

Postgraduates in education, exploring their sense and meaning of education

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Abstract

In this research, we present an analysis carried out in the city of Poza Rica, state of Veracruz, Mexico on the meaning and significance of education that students attribute to the master programs related to education. We base this work from the Theory of Social Representations of Serge Moscovici (1961) and the Method of Symbolic Interactionism of Herbert Blumer (1969), this research is consistent with the educational policies in the training of professionals, due that from an inductive study with a cualitative perspective, we can do an analysis with more relevance on the impact that the offer of postgraduate has on the training of current professionals. Two study contexts were taken: masters in education offered in the public sector and masters in education offered in the private sector. As well, the agencies that shape the policies for the evaluation of postgraduate programs in Mexico, particularly with emphasis on the National Council for Science and Technology(CONACyT for its acronym in Spanish) framework.

Keywords: *Educational policy, qualitative research, social representation, vocational training.*

1. Introduction

The postgraduate training in Mexico as a system has gone a long way, which has involved a willingness by the various institutions to lead to national agreements that regulate the system. The postgraduate training is part of an educational policy considered in each educational program of each six years-period of government to care for quality in the postgraduate. This has impacted both public and private universities.

It is necessary to mention that the researches that exist on the subject of the postgraduate in Mexico are usually of quantitative cut, Sánchez S. (2012) affirms that of the incipient studies that exist on the postgraduate, are simple statistics or diagnoses and do not approach the problem in depth. It is necessary to count on studies that allow us a deep, in situ knowledge of how the postgraduate course develops in the different contexts of Mexico. Therefore, we present at this moment, a study with a qualitative approach carried out in the City of Poza Rica, located north of Veracruz, Mexico. This study had among its purposes, to investigate and to know the sense and meaning of formation that the students attribute to their own studies of masters in education..

In order to begin this research, it was necessary to carry out a preliminary exploration in 2014 to know the masters related to education offered in the mentioned City, identifying what each of them offered as: scholarships, registration fees, Exam's days, facilities and finally their curriculum. We find that in Poza Rica, Veracruz, postgraduate programs in education are available in both public and private sectors, as shown below:

Master programs	Sector	Institution	PNPC (National Program of Quality Postgraduates)
Learning Management Máster, profesional orientation.	Public	Facultad de Pedagogía Universidad Veracruzana	In consolidation
Education Máster, profesional orientation.	Private	Universidad Huasteca Veracruzana	No
Education Máster with Specialty in didactic competences, profesional orientation.	Private	Instituto de Estudios Superiores en Educación	No
Science in Education Máster, profesional orientation.	Private	Universidad del Valle de Poza Rica	No
Educational Technology Máster, profesional orientation.	Private	Universidad del Golfo de México	No

Source: own elaboration.

The Masters chosen to develop the present investigation were:

Public Master's Degree:

- Management Learning Máster, Universidad Veracruzana.

Private Masters:

- Education Máster, Universidad de la Huasteca Veracruzana.
- Education Máster with Specialty in didactic competences, Instituto de Estudios Superiores en Educación
- Science in Education Máster, Universidad del Valle de Poza Rica

We observed that the largest offer is in the private sector, with just one master's degree program offered by a public school. What is the reason for this situation? From this research, we identify that masters in the private sector do not have a solid curricular design to offer a quality postgraduate, examining the marketing nature of the training. Moreno (2004) states that:

The quality of a Postgraduate in Education does not depend on the type of institution that offers it, the target population that attends or the educational function, but on a curriculum design with a good level of internal congruence, with achievable objectives and A form of operation fully consistent with its main purpose, in charge of consolidated academic plants and with support in a sufficient and up-to-date infrastructure (Moreno, 2004, p.3).

On this question, the study carried out by García (1995) is interesting, since he identified that in Mexico there are institutions with a solid postgraduate offer, differentiated from the offer of the degree programs, where the postgraduate degree is administered by a division, council or direction clearly identified within the organizational structure. In this sense, a better care is taken in the offer of postgraduate courses in public institutions than in private ones.

From our study, we observed that the in offer in the private sector, at least in the City of Poza Rica, Veracruz reigns the commercial character of the postgraduate, diminishing importance to the monitoring of educational policies, neglecting the true sense of formation in the context of the Master Degree, that according to the National Program of Quality Postgraduates (PNPC) of the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACyT) has two orientations: professional and research. The Universidad Veracruzana is the only school at the upper level of the public sector in the state of Veracruz. However, we must take into account that in a study carried out the indicators to evaluate the quality of postgraduates in Education, Cardoso and Cerecedo (2011) affirm that there are still few programs in education that actually meet the indicators of greater exigency that establishes the CONACyT, the reason is that the evaluation criteria are based mainly on the natural sciences, exact and engineering leaving aside the field of education.

2. Organizations that dictate educational policies on postgraduate education in Mexico

The development of the postgraduate course relies on the educational policies that are managed by various bodies or agencies that are located in the area of public administration, which are:

Secretariat of Public Education (SEP)

In 1921, by the initiative of José Vasconcelos, rector of the National University of Mexico (UNAM), the Secretariat of Public Education was created. On October 20, 1935, the organization created the drafting of curriculum projects, programs, regulations and in general the norms and dispositions necessary to regulate the work of the establishments of higher education in the country. Particularly in the area of postgraduate studies, the Undersecretariat for Higher Education has, through the Directorate of Higher Education for Education Professionals, a normative framework to "carry out actions aimed at proposing and evaluating policies regarding the authorization of postgraduate courses for teachers, taught by institutions of higher education" (p.1).

National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES).

This body was created in 1950 and has participated in the formulation of programs, planes and national policies, as well as in the creation of organisms oriented to the development of Mexican higher education.

In Mexico, it is the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) that, through the National Program of Quality Postgraduates (PNPC) and the Postgraduate Quality Promotion Program (PFCP), regulate the postgraduate offer through a series of evaluation criteria and quality standards. According to this organization, an accredited postgraduate program is located at one of the following levels:

- 1.- Recent creation: are the recent programs that meet the basic requirements as an academic plant, a curriculum, among others.
- 2.- In development: they are programs that have fixed and sustained their plan of improvement and the feasible goals to reach in the medium term. In addition, they have a teaching plant with high professional profiles.
- 3.- Consolidated: programs that have national recognition for the relevance and impact in the training of high-level human resources, academic productivity and collaboration with other sectors of society. All its academic plant counts on a high professional profile and belong to the National System of Investigators (SNI).
- 4.- And International level: they are programs that have collaborated with other programs through agreements that include the mobility of students and professors, the co-direction of thesis and projects of investigation as a whole.

The PNPC uses a qualitative-quantitative methodology in its evaluation processes, to assess the compliance with indicators that determine whether a postgraduate is a quality program or not. The fact that a postgraduate program is contemplated in the PNPC is a great recognition and a great advantage in comparison of the other institutions because it reflects the quality in which the institution is. The evaluation process is done by a peer committee who base their recommendations on:

- Self-evaluation of the program
- The fulfillment of the evaluation criteria and guidelines contained in the Framework of Reference for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Postgraduate Programs.
- The statistical information of the program.
- Means of verification.
- The interview with the Postgraduate Coordinator
- The file of the program and the observations that have received, if appropriate, previous evaluations.

These aspects are necessary, since they are accepted or not the programs give a reference of how is the operation of an institution. In addition, the Reference Framework for the Evaluation and Follow-up of Face-to-Face Graduate Programs, states that:

These programs have a thorough evaluation to certify and take care of the entry process, curricula, academic nucleus, infrastructure, entrance and exit profile, besides taking care of the profile of the teachers and that the Lines of Generation And Application of Knowledge (LGAC) are relevant to the area (Reference Framework for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Graduate Courses, 2015, p.10).

However, through our study we could realize that in Mexico, despite the educational policies that monitor the creation of quality postgraduate courses, there is the creation of masters and doctorates that arise without measure and not all have the requirements of Quality and social relevance, generating the diversification of studies of dubious origin and a commercialization in the training of the students.

3. Theory of Social Representations of Serge Moscovic

We base the study with the theory of social representations of Serge Moscovici (1979). For this author, "social representation is an organized corpus of knowledge and one of the psychic activities through which men make physical and social reality intelligible, are integrated into a group or a daily relationship of exchanges" (p. 18). On the other hand, social representations are an interpretation about our way of understanding, conceiving and interpreting with what we daily live, social representations start from the individual to the social, transmitted through communication and interaction with others . Social representation is related to how groups within society group and talk about how they perceive their reality within the context in which they are immersed, based on an action that can be: observable, rationalized and experienced.

4. Working Methodology

Our work was based on a qualitative approach, which gave us the philosophical foundations that allowed us to have the sensitivity of capturing both the characteristics of the educational reality and the essence from which our research subjects construct the meanings attributed to their formation, knowing In advance that to develop a research with a qualitative approach, it takes a dose of craftsmanship in its construction and an adventurous eye to capture with astonishment that which is in the immediate reality of the subjects. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1994), "qualitative methodology is a way of looking at the empirical world" (p.20).

4.1. The Method of Symbolic Interactionism

To give greater reliability to the study, we are based on the Symbolic Interactionism Method of Herbert Blumer (1969), which rests on three fundamental premises which are:

1. Human beings act on things based on the meanings they have for them.
2. The meanings of such things derive from the interaction that the person has with other human beings.
3. Meanings are handled or modified through an interpretive process that the person puts into play when he makes contact with things (p.65).

With these premises we can identify the process of construction of the meanings that guide the interaction of the subjects and their actions.

4.2. Study subjects and information retrieval techniques

For this research, our main study subjects were 2nd and 4th. semester students, as we consider they have a real knowledge of the training context that is provided in the postgraduate. The technique used to obtain the information was the interview. This technique gave us the opportunity to interact directly and in the real context with the study subjects. In this regard, observation was a valuable tool for looking at contexts in situ training.

5. Results

From the research we can say that: private institutions offer the postgraduate in accordance with the predominant interests of applicants: obtaining a degree and possession of a professional title. Although, having a postgraduate degree is a social representation that, in

addition to giving a status and recognition to a particular society, allows to raise the category of hiring and therefore improve the salary. In this regard, students who are trained in a context of particular mastery told us that the sense in which they entered the mastery was to obtain a degree that allowed them to move up and get a better salary. On the other hand, they also recognized that they needed to prepare themselves to be up to date, develop better strategies and knowledge in their work, as well as being critical and discovering new fields of research education.

The meanings built by the students on formation revolve around reflective, theoretical, permanent and innovative learning; For them training means learning for the working world, promoting reflection, creativity and practicality in their work.

Experience plays a fundamental role for the construction of meanings, in this sense, the experiences around postgraduate training for students began from the process of entry, incorporation and permanence where they have generated ups and downs, from stress For the hours between their jobs and the courses, to have the commitment to learn and to generate an intellectual and competent change.

Finally, regarding the type of training orientation, it is pertinent to mention that the students of the private masters did not have knowledge of the formative orientation of the masters, of their importance and professional impact that a postgraduate with recognition by the PNPC, or having teachers with a high professional profile. Masters that do not have a recognition within the PNPC repeat the undergraduate curricula, just changing the name of them, which is a shame given that students do not interact with a context of academic exigency.

On the other hand, the students that are trained in the public mastery have a more demanding panorama in the formation of the postgraduate. They know that they must manage diverse academic activities to strengthen their training process. They value the profile of their teachers, for example, who are in the National System of Researchers, who have the Desirable Profile of the Professional Development Program of the Secretariat of Public Education, to participate in congresses, to publish, among other activities, that reflect A high professional profile. All this shows that the meaning and meaning of training have been built from the knowledge of current educational policy, its language reflects such knowledge as well as its idea of training that goes beyond simply obtaining a degree.

Supporting the study from the Theory of Social Representations as well as from Symbolic Interaccionism allowed us to understand that the sense and meaning of the term formation is determined not only by the social context from which it is performed daily but also by the interaction that is established with the subjects individually, with groups, with institutions, with themselves. The sense and meaning of formation is built from the ideas, beliefs and expectations that the students themselves have created from their own contexts of formation

and from their own frameworks of interpretation, this relates to those ideas, beliefs and expectations of those others with they had established communication, in an interesting and continuous process of interpretation of sense and meanings, of realities and actions.

6. Conclusions

This work was undoubtedly a first approach to the postgraduate courses that exist in our city, which allowed us to realize that the sense and meaning of the training, are a pillar for professional development, however, in our city the growth of the private sector is having greater weight in the balance since they have designed masters programs that do not care for the operation of the same, their curricula do not have a formative orientation, and they do not have an academic plant with a profile of wide level and, in general, they are not programs of educational and social relevance. It is to be alarmed that few universities are committed to a program of quality, certification and recognition, a greater response is needed from both public and private universities to be able to design graduate programs that meet high standards of national quality and International, offering a range of possibilities to graduates of the bachelor's degree for their training.

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