evaluation as a regular administrative exercise function directed towards the solution of constant specific problems.

In other contexts, plurality of approaches from a methodological point of view, in relation to the schools quality concept can create confusion in determining what should be the aim of evaluation. Although the objective is usually defined in terms of efficiency understood as *the degree or level at which an educational institution fulfils the given social purposes*.¹⁶ The operationalization of this concept is subjected to kind of theory that is used to conceptualize the social function of schools, this means, the type of theory used for organizations to explain their role, varies the benchmarking applied to define the concept of efficiency. So while some do it in terms of productivity, others consider inappropriate to evaluate educational institutions with economic criteria as their priorities should be different: environment adaptation, social commitment, looking for solidarity.¹⁷

Finally, according to Albornoz,¹⁸ Venezuelan cultural scenario has been characterized by the lack of comprehensive evaluation procedures, which in practice has been primarily focused on students' performance. Other difficulties pointed out by this author are: absence of a proactive and preventive attitude, which leads to poor use of time during plan, schedules and timetables development, the contempt for quantitative assessment of problems, and the failure or misinformation to control basic rules.

CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION OVER THE LAST DECADE

From 1999 to present, there are two distinct stages but with common principles that have influenced higher education public policies formulation. The first, from 1999 to

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁶ M. Díaz, 'Schools Evaluation. An approximation to a systemic approach', *Educational Research*, Vol. 15 (1997), pp. 145-148.

¹⁷ J. Feerman, D. Quinn, 'Effectiveness: The perspective from organizational theory', *Review of Higher Education*, Vol. 9 (1985); J. Scheerens, *Effective schooling. Research, theory and practice*, London 1992, cited by M. Díaz, 'Schools Evaluation...', p. 147.

¹⁸ See: O. Albornoz, *La educación...*, p. 35.

2002, during which the higher education policy agenda was focused on Alma Mater¹⁹ and the creation of the Higher Education Ministry²⁰ as the unit responsible for the strategic direction of Venezuelan higher education. In the second stage (2002-2010), two phases are identified: the first phase (2003-2006), when the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (2003) and Mission Sucre were created.²¹ The second phase (2007-2010), defined by Simon Bolivar National Project, aimed at the construction of what has been called “XXI Century Socialism.”

The following implemented measures should be mentioned within this context:

- 1) Since 2005, changes in policies and procedures for accessing higher education have been implemented, one of them is the elimination of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, PAA (In Spanish: Prueba de Actitud Académica)²² in 2008. Thereafter, the admission process to higher education institutions in the country is being done by two mechanisms:
 - a) The National System for Admission to University Education, SINIEU (In Spanish: Sistema Nacional de Ingreso a la Educación Universitaria) whose objective is “universal and inclusion with social relevance” through the implementation of the National Registry for Admissions to university education, RUSNIEU (In Spanish: Registro Único del Sistema Nacional de Ingreso a la Educación Universitaria), the National Vocational Exploration Test, PNEV (In Spanish: Prueba Nacional de Exploración Vocacional) which is compulsory for students in their final year of secondary education and a multivariable allocation model²³ that seeks to fundamentally increase the admission rate of students from the population underprivileged sectors, taking into account academic performance in high school, regionalization and whether the student has previously participated in the process, thus looks for the ones who were excluded or unable before to access the system.²⁴ Through this process, the Higher Education Ministry, MPPEU (In Spanish: Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación Superior) is responsible for allocating to autonomous universities at least a 30% of the quotas for new students and 100% in other official institutions of higher education.
 - b) RUSNIEU and PNEV requirements are obligatory for five autonomous universities and Simon Bolivar Experimental University: These institutions

¹⁹ This program was discontinued since 2004.

²⁰ In 2006 was renamed to be called People's Ministry for Higher Education.

²¹ The missions are social programs initiated in 1999 (albeit with greater emphasis since 2003) to try to respond to priority needs of education, health, food, housing and employment. Works with most immediate resources allocated and not subject to regular procedures of public administration and staff receive instructions of the National Executive.

²² Instrument applied in Venezuela since 1984.

²³ See: 'SINEU. Programa Nacional de Ingreso', at <http://www.mppeu.gob.ve/pni_info.php>, 18 July 2012.

²⁴ See: 'Procedimientos de admisión y selección utilizados', at <<http://www.mppeu.gob.ve/documentos/boletin/SINIEEU.pdf>>, 10 August 2012.

also carry out internal admission tests for most careers and programs. The internal testing mechanism is added to admit students entering the institution in response to an institutional policy of merit recognition or academic excellence due to established commitments made with groups within the institutions such as teachers, administrative staff and workers. These institutions also have programs such as Samuel Robinson at Venezuela Central University (UCV), the Equal Opportunities Program at Simon Bolivar University (USB), the Academic Admission Merit (AAM) from Zulia University (LUZ), among others, which look for the inclusion of students from the population underprivileged sectors. Moreover, they also develop programs intended to ensure access to indigenous students, athletes and disabled students. Through these mechanisms autonomous universities have the right to allocate 70% of places in each institution, after receiving the 30% assigned by the MPPEU.²⁵

- 2) The other significant change in higher education, in the 2007-2010 period, was the adoption of an Education Law in 2009 which establishes guidelines relating to the State Teacher authority to regulate, monitor and control the operation of the university education subsystem in terms of financial management, governance standards, planning, policies and programs coordination and implementation aimed at the productive integration of graduates, the territorialization of university education and student admission to institutions, both formal and private.²⁶
- 3) In this decade, policies and measures which have been taken by the government have led to form an institutional platform consisting of 58 universities, 102 non-university institutes and 10 higher learning institutes which involve different considerations related to the number of graduates. First, these policies do not allow a consistent framework for diagnosing the needs of incoming and outgoing students, there is not a planned orientation for actual labor market requirements for medium and long term. And secondly, in newly created institutions, there are still cohorts who have not completed their studies. However, in the last five years there has been an increase in graduates' number from public institutions, which exceeds that of private, likewise, the concentration is observed in the social sciences and humanities areas for total amount of graduates in the period.
- 4) On the financial area, an inversely proportional relationship between the income gained by the government from oil barrels sales, as well as tax collection, and the funding allocated to the higher education institutions can be seen in Venezuela. In the last three years, this allocation has affected HEIs budgets so that they have been forced to close research programs, limit resources for equipment and supplies and offer few competitive wages. The enactment of the Science, Technology

²⁵ CINDA, *Statistical Report*, Caracas 2011, p. 11.

²⁶ 'Organic Law of Education', Official Gazette of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 5929 (Special), 15 August 2009, Article 6, at <<http://www.me.gob.ve.leyorganica.pdf>>, 28 April 2012.

and Innovation Law, LOCTI (In Spanish: Ley Orgánica de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación) in 2005 and its implementation from 2006, was a change that had a major impact on the National System of Science, Technology and Innovation, SNCTI (In Spanish: Índice de Siglas Institucionales y Temáticas). During the first 3 operating years, some universities were benefited from substantial financial resources for research; however, the government changed this law in 2010 making it virtually a tax. Briefly, in the last five years, the funding for higher education institutions has been derived in its 95% from the National Executive and 5% from revenues.²⁷

DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS OF SOME VENEZUELAN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY INDICATORS

Period 2000-2010:

The information provided by quality indicators is essential for making investment decisions concerning education. Particularly these indices are useful to monitor and evaluate higher education policy achievements.

There are a variety of quality indicators in higher education that can lead to the development of different systems. In Venezuela, experts such as Villarroel and Camperos (2008); Eggers (2005), Gonzalez and others (2002), Day (2007), among the best known, have developed indicator systems according to their own criteria regarding this issue²⁸.

Then, the situation of Venezuelan higher education will be observed from a numerical perspective, intending to see the behavior of some of the most important variables that interact in the university sector, in terms of policies and plans established by the State and the basic institutional form of organization – administration at university level.

The reference period for the analysis of quality indicators in higher education was the decade 2000-2010, but we only got information until 2009.

In this regard, it should be noted that the impossibility of presenting a unique consensual proposal that describes the characteristics and complexity of higher education system dynamics o. Therefore, in order to describe the decade chosen it was divided into two five-year periods: 2000-2005 and 2006-2010.

For the first half, the Bulletin of Higher Education Indicators No 1 CNU-OPSU was used²⁹ which contained a set of indicators for implementing general minimum between institutions in order to make comparisons to classify and see profiles' similarity, where possible.

²⁷ CINDA, *Statistical Report*, Caracas 2011, p. 6.

²⁸ C. Velázquez, 'Criteria and indicators...', p. 17

²⁹ 'Statistics Department of the Office of University Sector Planning', *Bulletin of Higher Education Indicators* N° 1 (2007), pp. 31-32.

And from 2006 until 2010, as the mentioned Bulletin was not published during this period, the data was taken from the Inter-University Centre Development.³⁰ Although, these are different sources, it is possible to establish comparison points between quality indices reflected in these two five-year periods.

It should be noted that one of the problems for evaluating higher education quality indicators in the country, was the lack of continuity in results' publication by relevant agencies, as well as the wide variety of criteria for its formulation.

The indicators that were taken into account for analyzing the period 2000-2005 are specified below:

1. *Gross enrolment rate*: This is the percentage of people from 18 to 24 years, enrolled in universities each year.

From 2000 to 2005, the enrolment rate for national universities increased from 14.94% to 22.9%. However, the public universities contribution percentage was (17.2%) well above the private universities (5.07%) share during the indicated period.³¹

2. *Incorporation Student rate*: It is defined as the percentage of new students for each university, at the beginning of each academic year.

For the 2000-2005 period, at national level, this rate increased from 28.90% to 41.05%. The public sector showed a gradual declined from 28.34% to 20.88%, while in the private sector there was a sharp increased from 29.47% to 61.38%.³²

3. *Gross graduation rate*: Indicates the percentage of graduates regarding undergraduate enrolment in each academic year.

During the 2000-2005 period, there was an increase from 13.02% to 18.06% in national universities. However, the greatest contribution to this value corresponds to private universities, whose rate increased from 15.02% to 26.31%. There was a decrease from 11.01% to 9.80% for official universities.³³

4. *Growth rate*: Represents the relationship between graduate students and new ones enrolled in each academic year.

The value for national universities changed from 0, 65 to 1, 2 during the 2000 to 2005 period. For the public sector, this indicator is erratic, varying from 0, 58 to 0, 62, while for the private sector, there was a decrease from 0, 72 to 0, 61.³⁴

5. *Graduated Students*: The percentage of national university undergraduate students who graduate each academic year.

The relationship between public universities graduates' percentage was inversely proportional to private universities graduates' percentage. A moderate decrease from 72.34% to 75.31% can be observed in public universities, while there

³⁰ CINDA, *Statistical Report*, Caracas 2011.

³¹ 'Statistics Department...', pp. 34-35.

³² See: *ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

was a growth from 24.69% to 27.76% in private universities during the period studied.³⁵

6. *Teachers rate credited to the Research Promotion Program*: In public universities, this percentage decreased in almost 1% (0.83%) during the above mentioned period, while there was an increase from 0.86% to 1.69% for private universities in almost 1%, coincidentally.³⁶

7. *Rate of budget allocation for research*: The budgetary allocation percentage varied during the referred period, depending on the type of university as follows.³⁷ For Official Universities, there was increased from 3.34% to 3.56%. For Autonomous Universities, there was a decreased from 3.81% to 3.56%. For Experimental Universities, there was an increase from 2.20% to 3.74%.

8. *Rate of Budget allocation in education*³⁸: In public universities, there was a decrease from 24.04% to 22.65%. The decrease for autonomous universities was 1.79% (from 23.61% to 21.82%). For experimental universities, there was a 2.26% decrease (from 30.02% to 27.76%).

9. *Rate Budget allocation in extension*³⁹: In public universities, there was an increase, on average, from 1.54% to 2.21%. The increase for autonomous universities was 0.64% (from 1.41% to 2.05%). In the experimental universities, it was 1.1% (from 1.99% to 3.09%).

10. *Rate Budget allocation for staff costs*⁴⁰: This indicator decreased for autonomous universities, from 43, 78% to 40, 09%, and for experimental universities, from 52, 25% to 49, 64%.

11. *Personal expenditure per student (2000-2005)*: In Venezuela, it is the public expenditure dedicated to the university sector, and priority areas such as health, safety, housing, etc., called 'social spending'; that is regarded as social investment because the education beneficiaries are individuals but they also have a dimension public.

During the 2000-2005 period, public universities showed an average increase from Bs 1.880.337 to Bs 2.933.511.

The increase in autonomous universities went from Bs 2.216.974 to Bs 4.197.871. In the experimental universities was from Bs 2.090.760 to Bs 4.758.164. It should be noted that during this period, for Simon Bolivar University, this expenditure increased from Bs 6,527,618 to Bs 9.509.808 in the period studied. The Bolivarian Armed Forces National Experimental University, UNEFA (In Spanish: Universidad Nacional de las Fuerzas Armadas), also, reached one of the highest spending per student (Bs. 18,006,927) in 2005.⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 58-60.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 72-74.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 76-78.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 81-83.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 87-89.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 92-94.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 105-107.

Indicators that were taken into account to analyze higher education quality during the 2006-2010 period:

A) Relating to enrolment growth and other similar concepts

1. *Trend of undergraduate enrolment from 2006 onwards:* this rate changed from 1,325,226 to 2,006,348 students in 2008. Between 2006 and 2008, undergraduate enrollment increased 66% in Venezuela. In real terms, in 2008, there were 681,122 students more than in 2005 in higher education institutions.⁴²

2. *Institutional infrastructure for provision of higher education:* Total number of institutions and their evolution during the 2006-2010 period.

During this period, there was an increase from 152 to 170 institutions, in 2010, during which this indicator reached its highest value.⁴³

On the other hand, during the five study years, an effort can be seen in order to build new infrastructure and such aspect can be interpreted as positive for a developing country like Venezuela.

B) Concerning the Status of Teachers

3. *Numerical Evolution of teachers in higher education institutions.*

This figure varies from 66,428 to 96,201, in the indicated period. In the five year series, according to the source, a slight but steady decline of teachers in higher education institutions is shown during the 2007-2009 period.⁴⁴ It is striking that by that time there is a growth of new institutions, and a significant increase in enrolment, so it is contradictory the teachers' reduction.

4. *Total of teachers in higher education institutions by Category.*

Information is available only from 2007.

The increase, by category, was as follows: Instructors: From 8,659 to 27,490; Assistants: From 6,813 to 1,9173; Aggregates: From 5,185 to 1,3772; Associates: From 3,657 to 1,3012 and Titulars: From 2,388 to 8,584. Over the last three years, it can be seen that teachers in higher education institutions in Venezuela, according to category, are in lower ranks. This behavior makes sense, because achieving the top category at a Venezuelan university, by regulation, it is needed a minimum of 15 years.⁴⁵

C) Related to budget allocation

5. In Venezuela, the scheme used to finance Higher Education Institutions (In Spanish, IES: Institutos de Educación Superior) comes from the design of a budget that is approved by the College Council and its equivalent, by type of institution (National Universities and Autonomous Experimental, private, colleges university, Technological University Institutes and Higher Learning Institutes).

⁴² Institutions of Higher Education, *Statistics Committee*, Caracas 2009, p. 25.

⁴³ See: 'Los desafíos de la Educación Superior', at <<http://www.cinda.cl/download/Brunner2011-EducacionSuperior.pdf>>, 13 July 2012.

⁴⁴ Institutions of Higher Education, *Statistics Committee*, Caracas 2009, p. 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

6. The funds are being discriminated by programs and budget. The criterion used is based on relating the amount that will be executed with the funding source. Some requirements have been changing in recent years and in some cases have merged, forcing IES to make administrative restructuring and monitoring applications to meet the respective audits.

7. During the 2006-2010 period, the annual expenditure in IES ranged from Bs. F 619.488.837 to Bs. F 1.284.288.678.⁴⁶

These current prices (expressed in Bs F.) correspond to allocations made to public universities under the Amended Budget plus the official budget non-university institutions and the government subsidies given to private IES (CINDA, 2011, p.47). There were no official figures for private expenditure on higher education, nor it was possible to estimate how much this expenditure was as a GDP proportion (In Spanish, PIB: Producto Interno Bruto), thus only considering the subsidy that the government gave to private HEIs as part of whole annual expenditure.

Indicators contrast between the period 2006-2010 and the 2000-2005 period

1) Contrary to what was found for the previous period (2000-2005), the number of graduates from non-university institutions during 2006-2010, was significantly lower than that of the universities and although there is still no information about graduation rates in the country, however it may be thought that this increase in the number of university graduates is due to the ease of access, but especially to the creation of the Bolivarian University and Sucre Mission.

2) Another important difference with the previous period, in terms of graduation rate, is that for the first time the number of graduates from official institutions significantly exceeds the private ones.

3) The budget allocation for staff costs (2000-2005) decreased for all universities; the most affected were autonomous ones. This is contradictory with the rising trend that showed this variable during 2006-2010.

4) During the first five years studied, it is observed that budgetary increase in resources allocated to research, teaching and extension had little significance because they were a minor contribution over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The main results from the main tendencies and changes in the higher education system during the ten year period can be summarized in four key areas: access to higher education, quality assurance, management and funding.

In first place, for accessing higher education, it has become clear that declaring higher education as a public good, eliminating all kind of admission tests as well as the creation

⁴⁶ Since 2008, the country monetary scale was changed and these figures were converted to a new monetary expression called Bs Fuertes (Bs. F.).

of a new institutional platform have been determinant factors in the growth of higher education in Venezuela, in that sense, the government has achieved a degree of minimization of exclusion and inequality in Venezuelan higher education before the proposed reconstruction process since 1999. However, it should be considered whether this massive process has been accompanied by quality minimum requirements, not only the process itself but programs' content, resources used, infrastructure and quality academic staff.

Secondly, the fact that Venezuela still has not got a widespread national assessment system for quality assurance. There have been attempts to ensure university institutions quality, as well as its processes and actors, only sporadic initiatives related to staff have been done at different times but for various reasons such measures have not been proposed as a consensual result where all the interested ones were involved.

Another key aspect has to do with university administration, institutions governance and the system. First, there are two parallel systems with different characteristics and different links with the National Government; this has created tensions between institutions that do not respond to their deposits, which have made it worse to the extent that it has not been possible to adopt a legal instrument to normalize the relationship between universities, the State and society. According to what was approved in the Education Act, universities must ensure its legitimacy basing their choice and retention in charges related to academic standards regardless of politics. This should be taken by all universities, but it has found strong resistance, however it seems that it is a point at which the national government has not found the middle ground and resistance only deepens the problem.

Finally, the analysis of funding becomes a crucial element for the future of Venezuelan universities. The infrastructure maintenance is needed in order to properly carry out the teaching, research and extension processes ensuring optimal levels of life quality for workers and academics as well as supporting students services with significant financial resources required, all of which indicates that the investment made by the State must meet these requirements, however this has not prevailed in recent years, as shown in the analysis.

In general, higher education in Latin America requires a major investment, so it is necessary for governments to meet the commitments made and seriously invest in this sector. New ways of funding are needed from the private sector to generate new incentives. Moreover, the clarity and transparency displayed in resources management, benefits all institutions development.

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