

**A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE CURRENT TRENDS AND
CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN
LATIN AMERICA**

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**A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE CURRENT MODES, TRENDS,
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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to consolidate a sample of existing academic literature on the modes, trends, risks and challenges of the internationalization of higher education in Latin America published over the last 15 years. Following a systematic literature review methodology, it was seeking to analyze and synthesize a sample of 25 published academic articles on the specifically chosen topic. As a consequence of this review, it was found that progress has been made on the subject and there is an awareness of the impact it has on quality, international indicators still lag far behind those of more developed regions. The creation and implementation of accreditation and evaluations processes, the commodification of higher education and the presence of new providers and regionalization efforts were perceived as trending topics in the publications. Risks and challenges such as lack of governmental support and brain drain, are respectively perceived by researchers as the most concerning. Finally, an emphasis is made on the comprehensiveness that must characterize this process in order to be successful, meaning that it should “embrace all the educational processes” (Gacel-Ávila, 2007, 406).

KEYWORDS

Internationalization; Latin America; universities; higher education; tertiary education; systematic literature review, HEIs

INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that globalization has changed the way of life and the perceptions of everything around us. No discipline can stay stagnant in such a dynamic and competitive environment and expect to survive, much less thrive. Thus, it becomes of great importance for education, specifically higher education, to evolve with these changes and embrace them in order to keep up and maintain the validity and relevance of the concepts taught in such institutions.

The interconnectedness and integration provided this lack of boundaries not only allows concepts, theories, new processes, research and methods to evolve at a faster pace than ever before, it also makes it possible for this new knowledge and data to be accessed in almost any place in the planet. This benefit however, comes with the immense responsibility of having to stay up to date with all the new information and managing to compete with institutions worldwide.

Internationalization is one way in which higher education responds to the effects of globalization (Altbach, 2001). It allows institutions to transform and address the challenges posed by this grand phenomenon through academic mobility and recruitment of foreign students, cross-border education, partnership, curriculums applicable in the global arena, partnerships and collaboration projects, and initiatives that encompass international and intercultural concepts (Stromquist, 2007). Networks and synergies are formed, innovation is encouraged and knowledge is not only transferred but also generated. This is the challenge for higher education institutions in developing countries, specifically those in the Latin American region.

Globalization and Higher Education

Higher education, also known as post-secondary or tertiary education is the part of the education process offered by institutions such as traditional (universities and colleges), technological, macro-universities, research centers, professional and vocational schools, technological institutes, from public and private sector (Gacel-Ávila, 2007). Thanks to the innumerable advances in technology and communication, the higher education sector has had significant changes in the last three decades (De Wit & Hunter, 2015). The internet, the creation of electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, among others innovations, are starting to be active participants in the classroom. Where some consider them an interruption or obstacle, others see them as valuable tools to improve the interaction and as facilitators in the learning process. Modalities such as e-learning, are clear examples of the transformation of this sector during the last two decades (Cordera-Campos & Santamaría-Ambriz, 2008).

According to Pamela Cox (2005, 11), “the interdependence of today’s economies and societies profoundly affects higher education, and higher education in turn shapes globalization—through teaching, research, and other services”. To take part in this process is no longer a choice but an obligation for those who wish to subsist in the new global, competitive environment. Those who decide not to take part in this process will, undoubtedly, be left behind.

Internationalization of higher education

As mentioned by De Wit and Hunter (2015), the international dimension of higher education has evolved with time, especially after World War II, a period in which peace and cooperation were strongly encouraged. The Cold War was another major event highly related to internationalization of higher education since its end represented the beginning of the information age and this period “[seemed] to be well on the road towards a single global

marketplace ideas, data and communication” (Muller, 1995, cited in Knight & De Wit, 1995). For Europe, which was not fully recovered at this point, the trend came a few years later and, contrary to the US, it was driven by the governments rather than the higher education sector (de Wit & Merx, 2012 cited by de Wit & Hunter 2015).

The changes in the internationalization process consisted of going from a sporadic and reactive student mobility and universal research to include new and more organized activities such as cooperation agreements, student and scholar exchanges, transnational education (TNE), virtual education, internationalization of curriculum, among others (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Altbach, 1998). This is what Teichler (2004) calls re-internationalization: a more active approach that involved more than mobility for political and national cooperation motives.

Although it is true that the spirit of cooperation that resulted after the wars was the driver of the incipient internationalization, this is not what suscitated the re-internationalization. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the fact that knowledge no longer had physical boundaries to overcome, created an environment where people had the necessity to constantly develop new skills and update their current ones just to stay competitive, meaning that employment, wages and living conditions were highly dependent on the acquired knowledge. Other factors such as a higher level of regionalism, trade liberalization, an increase in mobility opportunities not only for people but also of ideas, capital and knowledge, are all motivators of internationalization of higher education all over the world (de Wit et al., 2005).

The Latin American challenge in higher education

Although it seems like internationalization can only benefit higher education by increasing its quality and allowing the knowledge society to grow significantly, given the fact that “anyone” can now access all kinds of information, this is far from the truth. Emerging countries,

specifically Latin American countries, which are the focus of this study, have the need to compete and be part of this large market but do not always have the resources or a clear idea of what this process entails.

The UNESCO's Global Education Digest report of 2012 indicates an inbound mobility of 1.9% (UNESCO, 2012), among the lowest in the world. Other statistics are just as unfortunate. Rodríguez-Rodríguez (2015) states not only that it has the lowest percentage of universities who has implemented internationalization strategies but that they cannot effect the activities this process entails. Part of this resistance is due to fact that universities don't have the governmental support or means to make the changes (Gacel-Ávila, 2012).

Out of the 20 countries that make up Latin America, only four countries of them appear on the top ten ranking of Latin American Universities provided by Quacquarelli Symond (2015): Brazil (5), Chile (2), Mexico (2) and Colombia (1). The countries that entered these list are those whose Universities have been highly active in terms of internationalization as is the case of Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil, Universidad Católica de Chile, Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) and Universidad Nacional de Colombia. This shows that the efforts of adopting effective internationalization policies reflect in the results obtained, which in the end translate into higher incomes by enrollments and more possibilities to receive funding for research and other academic activities.

Through a systematic literature review, this study seeks to synthesize the existing literature on the topic of internationalization of higher education in Latin America with the aim of providing a wider understanding of this phenomenon in this region. Since such method has not been applied in this area, it might serve as an instrument for future researchers as it will identify important aspects that have not been addressed and indicate different and perhaps contradictory points of views. Finally, it will provide an overview of state of the field as well

as create awareness of the importance of reshaping existing policies in the institutions to include activities and develop initiatives that will allow them to compete in the global market.

METHODOLOGY

Given the large number of academic studies that are being published on the topic of Internationalization of higher education and the increasing attention to the Latin American region, the systematic or structured literature review method was considered the most appropriate (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002). Such method allows to present a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the subject, meaning that it provides a state of knowledge of the field and creates awareness of the current gaps and different points of views (De Los Reyes and Kazdin, 2008; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

This study hopes to provide a theoretical and methodological input for future research as no paper has been published on this specific subject. It seeks to “identify, evaluate and interpret all available research relevant to the research question” (Kitchenham, 2004, 1). With the purpose of doing so, a consolidated analysis of the research studies on internationalization of higher education in Latin America will be presented.

The systematic literature review is an academic method used to synthesize diverse results from previous research studies of an effect of phenomenon in order to summarize and determine the overall effect (David et. al, 2014). As mentioned by Petticrew and Roberts (2006, 10) “it is less of a discussion of the literature, and more of a scientific tool; (...) it can be used to summarize, appraise, and communicate the results and implications of otherwise unmanageable quantities of research”. It aims to provide new insights by collecting and reviewing and comparing the existing literature on the topic in a structured or systematic way. Although this method was originally conceived for social science (Glass, 1976), other

disciplines, mainly medicine, chose to adopt it and have further developed it since then to improve its legitimacy and minimize biases (David et. al, 2014).

With the aim of minimizing bias and guaranteeing a greater transparency in the work, researchers suggest that there be a clear methodology describing thoroughly how the study will be conducted (Boaz, Ashby & Young, 2002; Denyer & Neely, 2004; Parahoo, 2006). To obtain a comprehensive literature review, while ensuring the rigorousness and systematic approach of the study (Cronin, Ryan & Coughlan, 2008), the following steps were adopted as a guide for the research process and information review:

- a) Definition of the research question
- b) Identification of the key words associated with the research question
- c) Identification the databases that will be used to search for the information
- d) Establish inclusion and exclusion criteria
- e) Identification of the relevant literature on the topic
- f) Assessment of the quality of the literature

Information gathering is one of the most critical steps in these kinds of reviews since it is from this data that appropriate conclusions are formed (Li et. al; 2015). The first stage of the research consisted of the retrieval of studies on the internationalization of higher education in Latin America. Seven databases were used: EBSCOHost, JSTOR, ISI Web of Science, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, ProQuest and Google Scholar will be used. The first criterion for this selection was the access to the information. The second criterion was the characteristic and the relevance of the topics of the information found in the database, the third criterion was the world- known prestige of their journals of the fields of interest for this study (international business and education) and last, the ease with which they allow the user to introduce different criteria in the search. All journals mentioned met the aforementioned selection criteria with the

exception of Google Scholar, which provided a number of results, whose quality was later validated.

Since the keyword “internationalization” is used in countless studies, the search was extended to “Latin America”, “globalization”, “higher education”, “tertiary education”, “universities”, “post-secondary”, “colleges”. The terms were searched in Spanish as well: “*internacionalización*”, “*globalización*”, “*Latinoamérica*”, “*educación superior*”, “*universidades*” and “*educación terciaria*”. As part of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the selected keywords must appear either on the title or the abstract. The language is the second criteria; the article must be published in either English or Spanish. Third, since the interest of this search is to identify the current modes, trends, challenges and risks, only publications indexed between 2000 and 2015 are included. Finally, the articles must be published on a peer-reviewed journal.

After establishing these criteria, 95 results were retrieved in the first search. As part of the identification of relevant literature, a brief analysis of the abstracts was conducted to corroborate the relation to the topic. In this stage, only 36 articles were selected. After further review of the material, 25 articles were considered relevant for the study. Motives for exclusion on this phase were the relevance with the chosen research topic, meaning that the objective of the study must be highly related to the topics to be discussed in the present paper: modes of internationalization, trends, risks and challenges.

As in any methodology, there are limitations. The excessive amount of information the researcher recovers and must codify, synthesize and compare, can lead to subjectivity and exclusion of material that could be of relevance. Availability is another important issue, since only material to which the researcher had free access is included in this study. Poor keyword selection, establishment of criteria that wrongly excludes valuable publication and short time frame for the search are all important limitations that must be acknowledged. High probability

of bias is another great risk in work carried out by one researcher, not only for the strong opinions or for points of view that the researcher might have on a certain topic and that can translate into his work, but also in the obtained information, which leads to bias in the systematic review.

FINDINGS

After undergoing a rigorous research of literature in the topic of Internationalization of Latin American Higher Education, 25 studies were found that matched the exclusion and quality criteria defined in the methodology section. Although a significant number of results were obtained in the initial search, the relevant literature that met the criteria was far less than expected. On the positive side, from the 95 articles retrieved in the first search, it was possible to observe

As it was to be anticipated, the majority of the studies were written by Latin American scholars, predominantly Mexican researchers, with the exception of three whose nationalities are English, Canadian and Spanish. Table 1 shows the results along with the nationality of the researcher and the year it was published. 13 of the 25 publications are from journals in Latin America, demonstrating the awareness and attention that is currently being given to this process in the academic field of the region.

As a result of the search, it was discovered that the chosen topic entails a great variety of dimensions and could be analyzed from a number of analytical perspectives, though a shared conceptualization of internationalization of higher education was found among them. The following review however, focuses only on the modes, trends, challenges and risks associated with the internationalization process of the Latin American higher education.

Table 1*Search results*

AUTHOR	YEAR	TITLE	NATIONALITY	JOURNAL
Torres C. A. & Schugurensky D.	2002	The political economy of higher education in the era of neoliberal globalization: Latin America in comparative perspective.	Brazil & Canada	Higher Education
Fernández-Lamarra, N.	2003	Higher Education, Quality Evaluation and Accreditation in Latin America and MERCOSUR	Argentina	European Journal of Education
Cañón-Pinto, J.	2005	Internacionalización de la educación superior y educación superior internacional: elementos para un análisis sociológico general	Colombia	Revista Colombiana de Sociología
Dias-Sobrinho, J.	2005	Evaluación y reformas de la educación superior en América Latina	Brazil	Perfiles Educativos
García-Guadilla, C.	2005	Complejidades de la globalización e internacionalización de la educación superior: Interrogantes para América Latina	Venezuela	Cuadernos del CENDES
Gacel-Ávila, J.	2007	The Process of Internationalization of Latin American Higher Education	Mexico	Journal of Studies in International Education
Cordera-Campos, F. & Santamaría-Ambriz, R.	2008	Internacionalización, autonomía y calidad de la educación superior: Elementos para la integración de América Latina y el Caribe	Mexico	Universidades
Hermo, J. & Pitelli, C.	2008	Globalización e internacionalización de la educación superior. Apuntes para el estudio de la situación en argentina y el MERCOSUR.	España	Revista Española de Educación Comparada
Luchilo, L. & Albornoz, M.	2008	Universities and global competition for graduate students: scenarios for Latin America.	Argentina	Technology Analysis & Strategic Management
Brunner, J.J.	2009	The Bologna Process From a Latin American Perspective	Chile	Journal of Studies in International Education
Rama, C.	2009	El nacimiento de la acreditación internacional	Mexico	Avaliação (Campinas)
Villanueva, E.	2010	Perspectivas de la educación superior en América Latina : construyendo futuros	Mexico	Perfiles Educativos

Gacel-Ávila, J.	2011	The impact of the Bologna Process on higher education in Latin America.	Mexico	Revista de Universidad y Sociedad del Conocimiento (RUSC)
Lucchesi, M.	2011	La Universidad Internacional en América Latina: un Nuevo Paradigma para el Siglo XXI. (Spanish)	Brazil	Formación Universitaria
Reyes-Sarmiento, L.	2011	¿Integración o transnacionalización de la educación superior en América Latina?	Colombia	Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado.
Botto, M.	2012	La transnacionalización de la educación superior: ¿qué papel juegan los nuevos regionalismos en la difusión de estas ideas? El caso del MERCOSUR (1992-2012) en perspectiva comparada	Argentina	Revista Iberoamericana de Educación Superior
Gacel-Ávila, J.	2012	Comprehensive Internationalisation in Latin America	Mexico	Higher Education Policy
Gomes, A. M.; Robertson, S. L. & Dale, R.	2012	The social condition of higher education: globalisation and (beyond) regionalisation in Latin America	Brasil	Globalisation, Societies and Education
Amador-Fierros, G.	2013	Política educativa y su relación con la internacionalización y la cooperación internacional en la educación superior: el caso de México.	Mexico	Portes: Revista Mexicana de Estudios Sobre la Cuenca del Pacifico
Barragán-Codina, J. N., & Leal-López, R. H.	2013	The Importance of Student Mobility, Academic Exchange and Internationalization of Higher Education for College Students in a Globalized World: The Mexican and Latin American Case”	Mexico	Revista Daena (International Journal of Good Conscience)
González-González, J., & Santamaría-Ambriz, R.	2013	Calidad y acreditación en la educación superior: integración e internacionalización de América Latina y el Caribe.	Peru	Educación
Berry, C. & Taylor, J.	2014	Internationalisation in higher education in Latin America: policies and practice in Colombia and Mexico.	UK	Higher Education
Solanas, F.	2014	Intercambio cooperativo versus mercantilización competitiva: las políticas de movilidad académica en el MERCOSUR y la Unión Europea.	Argentina	Revista Iberoamericana de Educación Superior

Corti, A. M., Oliva, D. L., & de la Cruz, S.	2015	La internacionalización y el mercado universitario	Mexico	Revista de la educación superior
Rodríguez-Rodríguez, S. M.	2015	Redes de colaboración académica: una respuesta a los desafíos de la globalización y la sociedad del conocimiento.	Mexico	Sinéctica

Although a number of studies focused on similar subjects, they all provided their own insights and perspectives. Internationalization, as a strategy for improvement of quality (Gacel-Avila, 2007; Luchilo & Albornoz, 2008; Cordera-Campos & Santamaría Ambriz, 2008; Gacel-Avila, 20012; Amador-Fierros, 2013; Barragán & López, 2013; Gonzalez & Ambriz, 2013) can take place in a number of ways (Gacel-Avila, 2007; Luchilo & Albornoz; 2008) and these can be later categorized into strategies of internationalization (Cordera-Campos & Santamaría Ambriz; 2008; Gacel-Avila, 2012). Student mobility is the most common mode of internationalization and often the only way adopted by institutions in Latin America and has a dynamic effect on other modes (Cañón-Pinto, 2005). Modes such as internationalization of curriculum are practically non-existent in the region (Barragán-Codina & Leal-Lopéz, 2013).

Other studies focus on the rationales, benefits, risks and challenges of the internationalization process in Latin America (Gacel-Avila, 2007; Berry & Taylor, 2014). Luchilo & Albornoz (2008) describe different scenarios of government responses to these challenges currently posed by the emerging trends in the higher education sector. Garcia-Guadilla (2005), Cañón-Pinto (2005) and Reyes-Sarmiento (2011), share their concern on the consequences that this process might have on the region.

Some researches concentrate on the inter-institutional and intraregional cooperation, specifically on the regionalization of higher education (Lucchesi, 2011; Botto, 2012; Gomes, Robertson & Dale, 2012). In this regard, Brunner (2009), Gacel-Avila (2011) and Solanas

(2014) discuss the MERCOSUR's education area and other initiatives of regional cooperation and make a comparison with the European Union's Bologna Process. Networks are part of this international cooperation (Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2015).

Finally, a number of studies focus on the negative connotation of the new commercial conceptualization of higher education (Reyes-Sarmiento, 2011; Corti, Oliva & De la Cruz, 2015) and the effects this will have on the overall quality in Latin American higher education. This new nature of education creates the need for the State to find a way to ensure the quality of education (Dias Sobrinho, 2005; Villanueva, 2010; Botto, 2012; Gonzalez-Gonzalez & Santamaría-Ambriz, 2013). Cañón-Pinto (2005), Cordera-Campo & Santamaría-Ambriz (2008), Gacel-Avila (2012) and Barragán-Codina & Leal-López (2014) indicate that comprehensive internationalization is the only way in which the progress of internationalization can have a possibility of success. The strategies must be aligned to the institutional mission and values and be integrated in all the activities in order to be effective and contribute to the quality of the sector (Gacel-Avila, 2012). All actors involved in the process must be aware of the importance of such strategies and implement them (Cañón-Pinto, 2005).

Table 2 summarizes the topics discussed in each of the research studies selected for the systematic literature review. It can be observed that the topics which are mentioned with more frequency in the papers are the modes of internationalization, internationalization as a strategy for increasing the quality and regional integration.

Table 2

Topics discussed in the studies

AUTHOR	Comprehensive internationalisation	Modes of internationalization	Internationalization as a strategy for quality	Rationales, benefits, and challenges	Regional Integration	International cooperation and networks	Inter-institutional agreements	Accreditation and assessment	Effect of neoliberalism on HE	Concerns on internationalization of HE	Marketization and Commodification of HE
Torres C. A. & Schugurensky D. (2002)									x		
Fernandez-Lamarra, N. (2003)					x			x	x		
Cañón-Pinto, J. (2005)	x	x								x	x
Dias-Sobrinho, J. (2005)								x	x		
García-Guadilla, C. (2005)					x	x				x	
Gacel-Ávila, J. (2007)	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	
Cordera-Campos, F. & Santamaría-Ambriz, R. (2008)	x	x	x		x			x			x
Hermo, J. & Pitelli, C. (2008)					x						x
Luchilo, L. & Alborno, M. (2008)		x	x							x	
Brunner, J.J. (2009)					x	x					
Rama, C. (2009)											
Villanueva, E. (2010)					x			x	x		
Gacel-Ávila, J. (2011)					x						
Lucchesi, M. (2011)					x						
Reyes-Sarmiento, L. (2011)					x					x	
Botto, M. (2012)					x			x			
Gacel-Ávila, J. (2012)	x	x	x	x							
Gomes, A. M.; Robertson, S. L. & Dale, R. (2012)					x				x		x
Amador-Fierros, G. (2013)			x			x					
Barragán-Codina, J. N., & Leal-López, R. H. (2013)	x	x	x								
González-González, J., & Santamaría-Ambriz, R. (2013)			x		x			x			

Berry, C. & Taylor, J. (2014)				x						x	
Solanas, F. (2014)		x			x						
Corti, A. M., Oliva, D. L., & de la Cruz, S. (2015)											x
Rodríguez-Rodríguez, S. M. (2015)						x					
	5	7	7	3	12	5	1	6	5	6	5
	20%	28%	28%	12%	48%	20%	4%	24%	20%	24%	20%

DISCUSSION

Latin American higher education has undergone significant changes since the last decade of the twentieth century as a consequence of the political reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (Gacel-Avila, 2007; Luchilo & Albornoz, 2008; Brunner, 2009; Amador-Fierros, 2012). Higher education policies and trends cannot be analyzed in isolation from the economic and political situation of the region (Torres & Shugarenky, 2002). With the fall of welfare states and the emergence of the new neoliberal agendas, policies such as deregulation, liberalization, and privatization created the need to be part of the larger global trend (Gomes, Robertson & Dale, 2012). In this manner, it has gone from being a citizen's right to a marketable service (Torres & Shugarenky, 2002; Dias-Sobrinho, 2005).

Internationalization modes

Studies coincide in that there are a number of ways in which higher education institutions can internationalize. Luchilo & Albornoz (2008) propose the following typology: international mobility of students and faculty, supply of services abroad, setting up facilities in a foreign country, transference of institutional models and joint research projects with a foreign university. Gacel-Avila (2007) complements this classification with international networks for research and teaching and cooperation in research, both highly related to joint research projects mentioned above, and internationalization of curriculum, which is rare since international at

home is an unfamiliar concept for policy-makers. Mobility is the most common type, although still underdeveloped, with Latin America having the lowest number of outgoing students (Gacel-Avila, 2012).

According to Gacel-Avila (2012), these types of internationalization can be grouped in two different strategies: those that affect the individual and those that affect the system. Similar to these are those proposed by Cordera-Campos & Santamaría-Ambriz (2008): individual, institutional, regional-subregional and intraregional and external providers of higher education. The regional block of MERCOSUR, has positively influenced many of these modalities since it created synergies among the member countries and allows knowledge and resource transference that contribute to the increase in quality (Lucchesi, 2011; Amador-Fierros, 2013).

Internationalization trends in Latin American higher education institutions (HEIs)

Although each country of the region has its own political and economic policies that in turn shape the policies related to higher education, three trends can be observed in the existing literature: accreditation and evaluation process, commodification of higher education and the emergence of foreign providers and finally, the effects of regionalization on internationalization.

With the new neoliberal policies established in the 1990s, along with the economic crisis that took place in the region during that time, came public spending restrictions that significantly affected the education sector. Due to this lack of funding, privatization of the higher education became a trend (Fernández-Lamarra, 2013). This in turn, unleashed a series of issues like the creation of new private institutions, both national and international, to meet the high demand of this service. This inclusion in the global arena required national higher education institutions in the region to comply with new demands of the market in terms of quality and compatibility that would allow them countries to compete.

The emergence of new players in the high education sector raised a concern for quality, which created the need for the States to develop standardized criteria (Dias Sobrinho, 2005; Villanueva, 2010; Botto, 2012). This standardization entailed the implementation of evaluation and accreditation processes not only nationally but internationally, that can attest to quality of the institutions and whose responsibility was not only to control but to support all processes of education and attempts to internationalize (Gonzalez-Gonzalez & Santamaría-Ambriz, 2013). MERCOSUR has contributed to the establishment and improvement of these processes (Gomes, Robertson & Dale, 2012). On regards to international accreditation Rama (2009) explains that the reason why very few countries apply to these kinds of accreditations or recognitions are the high costs for the regions and the difficulty to comply with recommendations and requirements of these organizations.

After being classified as a commercial service by the WTO, education began to be perceived more as a new profitable and lucrative market (García-Guadilla, 2005; Reyes-Sarmiento, 2011, Corti, Oliva & De la Cruz, 2015). Consequently, this generated an increase in the entrance of new foreign providers, whether they be universities or enterprises, offering their services in the region. Although the phenomenon of transnationalization is still in its first stages in this region, national governments must be prepared to face the threat, taking into consideration that there are no current policies controlling these profit-hungry institutions and the quality of the service they provide (Hermo & Pitelli, 2008). In this sense, acting as a regional block seems like the best option to protect the sector and prevent possible external pressures (Hermo & Pitelli, 2008).

Regionalization comes in as a platform for strengthening the quality and competitiveness of higher education by encouraging the formation of synergies (Lucchesi, 2011; Amador-Fierros, 2013). For some time, regional integration has been a desire of many Latin American scholars (Reyes-Sarmiento, 2011). Modalities such as interregional and

interinstitutional cooperation are part of this trend. Rodríguez-Rodríguez (2015) mentions the importance of cooperation and regional networks, indicating that they provide the opportunity to complement skills, experiences and knowledge that would be difficult to acquire otherwise.

In the same line of cooperation, regional blocks such as MERCOSUR have greatly contributed to the increase in quality of Latin American higher education (Gomes, Robertson & Dale, 2012; Lucchesi, 2011). Although its main objectives in the education area, regional accreditation of degrees, cross-border mobility of students and faculty and interinstitutional cooperation among members, have not all been achieved, great benefits are observed such as helping the smaller countries create or improve their own evaluation and accreditation agencies (Brunner, 2009; Botto, 2012) collaborative research between EU and Latin American countries and encouragement to discuss topics for analysis between government, universities and the press (Brunner, 2009).

While the academic integration, such as the one attained by the European Union's Bologna Process, seems unfeasible to many researchers and policy-makers, Gacel-Avila (2011) states that an academic reform based on this model could change the current educational paradigms in the region and provide the graduates with the skills to compete at an international level. Other researchers, while acknowledge the benefits, disagree expressing that the difference in institutional systems, current political economy, Napoleonic nature, lack of governmental support and insufficient budget, it is unlikely that such a project would have success (Brunner, 2009). They do however, indicate that if great changes take place, it can be possible to have a similar process in the long-term.

Risks and challenges

Despite the progress achieved by Latin American higher education, the performance in the international arena lags far behind regions like North America and Europe (Berry & Taylor, 2014; Rodriguez-Rodriguez, 2015). This is due to a number of challenges, some that can be easily overcome and others that require deeper interventions.

The study carried out by Berry & Taylor (2014) indicates that although universities are aware of the importance of internationalization they have yet to understand all the benefits that this process provides. The lack of government support, not only financially but also in terms of policies and accompaniment programs, discourage many institutions from incurring in such efforts. Due to this lack of budget, institutions must prioritize activities. As mentioned by Amador-Fierros (2013), politics and reforms are carried out as basic needs in the sector are met. Such needs are coverage and access, a minimum level of quality and international cooperation. Until these are fulfilled, other points of the agenda, internationalization strategies in this case, are put on hold.

Of the institutions that indicate their commitment with this process, few actually have a coordinated and planned guideline of the activities that are to be carried out in order to be successful in this task (Berry & Taylor, 2014). It has been observed that a great number of inter-institutional agreements are currently inactive, indicating that they are signed more as protocol than a serious commitment (Gacel-Ávila, 2007). This means that not only is there a lack of planning and alignment between discourse and action, but also that progress in regards to internationalization in the region is perhaps overestimated (Gacel-Ávila, 2007). The Napoleonic model of education currently present in the majority of Latin American Universities, characterized by an rigid curriculum, dogmatic teaching, and inclination towards nationalistic views (Cañón-Pinto, 2005; Gacel-Ávila, 2007; Brunner, 2009) is a characteristic that slows down any initiative to advance in the direction required by the global reality. Other aspects like the low foreign language proficiency, reactive response to cooperative research

and interinstitutional projects, lack of autonomy of internationalization offices (Gacel-Ávila, 2007), are also on the list of difficulties or challenges hindering an effective outcome of internationalization processes.

Supposing all the aforementioned challenges can be overcome, these numerous risks that come with a process of internationalization. One of the most common concerns of scholars and policy-makers is brain-drain (Luchilo & Albornoz, 2008). This is a risk for most developing countries since they do not have the sufficient resources or requires policies to retain their most qualified graduates or attract back once they have travelled abroad (Luchilo & Albornoz, 2008; Gacel-Ávila, 2012; Berry & Taylor, 2014).

Another great risk associated with this process are the decrease in quality. The main motivations of higher education institutions is exactly the opposite. Unfortunately, the new commodification of the service has encouraged the creation of all types of institutions given that this constitutes a profit making business. In this sense, quality for those who only seek financial earning is not a priority (Cañón-Pinto, 2005). This fact, taking into consideration the lack of governmental norms and regulatory mechanisms aimed to control foreign providers (García-Guadilla, 2005), is great danger for the overall quality and reputation of all the higher education and society in general since it would not be possible to protect them from these types of institutions.

Other risks identified in the literature were the “loss of cultural identity”, homogenization of curriculums and (Cañón-Pinto, 2005; Gacel-Ávila, 2007). These are highly related and refer to the changes that must be made in the course programs, since a big aspect of quality in the region is relevance to the national context. In this sense, (Cañón-Pinto, 2005) expresses the need to elaborate on the topics in such a way that the student can grasp the information and is able to apply it or adapt it in both national and international settings.

Finally, the lack of comprehensiveness, or “the embracement of all levels of the education process” (Gacel-Ávila, 2007, 406), in the internationalization process can also be classified as risk or threat. Cañón-Pinto (2005), Gacel-Ávila (2007), Cordera-Campos & Santamaría Ambriz (2008), Gacel-Ávila (2012) and Barragán-Codina & Leal-López (2013) all agree that this is a critical and non-negotiable aspect of the process in order to have successful and positive results.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR LATIN AMERICAN HEIs

Latin America has made great progress in the last three decades in terms of internationalization of higher education. This study aims to provide an outlook of the current situation in the region in terms of trends, risks, and challenges that can serve as a framework for researchers and policy makers on the importance of carrying out initiatives that can improve the quality and competitiveness of higher education. In addition, it can indicate what aspects of this sector need the most improvement and support in order to have an idea of where the efforts should be focused. Without the inclusion of the international dimension in this area, the gap between Latin America and other regions will continuously increase.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

There are currently no studies using the Systematic Literature Review methodology, thus this work hopes to provide future researchers with an outline of the existing literature on the subject of Internationalization of higher education in Latin America, focusing on the main trends currently observed in this sector, as well as the risks and challenges this process poses for the region. It aims to bring together different perceptions, conclusions, and experiences of researchers from a different country that can provide insight on this topic. It contributes by

synthesizing the information as to indicate existing gaps and topics that might require further investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

Internationalization of higher education has gained importance in the agendas of higher education institutions as well as the national scale. Unfortunately, and despite the great advancements that can be observed in the increase of indicators such as student mobility, university cooperation agreements, and participation in regional and international networks, these are still significantly low compared to developed countries. This gap is consequence of a number of factors and characteristics of the region such as the need to address more pressing needs of the sector, budgetary restrictions and low governmental support, lack of long-term policies, lack of institutional alignment, among others.

Regionalization can serve as a platform to achieve internationalization objectives, as it creates synergies that strengthen the capabilities and competitiveness of Latin American higher education, increasing its quality and allowing it to slowly close the existing gap with more developed regions. Regional blocks such as MERCOSUR, with the influence of projects such as the EU's Bologna Process, have positively impacted the education sector and work towards a future academic integration between its member countries.

In agreement with Van der Wende (1997), policy makers require a greater understanding of the importance of the internationalization of higher education since it has become a requirement to compete with global and even regional players. They must be aware of its impact on the improvement on quality in order to define policies that can achieve the greatly desired competitiveness. This should be done in alignment with institutional missions and processes in order to join efforts towards the attainment of common goals.

Although a significant amount of material has been published on internationalization of higher education, the material for the Latin American region is still very limited. Out of the 25 articles retrieved in the search, only three researchers are not from this region. This indicates an increasing importance of this topic in the region, especially in the academic field. Nonetheless, perspectives from researchers of developed countries could provide new insights that can contribute to the current studies.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations regarding the methodology. As a systematic literature review, bias of the researcher during the process of data extraction is the main threat to validity. The fact that there is only one researcher increases this subjectivity. To mitigate this threat, seven databases were used and articles were selected taking into account the criteria previously defined in the Methodology section. Due to the limited amount of information pertaining this specific subject, special attention was placed on the quality and relevance of the information. As part of the exclusion criteria, only material from peer-reviewed journal was used for the review to assure the validity and rigor of the study.

An important topic for future research is the relation between the implementation of comprehensive internationalization in a Latin American institutions and its effects on the international indicators.

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