

Ethics and Excellence of Teaching Staff: The Students' View

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Accepted 11th May 2018

Abstract

This work is the product of a research framed in the field of the professional ethics of the teacher and the excellence of the teaching staff, which seeks to publicize the evaluations that the traits and characteristics of their professors make the students in a public university. The work of teachers is relevant in the training of new professionals, in the generation and dissemination of knowledge and in institutional management, which justifies observing, analyzing and understanding their activity from different perspectives, especially in their ethical actions. Here we analyze the data product of a questionnaire applied to undergraduate students, in which they value some professional features that the institution establishes as a profile of the teacher, in particular, those related to professional teaching ethics and academic excellence, which are important for both institution, as for the evaluation agencies. It also describes aspects of educational quality in the national and international rankings, such as professional excellence and how they are expressed in the teaching tasks, based on what the students say.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Teaching, Excellence, Teaching Staff, Students

1.0 Introduction

This paper analyzes the evaluations that undergraduate students of a public university in northern Mexico make about teaching and the academic work of their professors, under the consideration that training must be comprehensive, ethical and of quality. That is, since the students are the product of a specific training, their perceptions are incorporated as actors that are of the pedagogical relationship in the university, which explains and justifies the study in question.

The general purposes of the research project are to theoretically substantiate the issue of teacher ethics as a component of academic excellence in our context, to contrast the assumptions under which university teachers are valued with data from various sources of information., analyze said data in the framework of the criteria or indicators that the University takes into account to place them in a certain system of academic categories or supports of various kinds, to carry out, later, a diagnosis of the real profile of the university teaching staff. It is an investigation that is framed in the field of ethics and education, and seeks to identify the traits and professional and ethical characteristics that must be met as trainers, based on a questionnaire developed for the research "Excellence of the university professor" that is

carried out in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (UANL) and which is linked to the binational project that Ana Hirsch Adler of the Institute for Research on University and Education of the UNAM (2015) is leading on this problem.

The methodological approach is descriptive with some interpretative elements; The UANL features that talk about the ethical dimension of teaching and / or teaching are also reviewed; it is then contemplated to review the indicators that promote the national and international rankings to assess the excellence of the professors, because these indicators guide the classification of the university institutions. What this work offers, are some of the data that come from non-formal interviews and exploratory questionnaires that were applied to students, where they inquire about the teaching work and if it approaches professional excellence according to international standards. In a preliminary way, it can be said that, in general, students agree that excellence is expressed through the familiar aspects established by the profile of the teacher in UANL: teachers must know their subject and teach it well, which seems clear for all; but the agreement is markedly diminished in terms of research, an activity to which many students do not see it applied in the classroom or consider that this feature is not fundamental for teaching.

2.0 Development

2.1 Teaching Excellence and Ethical-social Commitment

The activity that teachers develop in the classroom, is not limited to reproducing and transmitting knowledge, education is much more complex than that, it goes beyond teaching content and promoting learning activities; consists in essence, in forging the personality, cultivating young people for life in society and encouraging them to think for themselves, which depends to a large extent on a good teaching job, but at the same time, on the professional identity of the subject that teaches and how she or he relates to knowledge and teaching. On the other hand, although not forgetting the statement that Jaume Trilla (1995) makes about the neutrality of the teacher, we think that if the fundamental task of the teacher is to teach well what he knows, using the strategies that best contribute to the learning of his students, considering its context or historical moment, as well as the cultural capital that its students carry with it, then their task is not neutral or lacking in values. In

any case, the possibilities of specifying this in the classroom must be guaranteed by the institution.

All the professions must fulfill social needs, they must tend toward the good, procuring the person in the professional practice, in this way they fulfill their social commitment, which leads us to recognize how Carlos Cullen (2012) does, that education always involves an ethical-political dimension, first, because it is a space of actions and interactions, whose intentional identity is to teach, and therefore these actions can achieve moral excellence, and can also be described as fair; and secondly, because all social commitment is an ethical commitment, which means that educational work must be put in place, both in training and in teaching practice, under strict principles of justice, freedom and equality, in order to fully comply with said social commitment.

Excellence is a habit that becomes a virtue, Aristotle said in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, "the virtue of man will be habit that makes man good and with which man makes his job well and perfectly." It is the *areté* of the ancient Greeks, for whom excellence is virtue, talent or exceptional quality for an end. In this tenor, being a teacher of excellence means that someone does their part and does it well; it means simply, teaching well with all that implies.

It must be recognized that any description of the characteristics, traits or indicators under which the excellence of the teacher is valued implies some position on quality education and, therefore, on knowledge. On the other hand, it is assumed that every teacher in compliance with the basic ethical principles, is a good person and acts according to them, this is essential, but such commitment must be complemented by a knowledge relative to what teaches, because of another In this way, teaching practice can lose meaning. That is why Charlot (2006) is important in this regard, for whom "relations with knowledge" are relations of meaning and, consequently, values between individuals and knowledge processes. On this same aspect, Mutuale (2009), following the thesis of Charlot, points out that there is a misunderstanding in believing that the "good" teacher is the one who teaches us well; the good teacher, he says, would be the one who apart from the awareness of what is said about good students, would have as a practice the relationship with knowledge, what it means, give meaning to their activity and communicate pleasure for the to know.

2.2 Teachers among Institutional Indicators of Excellence and Ethics

The evaluation for higher education institutions becomes a matter of global importance from the nineties, and since then we find a great influence of international organizations in the definition and construction of public policies that mark the course of education and evaluation processes in the country, with the purpose, in theory, of improving the quality of education and of all academic and scientific activity.

At the international level, the quality of the teaching staff is a matter of the first order that contributes to positioning the institutions of higher education in the academic rankings that are ordered lists (however questionable they may be, their influence is enormous nowadays) according to a

methodology of bibliometric type that includes "measurable and reproducible objective criteria", it is therefore a classification (Hirsch and Vidal, 2015). Among the rankings that now have greater credibility or confidence, are the annual ranking of the best universities in the world that the University of Shanghai JiaoTong performs through the Institute of Higher Education, which since 2004, performs the education supplement of the newspaper *American Times*.

According to Hirsch and Vidal (2015), although the criteria vary every year, and can be debatable, Shanghai usually uses the following to assess universities: quality of education, teacher quality, product quality and size of the institution . In particular, the quality of the teaching staff has an approximate value of 80% for the classification as excellent university:

- a) The exceptional results obtained by their students;
- b) the number of maximum distinctions obtained by the professors in their field of knowledge;
- c) the number of university researchers cited in the different areas of knowledge;
- d) articles published in indexed journals and in the most important databases in the world (ethical aspects are taken for granted).

Although these classifications have been generalized, they are not exempt from criticism; Here is an example by María Rosa Fenoll Brunet, a Spanish professor, who in an interview published in the *Diario Médico* (2015) argues the following:

In recent years, the tendency to recognize the excellence of universities has increased through classification lists that basically focus on the research results of these institutions, such as the ranking of the University of Shanghai (China) or just refer to quality educational, as the Times Higher Education magazine ranking, in which the teaching barely weighs 30 percent of the final grade (interview published in the Young Doctor Journal - Monsó, 2015)

In the UANL, the guiding documents such as the institutional development plan, the 2020 vision and the educational model record the profiles of the actors responsible for the training, and promote the evaluation of teaching through an instrument that is (now) provided in the electronic platform to the students, every semester, at least since the mid-nineties, however, the results do not define the work status of teachers (which has advantages and disadvantages). This instrument offers 12 questions that ask about the teaching work, including one that addresses the issue of values in the classroom. About the instrument and the evaluation process, it is necessary to say that almost twenty years after it was instituted, there is no study to report the results and their effects on the training of students and on teaching practice. The traits that characterize the The desirable profile of teachers contemplates the ethical dimension, as it happens in any profession.

The features or characteristics that make up the profile of UANL professors come from the Educational Model (2008,

2015); this profile is linked to the social responsibility model (derived from the PDI, 2012-2020) for the development of institutional activities, in relation to "University and quality education" (ME, 2015, p 13); According to this, teachers are considered:

socially responsible planetary citizens, aware of their role in global sustainable development and with broad and solid competences to develop in the world of work of the knowledge society in programs recognized for their quality by external bodies ... that achieve the established profile of egress ... the evaluation of levels of educational attainment through standardized tests. (ME, 2015, p 13).

The annotated description includes, in our opinion, several fundamental aspects in the exercise of teaching: being responsible, as teachers and as citizens; possess solid competencies as a teacher; participate in quality programs; achieve the discharge profile of their students; evaluate and contribute to the achievements of their students. Which, as can be seen, is close to some of the criteria established by different rating agencies.

To emphasize the importance of the ethical dimension in the exercise of teaching, the Academic Model (MA-UANL, 2015), the instrument that operationalizes the educational model, establishes that:

The university professor is an experiential model of the universal values and emblem of the Institution, contributing to the formation of integral professionals, with a high degree of social responsibility and who contribute in the resolution of the problems that arise in the local, national and international context (MA, 2015: 24).

3.0 Results

3.1 Teaching excellence: the students' view

The Teaching Excellence: the students' gaze to achieve an approach to the perception that students have of the activities that teachers and professors perform and if these activities contribute to characterize the excellence and ethics of the Teacher, the Etodológica strategy that has been followed, in addition to the direct observation, a questionnaire, which was applied in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (FFyL) of the Autonomous University of Nuevo León (UANL) in 2015; It includes 13 questions about how you look at the work of your teachers in the classroom. The instrument was supplied to 30 students and some identification data were requested, such as: sex, age and academic semester. The age of the young varies between 19 and 22 years and in the organization of undergraduate, at this stage the young people are studying between fourth and sixth semester. Those who filled the questionnaire were of the first question asked to write the "Five traits or characteristics" most important that every teacher and professor of the University should possess. In their responses predominate traits that are linked to the ethical-political and/or social dimension. One of those that appears most often, is that the teacher, must be "dynamic", make the classes dynamic (they are young), which does not mean only movement in itself, but it is equivalent to make an adequate

transfer of the planning to the Practice, to achieve the best results, which fits well in the ethical dimension or social commitment of teaching. On the other hand, being dynamic, also related to the capacity and/or competence to organize and encourage learning situations, according to the described Perrenoud (2007), and implies, among others, are functions of the professor of UANL, facilitate learning, motivate, Promote positive attitudes as established by the educational model:

The teacher will have the responsibility to design and strategically plan the activities relevant to the different learning environments to develop the competencies established in the educational programs... Facilitating learning... Motivate the student through constant interaction, recognizing as an active subject (ME-UANL, 2015:12-14).

Other characteristics that students wrote about the good teacher are related to personality traits, such as empathy, understanding, tact, being patient; This emphasizes the importance they give to "good treatment." That is, it is a question of manifesting an ethical behavior and attached to socially accepted values, since they also frequently mention as prominent traits of the good teacher, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, respect.

In Perrenoud's competencies, these values are equivalent to "coping with the profession's ethical dilemmas and responsibilities." It is also important, as the students say, that the teachers have an "excellent knowledge of the matter that teaches". Knowledge of the subject is fundamental to the teacher, can hardly act with dynamism or ethically, if you do not know what to teach, to show this relationship with the knowledge of which Charlot speaks makes it a desire for the knowledge that can be contagious.

3.2 Other Features of the Teacher of Excellence

The questionnaire also offers 12 closed-ended questions, whose assessment options are as follows: Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree (now we think that perhaps the number of options should have been greater). Among the aspects that obtain higher percentages in the agreement, are: The good teacher must know the methods and strategies to teach in the university; Developing respect for the profession they study in their students is a duty of every teacher; Acting ethically, showing socially accepted values is an obligation of university professors; Teachers need to develop empathy and understanding for their students.

The aspects on which the young people are not "neither in agreement nor in disagreement", are: The excellence of the teachers is duly manifested if they use the information technologies in their classes; The excellence of the professors manifests itself when they involve the students in research activities; It is necessary that teachers (as) involve students in their learning and their work; The most important thing is that a teacher arrives early and meets his schedule.

The questionnaire includes two open questions related to excellence, quality, training and professionalism indicators: more than half of young people think that it is not strictly necessary for their professors to be researchers: "it's not like

the most essential", " not everyone can be given this ability ", " it is because teaching is often neglected ".

As to whether their teachers should study postgraduate studies, in general students agree because it is a way to update themselves to be better teachers, and, as long as they do not study just to meet a requirement. That is, as they point out, for them it is a sign of excellence (more or less in this order): establish an adequate communication with their students, who know the subject they teach, who know methods and strategies to teach, who develop in their students respect by profession, act ethically, develop empathy and understanding towards their students, arouse the desire to learn from their students.

4.0 Conclusions

The educational processes, the training of the people, cannot be subjected exclusively to the indicators that establish the rankings, the training cannot be pigeonholed so easily, but not to speak, these are practices that have come to stay. We think that there should be general parameters that guide the observation of the teaching work and allow a certain evaluation, but everything that is done in this area, should be contextualized to obtain comprehensive data that permit the educational improvement, which is basically matters.

The evaluation that of the teachers must involve all the subjects that participate in the training, in such a way that it is possible to combine data to propose concrete actions for the improvement of the teaching competence's, directing it towards an ethical and excellence performance. Excellence is virtue, talent or exceptional quality for an end, it is a matter of habit.

In reference to the vision of the students, it is necessary to say that a first idea that this exercise has left us, is that for young people, beyond their professors being recognized in their field of knowledge and their research, they have a master's degree or a doctorate, the important thing is the type of relationship they establish in the classroom with their students. In this way, the manifestation of traits such as empathy, understanding, touch, patience, and humility lead students to consider their teachers as good and / or excellent. Without neglecting the fundamental values.

In a similar way to what Navia and Hirsch (2015: 127) found, in the responses of the young people of the UANL "the affective dimension is also present, which refers to the ability to relate to students", as one of the aspects most valued by them. For students the most important thing is that their teachers are understanding, dynamic, responsible, respectful of the profession and that it is good to do research as long as they do not neglect their classes. They see postgraduate studies mainly as more preparation and knowledge that their teachers have to reflect in the classes.

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