

## Transitioning to a new university curriculum management

## Transitando a una nueva gerencia curricular universitaria

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### ABSTRACT

The curriculum in the university context must be a flexible, open, pertinent instrument oriented to support and generate dynamic academic-managerial practices within the framework of teaching, research and extension. The purpose of the research was to build an approach to the conceptualization of curricular management from the notion of curriculum in the context of the Universidad Nacional Experimental Francisco de Miranda. We worked methodologically from the premises of the qualitative approach, in the context of the interpretative paradigm. The curriculum is not an abstract concept that precedes and has an existence apart from human experience; on the contrary, it is a form of organizational concretion of a set of human educational practices. Hence, the curriculum, from any socio-political viewpoint, is an organizing plan of actions aimed at the functions of planning, organizing, directing, executing and controlling the training processes of professionals required by society.

**Descriptors:** university curriculum; vocational school curriculum; educational research. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

### RESUMEN

El currículo en el contexto universitario ha de ser un instrumento flexible, abierto, pertinente y orientado a fundamentar y generar dinámicas prácticas académica-gerenciales en el marco de la docencia, la investigación y la extensión. La investigación tuvo por propósito construir una aproximación a la conceptualización de gerencia curricular desde la noción de currículo desde el contexto de la Universidad Nacional Experimental Francisco de Miranda. Se trabajó metodológicamente desde las premisas del enfoque cualitativo, en contexto al paradigma interpretativo. El currículo, no es un concepto abstracto que antecede y tenga existencia aparte a la experiencia humana; por lo contrario, es una forma de concreción organizativa de un conjunto de prácticas educativas humanas. De allí que el currículo, desde cualquier visión sociopolítica; es un plan organizador de acciones, que apuntan a las funciones de planificación, organización, dirección, ejecución y control de los procesos formativos de profesionales que requiere la sociedad.

**Descriptores:** plan de estudios universitarios; plan de estudios profesionales superiores; investigación pedagógica. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).

## INTRODUCTION

The management of university academic processes, with emphasis on curriculum management, is the intentional human action consistent with the educational goals and objectives that is deployed transversally at all levels of the organization, having the curriculum as a reference; which, as a sociocultural construction (Ylimaki et al. 2017), is the organizing element of the academic-managerial practices around Teaching, Research and Extension.

It should be noted that the management of Teaching, Research and Extension processes has been marked by a technicist curricular theoretical approach (Canales-Sánchez, 2019), which generates prescriptive, linear, vertical, atomized and fragmented educational-managerial practices that have been configured as a hardened and entrenched tradition (Santaella-Rodríguez & Martínez-Heredia, 2017). However, for this management to change and develop with quality thinking, it must appropriate a new approach that considers and makes visible the Being there, imagined, felt and hidden of organizational subjects (Driver, 2016). That is to say, that articulates the different representational perspectives, ways of being and behaviors of teachers; since it is from this sphere that dynamic and innovative academic-managerial strategies can be deployed, which can lead the university to the change and transformation it requires.

The raised, contributes in supporting the position assumed around the inexistence of a theoretical model implied of principles and innovative orientations for the management of such processes, which have emerged from the meanings constructed by the teachers; which, are intentional of their behavior as Dasein, or entity that exists when it wonders and exposes from its Being, the Being that is found in the existing (Braga & Farinha, 2017). Similarly, the motivation to investigate from their experiences as organizational subjects, particularly from their ways of being, acting and behaving managerially; since, these as expressions of their intentionality, have to give meaning and resignification to the academic-curricular management as a fundamental action of the university.

The curriculum, as an entity of mediating representation theory-educational reality (Paredes, 2019), where the system of beliefs and thoughts of the subjects involved is implicit, is the ordering guideline of the teaching-learning-evaluation dynamics that constitutes the indispensable navigation compass for the management and management of education (Arribas-Estebarez, 2017). Therefore, in the university context it must be a flexible, open, pertinent instrument oriented to support and generate dynamic academic-managerial practices in the framework of teaching, research and extension as core processes that give it functional organization according to its formative purpose.

In consideration, it is evident the need for the university to have solid foundations and adequate guidelines that support a successful management of university academic processes (Delgado-Cotrino, 2016); considering, not only in what refers to the managerial and curricular theories as concepts given or constituted in the academic-structural, but also encompassing what is given, constituting itself as a sphere from where the subjects and their subjectivity are thought. From this perspective, the dependence of the objects of the represented reality on the subjects that represent it is undeniable.

In this context I must bear in mind that trying to understand the reality of university organizations, in terms of the management of their university academic processes in the field of curriculum management is not an easy task, since any form of university management will always be inextricably linked to the architecture of its management. Considering this, it is worth noting that the UNEFM is constituted in the particular space of research, as it is my place of daily work-professional development. Therefore, it is important to describe it briefly as a scenario of approach. In this sense, it is a Venezuelan public institution of university education of experimental character, which was founded in July 1977, in Venezuela, specifically in the city of Santa Ana de Coro, Falcon State.

Due to the above, the purpose of the research was to build an approach to the conceptualization of curriculum management from the notion of curriculum in the context of the Universidad Nacional Experimental Francisco de Miranda.

## METHOD

We worked methodologically from the premises of the qualitative approach, in the context of the interpretative paradigm, being the current manuscript part of a research, therefore, we present aprioristic theoretical analysis as a result of the analysis of documentary content used to nineteen refereed scientific articles from databases such as Scielo, Scopus, Redalyc, WOS and two books referred to as classic literature in relation to the topic addressed, forming a bibliographic population of 21 documents, which provided guidelines in accordance with the perspectives and experiences of the research team, which is formed by the author and key informants of the project referred to generate an emerging theory.

### *Research procedure*

1. The ontological relationship of the researcher with the phenomenon under study was the starting point.
2. The researcher's a priori assumptions about the subject matter were developed in documentary form.
3. Dialogues were held with key informants with the intention of finding out their initial appreciation of the topic.
4. The databases Scielo, Scopus, Redalyc, WOS were searched for documents based on the keywords: university management, university curriculum, hidden or implicit curriculum, curricular transformation. Not more than 6 years old.
5. Nineteen articles were selected which presented information related to the researcher's interests.
6. They were scrutinized by means of the content analysis technique, extracting the most relevant ideas with the intention of being quoted verbatim or paraphrased, in order to support the researcher's vision or to expand it.
7. As a central result, an approach to the conceptualization of curriculum management from the notion of curriculum is presented.

## ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The present section of analysis of the results presents a first theoretical approach to the question posed, from an a priori conception of the researcher in consideration of segmenting the epistemological framework supporting a theorization of a state of the question focused on responding to a curricular managerial vision that cannot be perceived as an isolated reality, but rather, complex in its actions, in consideration of what has been described:

### **Research and knowledge relevance and importance of university academic process management in curriculum management**

In the context of the intentions of this research at the UNEFM, a curricular vision is urgently needed for the conception of innovative forms in the management of teaching, research and extension processes; seen from the perspective that these are constituted as backbone structures not only of the curriculum, but also of the entire organizational system of the university, it is necessary to transcend the traditional practices that have become entrenched in time and characterize management. In the same way, this implies starting to think of them as representational elements of the ways of being, acting and behaving of teachers, since they are the ones who give meaning and sense to the academic-curricular management.

That is why, beyond justifying the reasons for this research journey, I show why it is important to consider the Management of University Academic Processes in curricular management as an object of knowledge and a research phenomenon. In this sense, the research process started from a previous understanding of the type of management that exists and that is desired. Therefore, framing the study from the understanding, makes it acquire great importance and relevance, since it is given from a process of introspective inquiry, penetration and interpretation of the experiences lived by the subjects, around the phenomenon as a reality that exists in the UNEFM.

Likewise, the introspective doing was constituted in a transcendent element in the ontological-living sense (De-los-Reyes-Navarro et al. 2019), because as a teacher and researcher, I am a subject who is immersed in the university social reality; that is, I live the phenomenon in everyday life and in the relationship with others. Furthermore, as I said before, I am the one who creates, recreates and is recreated in the experience, through the exhaustive production of knowledge, clearly reflecting that knowing, doing, being and living together are inseparable and inherent to the human essence.

Also, it was necessary to go towards an epistemology of complexity such as phenomenology (Ortiz-Navarrete & Barrios-Jara, 2020). This with the intention of constructing a scientific knowledge moved by the epistemic voice of the intentionality of consciousness, as a dynamic that is founded in the time of constitution of the is that exists essentially as an ecstatic unit, enraptured, caught in the horizon as a world of senses and meanings. Likewise, by the principle of intersubjectivity that incorporates the point of view of the we; from listening to understand and interpret the subjective consciousness of the I in coexisting with the others, as creators all of the phenomenal reality, which is expressed as a world of daily life with meaning. For, it is from there that categories emerge as innovative assumptions that allow rethinking management and academic-curricular management. Therefore, understanding and comprehending the subjective conscience from the coexistence with others, became an axiological foundation of relevance, which becomes the axiology of care.

Hence, the hermeneutic phenomenological method and the qualitative methodology also represent an element of significance, since what is involved is to go beyond a proceduralist scientificist vision in the construction of knowledge, to transcend to a more human one; which, as already said, is given from listening, looking and feeling. In the same way, from the fraternal relationship, intersubjective understanding and interpretation; because currently management and management require the assumption of ways that bring them closer to their objects of study as phenomena that occur there, through the human being that makes them.

In this sense, the phenomenological method and the qualitative methodology allowed the observation of such management of the academic processes to leave behind the purely mechanistic and functionalist approaches, to perceive, understand and recreate it from the viewpoint of the subjects as beings who, with their actions, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, experiences and experiences, their own and unique, configure the organizational being as a whole. Of course, without annulling or neutralizing the intuitive process of the researcher, since this is what allows the process of capturing the experience, understanding existence and transforming it into knowledge.

As far as the theoretical-scientific relevance is concerned, this is given by the construction of knowledge as a contribution to the science of management and management intertwined with the science of the curriculum, from multiple but unique emerging perspectives. This product of understanding the experience of the university subjects, elucidating the power of the management of the academic processes of teaching, research and extension in the curriculum, since it has been assumed as a reality that is established in the university, which coexists with the university subjects. Specifically, this will contribute to substantiate the managerial knowledge system of university organizations, with theoretical approaches around academic management, from the world of the curriculum as a horizon of meaning.

In the socio-political context, the research is considered of importance, since the situation of the management of academic processes as fundamental elements that create and recreate social and political relations in the UNEFM, can only begin to change if it is first understood from what represents the thoughts, feelings and constituent behaviors of the subjective conscience of the subjects that integrate it. From there also, the considerable in the praxeological sense, since a knowledge was generated through the acts of deep listening from the coexistence with others and the coexistence with the other; of what and how things are done, and of their best possibility. This as a praxis that moves towards the change of reality, both internal and external; both of the other and of oneself.

The study in the institutional line is important given that the management of academic-curricular processes is a substantive dimension of government and management in university

organizations. Therefore, conceiving theoretical constructs around this, from the worldview of teachers and considering that the emphasis was placed on the observation of the qualitative interactions of social actors, can enable a better art for the conciliation of interests, decision making and university governance. In this sense, it is worth saying that, for the UNEFM, it is transcendental to constantly rethink its policies and practices of academic management, especially those that respond to the dimensions of teaching, research and extension; because as processes immersed in the curriculum they are energized by the intentionality of those who make the management.

### **Approach to the conceptualization of curriculum management from the notion of curriculum.**

With regard to the word curriculum, it is important to know that etymologically it comes from the Latin term *currículum*, which means career, walk, journey. In this sense, it is an expression where the principles of organicity, continuity and sequentiality underlie; therefore, in the practical, operative context it implies what must be done processually to achieve something (Osorio-Villegas, 2017).

Now, traditionally the curriculum in the university context, in one way or another, has been understood as the study plan. That is, it has been represented as the set of curricular units or subjects organically structured and containing objectives, processes, procedures and contents for the acquisition of knowledge and the training of professionals; therefore, "it implies imagining flexible curricular and institutional spaces that allow the entry of the contingent and the provisional, and that at the same time are located in the possibilities offered by the current curricular structures and their modes of operation" (Abate et al. 2019, p. 10).

Hence, conceptualizing the curriculum is not an easy task, since it is not just defining it and sticking to it. The curriculum as such, although its expression is of relatively recent use, is characterized by being polysemic, multiform and complex; because it comes from the sociocultural and historically constructed reality, being part of the vital structure of society; hence, it is subject to multiple readings and interpretations, in direct interpenetration with other concepts, such as didactics, teaching, learning, among others (Locatelli, 2018). Therefore, the particular meanings that have been established around diverse enunciations of curriculum are neither philosophically nor politically neutral.

In this sense, one of the definitions that challenges the various positions assumed by teachers and university organizations regarding the curriculum is the one proposed by (De Alba, 2002); consequently, she considers that the curriculum is the synthesis of cultural elements (knowledge, values, norms, customs, beliefs, habits) that structure the socio-political proposal of the State in the field of education. That is, it is a project that operationalizes and makes viable its ontological, axiological, epistemological, methodological, praxeological, political and institutional vision; therefore, it is the practical expression of its ideas, philosophy and methods. Hence, the curriculum is neither neutral nor skeptical, since it always responds to the particular political project of each government, thus connoting a form and style of managerial management in university organizations.

It is important to know that in any curricular proposal two types of components or aspects converge. On the one hand, the conceptual-formal component that refers to the written norm as an official document, containing supporting dispositions, plans, programs, route schemes, standards, processes, among others; and the basis that is adjusted to manage and manage the development of educational and/or academic practices, at all levels of curricular concretion. On the other hand, the practical-cultural component that allows to really understand the curriculum, since it represents the subjects' own experience in the action and operability of this; and, from where the elements of coupling or resistance to the forms of management and management of such educational-curricular practices are unveiled (Icarte & Labate, 2016).

The curriculum can be constituted as a practical expression of a philosophy of life of a country and a methodology of educational and/or academic work; then, it can be said that the curriculum is an instrument object of constant interpellation, since it is an element that contains the underlying doctrinal system to manage, manage practices, educational processes, which lead to the



achievement of the formative purposes, justified from the vision of the country and the citizen to be formed (Mujica-Johnson, 2020).

However, reflecting on the idea that the curriculum is susceptible to multiple readings and interpretations, we can express that it can be viewed from different angles. Considering (Sacristán, 1991), the curriculum can be observed from three perspectives: as a social construction with function, it is a way that intertwines the vision of university-professional training-development of society; as a plan, it is to assume it formally and materially as a university educational project that is sought, and definitely as a totalizing action, it is a sphere that interconnects diverse practices; among them the pedagogical and managerial ones; in perennial interaction with educational theories and from where the pedagogical-curricular discourse is structured, which always ends up going far beyond the prescriptive and programmatic.

From the ideas proposed, the curriculum is conceived as a plan that implements the functions of the university; a situation that occurs within the framework of an educational policy of a given social system, which responds to a particular socio-historical moment and an institutional framework. Therefore, it is a formal and material referent that projects the decisive determinations of the pedagogical practice (Flores-Serna, 2019). This formal and material use of the curriculum makes it an instrument of management and management, which must be interwoven with the functions of planning, organization, direction and control-evaluation, for the development of educational processes and practices carried out by university educational organizations and educational systems in general (Schoenfeld, 2016).

In this context, it is also important to refer that curriculum management, at any of the organizational levels, is directly linked to the decision-making processes in relation to what is specifically prescribed as: what, why, for what, how and when, of the deployment of the fundamental triad learning-teaching-evaluation in the framework of teaching, research and extension processes, since they are the guiding elements of the central educational practices and processes that are developed in universities (Tapia-Sosa et al. 2018).

Consequently, the curriculum is not an abstract concept that precedes and has an existence apart from human experience; on the contrary, it is a form of organizational concretion of a set of human educational practices. Hence, the curriculum, from any socio-political viewpoint, is an organizing plan of actions aimed at the functions of planning, organizing, directing, executing and controlling the training processes of professionals required by society. Therefore, it is tied to the interpretation and intelligent management of those who manage the university organization, in the dynamics of these managerial functions as fundamental anchors, so that these academic-managerial practices, the curriculum itself and the achievement of educational purposes, are carried with quality and excellence thinking (Concepción-García & Rodríguez-Expósito, 2016).

Specifically, the curriculum is a pillar for the deployment of the academic-managerial practices immersed in the course of the formative actions; at the same time it represents the frame of reference to discover the conditions in which such practices are empirically given; always in relation to a certain rationalizing discourse, from where ethical-political, theoretical and technical conceptions emerge, as metatheories of thought and its structural codification (Sacristán, 1991).

## CONCLUSION

The curriculum is not an abstract concept that precedes and has an existence apart from human experience; on the contrary, it is a form of organizational concretion of a set of human educational practices. Hence, the curriculum, from any socio-political viewpoint, is an organizing plan of actions aimed at the functions of planning, organizing, directing, executing and controlling the training processes of professionals required by society. Therefore, it is a pillar for the deployment of the academic-managerial practices immersed in the course of the formative actions; at the same time it represents the frame of reference to discover the conditions in which such practices are empirically given; consequently, the curriculum can be constituted as a practical expression of a philosophy of life of a country and a methodology of educational and/or academic work.

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