

## *Interdependence between class's quality and promotion at the university*

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**Resumen:** Es fácil escuchar de algunos directivos frases tan desacertadas como esta: no puede ser que las clases de los profesores estén evaluadas de cuatro o cinco, y solo aprueben el 50 % de sus estudiantes. Pero la práctica demuestra lo contrario. La creencia de que el aprendizaje del estudiante y los resultados en sus exámenes dependen netamente de la calidad de la clase que recibe, sin que exista una demostración científica que avale tal afirmación, constituye el problema que analiza este trabajo, cuyo objetivo es la demostración científica de la verdadera interdependencia entre calidad de la clase y promoción.

**Palabras clave:** Calidad de la docencia; calidad de la clase; Enseñanza; Aprendizaje; Proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje

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**Abstract:**

It is common to hear some directors say phrases as wrong as: it is impossible that a teacher's lesson is evaluated with four or five points, and only 50 % of his/her students promote. However, practice proves the opposite. The belief that the students' learning and results in exams depend solely on the quality of the lessons they receive has not yet been scientifically proven. Such aspect constitutes the scientific problem addressed in this paper, which target is the scientific demonstration of the real interdependence between quality of the lesson, and promotion.

**Keywords:** Lesson's quality; Quality of learning; Teaching; Learning

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## **INTRODUCTION**

If a comprehensive review of the scientific literature resulting from the investigations carried out about the teaching-learning process at the University is carried out, it is easy to see that their conclusions differ, and a scientific consensus is not reached. On the other hand, Prados, Cubero and De la Mata (2010) reflect that in this area the predominant research refers more to teaching than to the process.

Following the previous idea, the issue is usually investigated based on the opinions of the students about their teachers in different aspects (Apocada and Grad, 2002, Molero and Ruiz, 2005, Molero, 2007), or the evaluations to the teachers, whether integral or of independent topics. Unfortunately, most of these studies analyze the students' learning as a variable that is absolutely dependent on the teaching provided by the teacher.

In this way, a problem is generated by generalizing the belief that the student's learning, and more precisely the result obtained in the exams he performs, depends clearly on the quality of the class he receives, even when there is not a scientific demonstration that supports such an assertion. To that end, it is easy to hear some managers utter such misguided phrases as: it cannot be that teachers' classes are rated four or five, and only 50% of their students pass the exams. However, practice shows otherwise.

Finally, it should be noted that statements such as the previous have led to increased controls on classes with the aim of demonstrating that the cause of poor promotion lies in the quality of the class taught by the teacher, however, there are no studies that aim at discovering other reasons for it, that is, demonstrating that in many cases the cause of bad promotion lies in the student. Likewise, the need to analyze anything is not appreciated when the "desired" promotion is obtained with poor quality classes.

For all of the above, the purpose of this article is the scientific demonstration of the true interdependence between class quality and promotion at the Cuban University, through the synthesis of the results of a research that used informal consultation to thirty experts with more than thirty years of experience work in higher education, as well as a sample of 3,000 students.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

The nature of the University lies in the purpose or mission for which it was created, which remains the same from ancient times, but in our days, adequated to new contexts. Instruction and education, socialization of young people, and generation of science, technology and a high cultural level, are in essence the key elements of their function.

Seen in this way, a university graduate of any level must be educated and instructed, with a high cultural level, able to maintain good social relations, and bring new knowledge to science and technology. But to achieve this, entry, process and output standards must be respected.

According to Radford, Raaheim, de Vries and Williams (1997) academic standards have traditionally been established and maintained by the institutions themselves, but with external validation. One way of representing academic standards in the teaching-learning process is shown below.

| Type of academic standard | Indicators   | Use criteria defined by:                                      |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Entries                   | Entry qualifications of students and their assurance of the starting level | Admission policy  |
|                           | Quality of teaching staff  | Selection policy  |
|                           | Learning resources and support services                                    | Adequate and available funding                                |
| Procesos                  | Processes Student learning progress  | Correct entry standards                                       |
|                           | Content and organization of the curriculum                                 |   |
|                           | Teaching, learning and evaluation strategies                               |   |
| Exits                     | Achievements of the students (knowledge, skills, abilities, ...)           | Achievement of the objectives observed through the evaluation |

Table 1: Academic standards in teaching and learning

Source: Adapted from Radford, Raaheim, de Vries and Williams (1997)

Based on the above, it is necessary to reflect first on the admission policy of the Cuban University; admission is guaranteed above all through an entrance examination that has a national character, and is exactly the same for all majors. In this way, it is demonstrated that this examination disregards aspects related to vocational training and career guidance of the student, and as a result approximately 30% of them begin to study the career which is not their favorite.

Given the situation, it is worth adding (referring to the three subjects that make up the entrance examination) the lack of coherence between the results of the diagnostics made by the teachers at the beginning of the first year of the course and those achieved by the same students in the

entrance examination. This experiment shows that the knowledge shown before admission did not have a solid base, and anyone is aware that a student can study to pass and not to know about the matter.

Within this framework, a couple of important elements have already been addressed; however, the assurance of the initial level will not be analyzed as such, because it will be intentionally taken up later. However, aspects related to the quality of the teaching staff will be considered in terms of entrance standards. Firstly, the demands to be a teacher of a Cuban university (selection policy) meet a high standard of quality, in addition the evaluations of the teaching staff have proven to be systematic, rigorous and exhaustive, guaranteeing quality.

On the other hand, Cuban state and government guarantee adequate financing available to higher education, which has led to continuous improvement of the system in terms of infrastructure, equipment and access to information, among other relevant aspects. Foreign financing is also managed on a perennial basis, especially through projects.

The foregoing analysis shows that the essential problem in the academic standards of entry refers to the quality of the student. More than 60% of the students do not have fully assured the starting level needed to understand more than 50% of the subjects he must receive. Mathematics, Spanish, English are received by more than 75% students who lack the minimum knowledge necessary to assimilate new contents.

The foregoing observation, together with the insufficient vocational training and vocational guidance that prevail despite great efforts in this regard, affect the process indicators and output indicators. That is, that the greatest affectation is generated from the student and not from the teacher. But unfortunately, in cases of low promotions, the analysis is carried out about the teacher's job, and there is very little research published about characterizing the student.

Taking into account the previously stated, some results of interviews to teachers and students is presented here. Firstly, it is discussed in words of the teachers how many students satisfy the requirements for learning at the university and what are the students' opinions about it.

| Affirmations about students  | Professors | Students | Difference |
|--|------------|----------|------------|
| He likes the profession he studies                                   | 57,1       | 60,7     | 3,6        |
| He is aware of the characteristics of the profession he is studying  | 52,9       | 59,7     | 6,8        |
| Possesses future projections about his performance in the profession | 42         | 70,3     | 28,3       |
| He cares about the quality of his learning                           | 28,2       | 41       | 12,8       |
| Shows interest in teaching tasks.                                    | 17,1       | 66       | 48,9       |
| Has an acceptable level of independence to learn                     | 12,3       | 37       | 24,7       |
| He is interested in obtaining high marks.                            | 10,4       | 40,3     | 29,9       |
| Wants to change career.  | 15,3       | 12,3     | -3         |

Table 2: Comparison between what teachers estimate and what students think

Source: Made by myself

It is observed that except in the (detrimental) aspect related to the desire to change career, in the remaining cases teachers offer lower estimates than the students considered, that is to say, that the teachers have the most negative estimates. But it is striking that the critical judgment of students does not exceed 70% in any of the positive affirmations and, on the other hand, only in 50% of the aspects can be noticeable differences. This leads to the conclusion that students have affective affections for good learning, despite the bias that can be generated by the fact that teachers are not exactly the ones who teach these students.

But the affective aspect is not the only one that influences learning, also the cognitive goal and the cognitive influence must be studied. In that sense, most students do not make an adequate assessment of their learning, do not develop diverse strategies for learning, and what's more, they are not always able to learn from their mistakes; elements that speak in favor of a lack of adequacy in meta- cognition.

As for cognition, memory and thought must be analyzed. The first regarding the procedures applied and the channels of sensory perception used, while the second must be studied from the levels of processing, dependency and originality. Let's analyse the opinions of the experts on the subject, which are represented in the following charts.

|        |
|--------|
| Memory |
|--------|

| Procedures applied |            | Sensory Perception Channels used |        |              |
|--------------------|------------|----------------------------------|--------|--------------|
| Logical            | Mechanical | Hearing                          | Visual | Audio-Visual |
| 31 %               | 69 %       | 12 %                             | 45 %   | 43 %         |

Table 3: Estimates of experts about memory in students

Source: Made by myself

| Thought    |           |             |           |             |            |
|------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Processing |           | Dependency  |           | Originality |            |
| Analytical | Synthetic | Independent | Dependent | Divergent   | Convergent |
| 15 %       | 85 %      | 15 %        | 85 %      | 10 %        | 90 %       |

Table 4: Estimation of experts about student thinking

Source: Made by myself

Memory does not appear to be the Achilles heel in terms of cognitive aspect, although valuations do not show flattering data. Thought, on the other hand, a severe barrier to learning is shown. These estimates contradict the way of thinking that still exists in the Cuban society and even in many decision makers and teachers of the educational system, and that associates the quality of the class and the teacher's demand with the hundreds of flunked or approved students, but with the intention of direct causality.

With regard to the above, in the objective reality are manifested cases like those shown below. The quality of the class and the teacher's requirement have been valued on a scale of five, while those approved and disapproved are accounted for in percentages.

| Cases | Quality of the class | Teacher's requirement | Approved | Disapproved |
|-------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------|-------------|
| 1     | 5                    | 5                     | 40       | 60          |
| 2     | 5                    | 5                     | 80       | 20          |

|   |   |   |     |    |
|---|---|---|-----|----|
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 90  | 10 |
| 4 | 5 | 3 | 95  | 5  |
| 5 | 4 | 4 | 35  | 65 |
| 6 | 3 | 3 | 100 | 0  |
| 7 | 5 | 5 | 25  | 75 |

Table 5: Cases that occur in reality

Source: Made by myself

From the above chart draws the attention the case number two that can lead to an analysis, while the third or sixth would go unnoticed.

With the intention of strengthening what has been presented and demonstrated here, we will cite some texts collected from the VIII Meeting of University Defenders of the G9, organized by the University of Rioja in Logroño, Spain, from 12 to 14 September 2013, in the preparatory text for the debate on the topic Subjects with abnormally high drop-out rates. Because, as Hernández, Delgado-Gil and Pericay (2013) quoted by Itziar (2013), we cannot let the university become a mere continuation of secondary and pre-university education, a danger in the current high school By some university analysts.

Within this perspective are presented texts of regulatory documents of several Spanish universities:

"Point 17 of the Regulatory Norms for Evaluation Processes at the University of Cantabria, approved by the Governing Council on December 16, 2008, establishes the following:

The University of Cantabria will publish statistical data of the academic results of each subject, which will include at least the number of students enrolled, presented and approved.

In those subjects in which these percentages are exceptional, and in any case, those in which the total number of students approved in the academic year is less than 35% of the enrolled students, the Board will commission the Department responsible for the subject report that analyzes the circumstances that have caused this situation.

Annually, the Center Boards shall prepare and submit to the Academic Committee for Control of Evaluation Process an overall report by title on the results of the evaluation in the different subjects. This report will also be analyzed in the Commission of Academic Order of the University "(Itziar, 2013, page 3)

Note how it is considered exceptional to disapprove more than 65% of the students, but at no time does it speak of questioning the teacher, but of analyzing the circumstances that have caused this situation.

In this vein, one can also cite what was established by the University of Granada, which appears among the first 400 universities in the Academic Ranking of the Universities of the World (Academic Ranking of World Universities).

"The First Additional Provision of the Regulations for Teaching and Examination Planning, which entered into force in the academic year 1997/98 and still valid, indicates that:

In those subjects whose academic failure rates exceed 70% of the students presented in the ordinary and extraordinary convocations, the Academic Planning and Validating Commission, advised by specialists of the Area, will ask the responsible teachers to provide the academic reasons which, if appropriate, can justify such failure. The Departments and Centers will provide the reports that are deemed appropriate." (Itziar, 2013, p.3)

According to this excellent University a promotion of 30% is not worrisome while the following quoted admits 20%.

"... the Polytechnic University of Cartagena ... establishes in its article 25 that:

"When in an Academic Course the percentage of students approved in a subject in a group is less than twenty percent of the qualified students and at the request of the Delegation of Students of the Center, the Department Director shall open an information procedure in which Determine the possible causes that have negatively influenced and a proposal of measures that can contribute to the improvement of the academic performance in the subject are collected "(Itziar, 2013, p.4)

Below is the University of Zaragoza which is among the 500 universities of the Academic Ranking of the Universities of the World, a little more demanding in terms of the number of approved but ...

"Article 19 of the Regulations for Learning Assessment Standards, approved by the Governing Council Agreement of December 22, 2010, includes the following:

Actions related to the academic success rate.



1. Those subjects whose academic success rate, understood as the percentage of students approved on the presented ones will be inferior to the forty percent in the previous course; will be object of analysis by the commission of evaluation of the quality of the titles.
  2. Likewise, it will analyze ex officio those subjects whose success rate exceeds ninety-five percent or the difference between the highest and lowest qualifications of those approved does not exceed two points.
  3. After the analysis and detailed study of the situation, after hearing all the parties concerned and having direct responsibility in the matter, it shall propose, where appropriate, measures to improve the quality of the degree. "(Itziar, 2013, P.4)
- \* ... apart from accepting 40% of approved, requires analysis for when it passes more than 95%, and when assessments are in a two-point range.

Finally, it is convenient to consider what was established by the University of Navarra, which occupies the number 265 in QS World University Rankings® 2015/16.

Article 30 of the Normative Regulatory of the Evaluation Process of the Public University of Navarra, approved by the Governing Council Agreement of December 15, 2011, states that:

**Exceptional academic achievement situations.**

1. Those subjects whose suspension index reaches or exceeds 75% of the students presented in each call, during two consecutive academic semesters, will be reviewed by the Quality Assurance Commission of the Center.
2. Similarly, the Quality Assurance Commission of the Center will review ex officio those subjects whose passing rate exceeds 95% of those submitted or the range of the approved qualifications does not exceed one point. "(Itziar, 2013, Pp. 4-5)

For this University must reach a promotion higher than 25%, so as not to be considered an exceptional result. On the other hand, apart from considering the fact that it approves more than 95%, it is also reviewed if the range of approved does not exceed one point. If it were considered worthy to imitate, it should worry when the approved ones have grades four and five only, although the predominance of the two highest marks in a university implies impacts that are not yet visible.

It is clear from the foregoing that the promotions' mentality is not a global fact, which requires that assessments and comparisons based on indicators that actually result in social, economic, ecological protection and sustainable forms of production should be established.

## CONCLUSIONS

It has been evidenced that a bad promotion cannot be justified with poor class quality or lack of demand on the part of the teacher, because it affects many variables that depend on the student, and those do not have a good behavior. The quality of the class that teachers dictate may or may not influence the increase in the number of approved, but they are in no way a guarantee of good promotion.

There is very little research on students, and much effort is made in the vocational training and career guidance of the students, there are still no remarkable results and much less impacts.

In order to direct the analysis of bad promotions to teachers, "care must be taken to ensure that the teacher feels respected and not disavowed. It is very important to give him the opportunity to explain his practice as both teacher and evaluator. It is not the king, nor can he do in his subject what he wants, but it is clear that, in principle, he has his criteria, he must be respected and at least listened to." (Itziar, 2013, p.7)

In Cuba, all people have the right to be admitted at the University, but as in the rest of the world, not all have the necessary competences to achieve it, however, many of them succeed.

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