Service Learning at the Instituto Profesional of Chile: Social Responsibility in Higher Technical and Professional Education

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Abstract

Social responsibility in higher education is an opportunity for technical-vocational training. In the chapter, the experience of implementing service learning at the Professional Institute of Chile is analysed. Strengthening the role of implementers and moving towards sustainable institutionalisation are its main challenges.

Keywords

social responsibility in higher education – service learning – technical and professional education

1 Introduction¹

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are mandated to seek the integral development of their students. For this, it is imperative to strengthen the educational process, in the context of personal and social development in a global knowledge society. Globally, the 2009 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Conference on Higher Education proposed the concept of Social Responsibility in Higher Education as a key element to solve global social problems (climate change, water management and the food crisis, to name some of the most relevant), and to orient policies to an education that allows the formation of ethical citizens committed to social transformation (UNESCO, 2009).

The ISO 26000 Social Responsibility Guide defines the concept of social responsibility as the “responsibility of an organization for the impacts that its decisions and activities cause in society and the environment, through ethical and transparent behavior” (Valleys, 2019, p. 17).

Regionally, universities have adopted the concept of university social responsibility (USR), but this has been linked to corporate social responsibility, creating a perception of philanthropic objectives and image washing, among others (CLAYSS, 2014). USR began in Latin America in 2001, with the creation of the Network of Universities called Chile Construye País (Jímenez, 2011). There, USR was defined as a practice with a set of principles and values that, through management, teaching, research and extension, responded to the challenges of the country where it is located.² This reflection, in terms of equality, should be broadened as a concept that refers to social responsibility in higher education, including the technical-professional sub-segment.

2 Context of Education in Chile

In Chile, the main institutions of higher education are universities, professional institutes and technical training centres. The last two make up the sub-segment of higher technical-professional education.

The Ministry of Education (Mineduc) has promoted standards to regulate technical-vocational education as the general law on higher education (Law 20,370) and the technical-vocational policy that establishes the legal framework of its operation and that aim, among other things, to ensure the equity and quality of its services.³

Service Learning (SL)⁴ has been adopted as a strategy to strengthen student learning and linkage with communities. By 2019, its institutionalisation process was at different degrees of progress in HEIS (Pizarro et al., 2019). SL is defined as a pedagogical proposal that allows students to develop their skills or knowledge through a service to the community (Tapia, 2010). The National SL Network, for its part, has promoted a definition that encompasses 4 dimensions: the detection of a social need; the relationship between the curriculum and the service; permanent instances of reflection, and; the participation of students as the protagonist (Caire et al., 2019). Through SL, students act in real contexts, applying their acquired knowledge and solving social needs (Martínez, 2015).⁵ It allows students to develop skills through a service to the community and impacts on different areas of their training, including academic, personal, social and vocational (Eberly et al., 2002; Furco et al., 2010; Jouannet et al., 2015; Red de A+S USACH, 2019).

According to Valleys (2019), the SL approach should be incorporated as a goal in the University Social Responsibility (management models to achieve educational and cognitive purposes in a collaborative context), which will

complement an institution's work to actively integrate with the community to which it belongs (Trilla, 2009), and in a context where students are committed to building a fair and free society (CLAYSS, 2004).

Within the institutions of technical-professional higher education, the Instituto Profesional de Chile (hereinafter IP Chile)⁶ adopted SL with the objective of inserting the students in activities related to the world of work early on, in addition to strengthening innovation and linking with the environment.

In the current context, the implementation of SL allows a discussion on how the institutions understand the main guidelines, established in the law, and their responsibility and commitment to the environment they co-inhabit.

This chapter approaches the process of the institutionalisation of SL from a descriptive analysis, answering the following question: From the axes of social responsibility, what are the main advances in the implementation of service learning from a model focussed on sustainable institutionalisation?

3 Methodology

This chapter is part of the study of the institutionalisation of SL in HEIS (Rubio, 2015). The main milestones of incorporating SL to IP Chile are presented using the dimensions proposed by Andrew Furco's (2011)⁷ institutionalisation rubric.⁸ From these dimensions, an analysis of the progress of SL in IP Chile will be carried out.

In reviewing the institutionalisation dimensions of SL, this chapter aims to analyse the progress of SL in the institution through the initiatives implemented.

4 Discussion

The Professional Institute of Chile was established in 2003. By 2019, it had 22,022 students enrolled, offering 52 degrees. It has 4 branches in the cities of La Serena, Santiago, Rancagua and Temuco, in addition to a virtual branch. It is characterised by being part of the Chilean higher education technical-professional subsystem, made up of professional institutes and technical training centres (Law 21,091). It is an institution of technical-professional education that is at the service of people, so that they can perform responsibly and productively in the world of work through its institutional seal (IP Chile, 2020a). The institution has incorporated SL, understanding it as an active methodology that allows meaningful learning in students, fostering a horizontal relationship with the

community. This is an important aspect of IP Chile's education, considering that most of the students come from low-income sectors of the country.

The implementation challenge is high considering that SL projects are developed with community organisations in which students participate or feel empathy, such as camps, nursing homes, sports clubs, municipal corporations, foundations, etc. The projects are planned at different times of the learning process (from the first year to the degree project) and are heterogeneous in their duration (can last from 1 week to 2 months) and in visits (can be 1 to 5 or more) to a community. Below are some examples of A+ SL projects in the institution:

- In the Occupational Therapy programme, under the subject Community Intervention, students develop strategies of intervention for people in different stages of their life cycle who present some occupational need. That is, who have some difficulty in getting involved in an occupation in a satisfactory manner. Particularly, in the city of Rancagua, students develop the project with children who have an intellectual disability, in partnership with the Coanil Foundation. It is a project that lasts approximately 1 month and includes at least 5 visits to the centres.
- Social Work students carry out a project in the subject of Community Social Work. It aims to detect the needs of the inhabitants of a given community in a vulnerable situation. With the results of the diagnosis, an activity called 'service fair' is carried out, the objective of which is to make the participants aware of their different rights and how to exercise them through state institutions. The project lasts 1 month and the students make 3–5 field visits. In 2019, in the city of Rancagua, the students developed the project with the inhabitants of the Los Paltos camp. The project challenges us to think about initiatives with communities in a situation of social vulnerability.
- Students in the Graphic Design Technician programme, under the subject of Branding, provide advice to microentrepreneurs who need support to implement or improve their organisation's brand. Meetings are held with the microentrepreneurs at least 3 times in which ideas are discussed with the business owners, the brand is developed and finally the results are presented to the community partner. This project is unique in that it is an integrated assessment which includes the contents of all the subjects of the semester, with the SL component serving as the central axis of the learning measurement.

5 Dimension 1: Philosophy and Mission

In 2017, IP Chile begins the implementation of SL with 5 career programmes and 5 subjects (Jouannet et al., 2018). As of 2019, the programme has been

implemented in 27 career programmes and 36 subjects, with the participation of 6,400 students, 527 community partners and 161 teachers.

The first stage of developing the SL programme was achieved through funds from the Mineduc Mecesus 3 Programme (IP Chile, 2013).⁹ A team of academics from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile¹⁰ was hired, who supported the design of a curriculum implementation model that was structured in 4 stages: planning, appropriation, implementation and evaluation. This model was overseen and implemented by the Vicerrectoría Académica.¹¹ In addition, an institutional definition for SL was developed.¹²

In 2019, SL became a part of the Institutional Strategic Plan, in an objective called innovation. This defined coverage goals and a continuous improvement of the processes. It noted that SL “pays tribute” to the institutional mission, although not explicitly, which declares the educational project to be to train responsible people in an innovative context (IP Chile, 2020b). In addition, the institution was mandated to comply with the various educational reforms that the State had declared for technical and vocational training institutions.

By 2020, the Vice-Rector's Office for Linking with the Environment updated its policy, with the objective of forming socially committed citizens. Although the institution's commitment and responsible training are mentioned, social responsibility is not directly alluded to as a management model of USR.¹³

6 Dimensions 2, 3 and 4: Support the Involvement of Teachers, Students and Community Partners

SL is installed in the teaching area in the institution with the aim of ensuring quality teaching in accordance with the implementation of the active methodologies that IP Chile declares as its priorities. This has meant focusing on strengthening the teaching role. Training and pedagogical advisory programmes have been developed in which pedagogical advisors make class observations to provide feedback on teaching practice in reflection activities.

With respect to the involvement of students and community partners, institutionalisation is at an early stage. Each teacher closes the semester by inviting the community members, where the results of the SL projects are presented. Some of the students and partners that implement SL are invited to the closing sessions that take place in each location. In terms of socialisation, in 2019, the first meeting of experiences of SL was held, and 3 experiences were presented at the seventh national seminar of SL of the Chilean Network of Service Learning (Red Chilena de Aprendizaje Servicio, REASE). Teachers and students participated in both of these platforms.

7 Dimension 5: Institutional Support

In 2017, the National Coordination of SL was formed, a unit whose mission is the creation, monitoring and evaluation of policies linked to the stages of the curriculum implementation model. This body was also responsible for budget planning. School teams were involved in implementation planning, ensuring the consistency of learning outcomes versus community needs. In 2017 and 2018, work was done with public funds and, in 2019, the institution continued implementation with its own resources. Each semester, a survey of the perception of the implementation of SL was carried out with teachers, students and community partners, and the evaluation of the performance of teachers and their approval rate were monitored.

Since 2017, four perception studies have been implemented. The actors who have been key in implementing SL claim a high level of satisfaction with what has been carried out (Sepúlveda et al., 2019). Likewise, in 2019, the National Coordination implemented a self-assessment process, following the Furco model, in which the authorities and academic teams evaluated the progress made at the level of institutionalisation of the SL programme.

8 Conclusions

Education must allow progress towards a world with ideals of peace, freedom and justice (Delors, 1997). One of the challenges is to respond to train people who are responsible and committed to their environment. Social responsibility in HEIs opens a space for reflection on how institutions are territorially inserted into their communities, aimed at a horizontal relationship and mutual collaboration and learning.

Chilean education policy does not explicitly refer to social responsibility in higher education, choosing instead to mandate a context of innovation and VCM. However, HEIs have had to generate linkage models, ensuring horizontality in the relationship with communities, a challenge that implies working with responsibility and commitment towards them. Service learning is an active methodology that allows progress towards work in this direction.

IP Chile is moving towards the sustainable institutionalisation of SL. It stands out that its implementation and definition is aligned with the institutional educational project. Even more important, SL is valued by the authorities, academic teams and actors responsible for implementing the methodology. In a recording made in a project, a student points out: "This is 50–50, you learn from us and we learn from you [...]. Sometimes life hits us hard, but you are the

managers of your own change" (IP Chile, 2019). That is the sense of the methodology that our students, despite their difficulties, become better professionals and better people at the end of an SL project.

It has been a challenge to strengthen the role of teachers, community partners and, especially, students, to consecrate sustainable institutionalisation. Among the critical situations of the projects that are currently being developed is the strengthening of teams at each headquarter (with exclusive functions in SL) and the resources associated with the equipment and supplies used in the services to strengthen an interdisciplinary model of implementation of SL projects, with the idea of deepening the learning of the students, community and institution.

The institution has not declared a model of social responsibility; however, the implementation of SL points to the right direction. A social responsibility management model opens questions about how its installation can impact student learning and work with communities, and the internal management model of HEIS.

Notes

- 1 Vocational education in Chile is called "technical and professional".
- 2 University Social Responsibility was defined by Universidad Construye País as: "the capacity of the university to disseminate and put into practice a set of general and specific principles and values, by means of four key processes, such as management, teaching, research and university extension, thus responding to the university community itself and to the country where it is located" (Jímenez, 2011, p. 3).
- 3 In 2018, Law 21,091 established the obligation for institutions to have horizontal links with the communities that live in the territories where they are located. This has meant an adaptation in the management within the higher education institutions, which states that their mission must be fulfilled through the realisation of "teaching, innovation and connection with the environment (VCM), establishing that [...] these initiatives must be consistent with the training of students" (Law 21,091, 2018, p. 1).
- 4 In Chile, no common name has been reached to describe the pedagogical approach. For example, it is called service learning, learning and service, with the initials S+L, S-L and Spl. The National Network of L+S (REASE) has promoted the use of service learning and S+L (Pizarro & Hasbún, 2019).
- 5 According to Furco et al. (2002): "the same line defines that learning service seeks to involve students in activities that combine service to the community and academic learning" (p. 25).
- 6 IP Chile has a constructivist vision of learning, in a pedagogical model based on competencies. It offers careers in 5 areas of knowledge, including Administration and Business, Humanities, Engineering, Health and Industrial Processes and Natural Resources.
- 7 According to Furco (2011): "The self-assessment rubric on the Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education is designed to assist members of the higher education community to make adjustments in the development of their efforts to institutionalize service-

- learning in their universities" (p. 11). The Instituto Profesional de Chile is a technical-vocational training HEI.
- 8 This presents three stages of progress for sustainable implementation over time: (1) creation of critical mass, (2) quality building and, (3) sustainable institutionalisation. Progress is measured by analysing the categories of the rubric, which is composed of 5 dimensions: philosophy and mission; teachers' involvement and support; students and community partners, and; institutional support.
 - 9 The Mecesusup 3 programme is a competitive fund for HEIs, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. As stated, "the objective of the MECESUP 3 Program is to improve the quality and relevance of higher education through the expansion of the results-based financing system. In other words, the main objective of MECESUP is to help tertiary education institutions achieve excellence" (Mineduc, 2020).
 - 10 The team was led by psychologist Chantal Jouannet Valderrama.
 - 11 The Vicerrectoría Académica is an office at IP Chile responsible for the management of the institutional policy in academic areas.
 - 12 The definition is as follows: "An active methodology that allows for deep learning and promotes the development of social and disciplinary competencies in students through service to the community" (IP Chile, 2018).
 - 13 For example, in the General Education Law, the Law on Technical Vocational Training incorporates innovation and linkages with the environment as a compulsory area for accreditation. The policy on linking institutions says: "improving the quality of life of the community with which it relates, being a contribution to the development of the territory in which it is located" (IP Chile, 2020b, p. 1). The mission of IP Chile states: "To train people in the technical and professional areas to perform responsibly and productively in the world of work, through a project with an institutional seal [which is] inclusive, student-centred, flexible, which promotes methodological innovation and links with the environment, contributing to improving the quality of life of those who participate in it" (p. 1).

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