

The internationalization of higher education from the perspective of university students

La internacionalización de la educación superior desde la perspectiva de estudiantes universitarios
A internacionalização do ensino superior na perspectiva dos estudantes universitários

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Abstract

Introduction: Corporación Universitaria del Caribe-CECAR has been interested in creating internationalization spaces from academy, transforming its teaching-learning processes regarding the demands of the globalized world; this has allowed to develop and to strengthen, in these future professionals, the competences and abilities that fit the labor and social needs from the context they will work in. **Objective:** The current study aims at identifying practicum students' perceptions towards higher education internationalization and describing the benefits of internationalization in such processes. **Method:** The applied methodology had a mixed descriptive approach; the data collection tools were the Likert scale to measure CECAR's internationalization and the documentary revision. **Results:** Within results, it was evidenced that, in 2021-2, the 79% of practicum students has a positive attitude and only the 21% has a rejection attitude with regard to internationalization processes. Regarding its main benefits, is highlighted the critical thinking aspect that is developed on professionals which allow them to communicate assertively throughout diverse contexts and generating international academic networks. **Conclusions:** To conclude, undergraduates are interested in making part of internationalization activities, letting them to articulate their academic process with international experiences in their practicum requirement, in which they can strengthen their professional skills and competences

Keywords: Attitudes; International education; Higher education; Professional personnel.

Resumen

Introducción: La Corporación Universitaria del Caribe-CECAR se ha interesado en crear espacios de internacionalización desde la academia, transformando sus procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje frente a las demandas del mundo globalizado; desarrollando y fortaleciendo en los futuros profesionales, competencias y habilidades que se ajustan a las necesidades laborales y sociales del contexto en el que se desempeñarán. **Objetivo:** identificar las percepciones de los estudiantes de prácticas hacia la educación superior, internacionalización y describir los beneficios de la internacionalización en dichos procesos. **Método:** La metodología aplicada tuvo un enfoque descriptivo mixto; las herramientas de recolección de datos fueron la escala Likert para medir la internacionalización de CECAR y la revisión documental. **Resultados:** se evidenció que en el año 2021-2, el 79% de los estudiantes de prácticas tiene una actitud positiva y solo el 21% tiene una actitud de rechazo frente a los procesos de internacionalización. En cuanto a sus principales beneficios, se destaca el pensamiento crítico que se desarrolla en los profesionales, que permite comunicarse asertivamente en diversos contextos y generando redes académicas internacionales. **Conclusiones:** los estudiantes de pregrado están interesados en hacer parte de actividades de internacionalización, permitiéndoles articular su proceso académico con experiencias internacionales en su exigencia de práctica, en las que puedan fortalecer sus habilidades y competencias profesionales.

Palabras claves: Actitudes; Educación internacional; Educación superior; Personal profesional.

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Resumo

Introdução: A Corporación Universitaria del Caribe-CECAR tem estado interessada em criar espaços de internacionalização a partir da academia, transformando os seus processos de ensino-aprendizagem em relação às exigências do mundo globalizado; isto tem permitido desenvolver e fortalecer, nestes futuros profissionais, as competências e habilidades que se ajustem às necessidades laborais e sociais do contexto em que irão trabalhar. **Objetivo:** O presente estudo tem como objetivo identificar as percepções dos estudantes do practicum relativamente à internacionalização do ensino superior e descrever os benefícios da internacionalização nestes processos. **Método:** A metodologia aplicada teve uma abordagem descritiva mista; os instrumentos de recolha de dados foram a escala de Likert para medir a internacionalização do CECAR e a revisão documental. **Resultados:** No âmbito dos resultados, evidenciou-se que, em 2021-2, 79% dos alunos de estágio têm uma atitude positiva e apenas 21% têm uma atitude de rejeição relativamente aos processos de internacionalização. Em relação aos seus principais benefícios, destaca-se o aspeto do pensamento crítico que é desenvolvido nos profissionais que lhes permite comunicar assertivamente em diversos contextos e gerar redes académicas internacionais. **Conclusões:** Conclui-se que os estudantes de graduação estão interessados em participar em actividades de internacionalização, permitindo-lhes articular o seu processo académico com experiências internacionais no seu estágio curricular, nas quais podem reforçar as suas capacidades e competências profissionais

Palavras-chave: Atitudes; Educação internacional; Ensino superior; Profissionais.



Introduction

The educational context has experienced a series of transformations in its teaching-learning process as an answer to the social, economic, cultural and global dynamic changes. With this purpose, professional careers have developed a range of elements that let the professional be trained in different areas; making the learning scenery a space in which the undergraduates develop their specific professional competences, but also transversal competences that allow them to go through any context.

Within the multiple changes the educational processes have had, is highlighted the link between the learning process and the External context. It implies fostering actions in order to strengthen cooperation networks in between higher education institutions worldwide for preventing education from being endogenous; however, it has international incidence in a world that is increasingly globalized. Thus, professional training will have the international and the intercultural dimensions through pedagogical activities, academic mobility, intercultural exchanges, mirror classes, curriculum internationalization, design and research projects' execution in national and international networks, and all this promoting quality education for answering to current dynamics.

The previous information is related to what is established in the 1330 decree of 2019; about the curricular aspects that must be focused on wide and flexible contents due to the globalized interaction that emerges from the new networks linkage that let both a curricular guided and the competences development in the different courses fostering global professional profiles that contributes to the social, cultural, and environmental growth. This is supported under the new Institutional education project- (PEI, por su significado en español) of CECAR (2022) where is described that 'Curriculum flexibility' is mediated by international components in their different modalities, contributing to the integral learning with global projection through curricular guidelines in which are set up the different routes to fulfill curriculum flexibility (CECAR - PEI, 2022, p.59).

Under the previous perspective, the educational processes answer to the globalized world needs, since these sceneries are part of constant transformations that are developed within social dynamics, that's the reason why, HIE [Higher Education Institutions] have the challenge to train professionals that answer to globalization. Meanwhile, 'the HEIs are one of the main fields where knowledge is generated, spread and transferred' (González, 2007, p.1).

However, the new professionals must respond to the demands of today's world, which reflects an expansion within its dynamics, where the approach or the field of these professionals is not limited to the local context but is permeated by global trends and values; that is the real meaning of the internationalization of higher education. According to Sittenfeld and Muñoz (2012) internationalization is the way to carry out exchanges that promote and dynamize the sharing of experiences around the world, "including within the classroom, incorporating it as part of the didactic strategies developed by teachers, bringing students to the world" (López, 2018, p.1).

Therefore, it is important to articulate the internationalization activities carried out by HEIs with the students who are carrying out their professional practicum, since they are on the verge of the working field, which could be developed at either national or international contexts. Considering the above, the students who participated in this study are linked to the last levels of academic training and are studying the professional practice in the programs of: Social Work, Industrial Engineering, Business



Administration, Public Administration, Law, Architecture, Bachelor's Degree in English, Psychology, Sports Science and Physical Activity, Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy, Public Accounting, Systems Engineering, Economics, Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics and Literature. With respect to competencies and the learning outcomes to be developed, these are described within the course plan of each practicum course according to the academic program, which are consistent with the objectives and activities associated with elements of internationalization, such as the internationalization of the curriculum, global abilities and approach in national contexts.

Authors such as Álvarez and Herazo (2022) argue that it is crucial for the university to identify the current state of its Internationalization at Home (IeC) strategies from the student's perspective. This will allow the institution to examine its strengths, identify areas for improvement and strengthen this facet. In addition, this analysis could serve as a reference for other institutions, showing which practices to adopt and which to avoid. Therefore, this type of study acquires significant relevance.

Evaluating the current state of Internationalization at Home (IeC) strategies from the students' perspective is crucial for educational institutions. According to Álvarez and Herazo (2022), this approach allows universities to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, which is fundamental to offer quality education and prepare students for an increasingly globalized world.

Moreover, this type of analysis not only benefits the institution that performs it but can also serve as a reference for other universities. Sharing successful practices and highlighting those that have not worked well helps to create a more cohesive and efficient educational environment at a global level. Internationalization is not only a competitive advantage, but also a shared responsibility that contributes to global educational and social progress.

Another important aspect of internationalization is its direct impact on the student experience. By evaluating IeC strategies from the student's perspective, universities can design more effective and attractive programs that not only enhance students' academic and professional competencies, but also foster greater understanding and respect for other cultures. This cultural enrichment is essential in the formation of global citizens, prepared to face the challenges of an interconnected world.

In addition, the internationalization of education promotes collaboration and academic exchange between institutions in different countries. This not only expands learning and development opportunities for students, but also strengthens research and innovation at a global level. That is why the attitude of students towards these processes is important as it allows them to dynamize their growth and their continuous evaluation of global trends and the challenges that exist in each profession.

The aim of this article is to present the attitude towards the internationalization of higher education held by students in professional practicum courses at the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe-CECAR, as well as to describe the benefits of internationalization in the professional practice processes, taking into account that the practice is the scenario that allows the student to put into practice the knowledge acquired during his professional training, as well as to approach the world of work.

In the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe - CECAR, it has been observed that some students in professional practice show negative attitudes or rejection towards participation in internationalization activities. This phenomenon may be due to various factors, such as lack of adequate information



about the benefits of internationalization, fear of facing new and unfamiliar academic and cultural environments, and the perception that these activities may be a distraction from their immediate responsibilities and objectives in professional practice. In addition, the academic load and work demands of internships may contribute to students prioritizing their local assignments over international opportunities, feeling that they do not have enough time to engage in these experiences.

Another relevant factor is the possible language and cultural barriers that students may perceive. Many students may feel insecure about their foreign language proficiency or fear of not being able to adapt to different cultures, which generates a reluctance to participate in internationalization programs. In addition, there may be a lack of visible institutional support or accessible resources to facilitate this participation, which reinforces attitudes of rejection. To overcome these challenges, it is crucial that CECAR implement effective communication strategies that clearly inform about the advantages of internationalization and provide the necessary support so that students feel confident and motivated to take advantage of these opportunities, integrating them seamlessly with their professional practice activities.

2. REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Higher education internationalization

The internationalization of higher education, according to Knight (1994) is the process that seeks the integration of the international and intercultural dimension to the teaching, research and service functions of educational institutions, through the academic mobility of students, teachers and researchers. In other words, it is a process that aims at constant interaction between international universities in order to establish relationships and agreements that allow for collaboration with the purpose of improving not only the quality of the education they offer, but also the quality of the professional product that graduates from their institutions (Knight, 2005).

This whole process of internalization occurs thanks to the universal nature of learning and research, therefore, such partnerships and agreements should be based on the purpose and projection of providing quality and relevance to higher education (Altbach, 2002).

According to the International Association of Universities (2012), internationalization presents an evolutionary dynamic that adapts to the social environment and the requirements of the globalized world as it is articulated with cultural, political, economic, social and scientific processes; thus allowing the creation of knowledge networks that are enhanced through the mobility of people, goods and services. Considering the above, internationalization brings added value to the educational dynamics, since it can be promoted from the classroom, since it "includes other strategies that can be incorporated into the curriculum and that do not necessarily involve mobility between countries" (Trigos, 2016, p. 13).

The Ministerio de Educación Nacional (2009), the internationalization of HEIs must promote certain aspects in order to be successful, not only to allow international academic displacement between different higher education systems in the world, which promotes the exchange of students, teachers and researchers thus allowing interculturality and acquisition of knowledge forged on the basis of the

acceptance of diversity; this occurs through short stays such as the study of academic semesters, internships and double degree programs in international universities, experiences that provide a greater acquisition of knowledge for the academic community. But also, allowing internationalization at home, which refers to access to training with international contexts for students, teachers and the academic community in general while remaining within the country, which is given through virtual education, a contribution provided by the continuous progress of information technology in telecommunications.

In addition, internationalization has to promote the participation between HEIs in university networks to facilitate the generation of alliances and exchange of talents, experiences and academic knowledge, which also allows the internationalization of research as a formulation of programs, educational projects and the development of joint research initiatives that seek to generate new knowledge that foster not only the spirit of research but also innovation and entrepreneurship.

For Knight, quoted in López (2018), states that "the perspectives of internationalization adopted by many have to do with the inclusion of an international, intercultural and/or global dimension in the curriculum and the teaching and learning process" (p.1), this indicates that within the educational dynamics of HEIs it is considered as a transversal axis that permeates the institutional policy, since it allows implementing strategies that articulate the training processes with what is described in the institutional educational project of each university.

To CECAR, internationalization dynamizes the link of the academic community with peers from other countries through the "encouragement and promotion of academic activities and international practices as elements of the training process and curricula, as well as the strengthening of participation in international academic networks; from perspectives of dialogue of knowledge and cultural exchange and interaction" (CECAR - PEI, 2022, p. 60). Based on this, CECAR has established two action fronts for the direction of internationalization processes, the first is related to the good practices of the substantive tasks of Higher Education and the second to the good practices of the Institution's governance.

In the same line of ideas, Herazo et al. (2023), in their quantitative-descriptive study, expose the benefits to which Higher Education Institutions have access when they receive students from other cultures, which contributes to the social and cultural enrichment of the environment; which in turn is part of their social commitment as universities from the substantive function of their corporate purpose: Extension.

The internationalization of the professional practicum

The internalization of higher education became a fundamental factor to strengthen pedagogical services and to bring to the market professionals with a more globalized training that would give rise to a greater benefit of the internal and external talents of the HEIs. Thanks to the international agreements of the HEIs, fundamental aspects are promoted such as the generation of opportunities for complementary or specialized training, opportunities to generate knowledge through the research exercise (research seedlings) and training exercises for life, since through such agreements, better opportunities can be offered that allow greater performance of professional work.

According to Cantú (2013), internationalization is presented as an element that enables the emergence of global competencies that allow future professionals to perform their functions from a multi-



cultural perspective and the diversity of the environment. It is also seen as a transversal component in educational processes in order to respond to the demands of a globalized society.

However, CECAR promotes the importance of the global vision of professionals; in order to foster internationalization at home, which is "a means for the interaction of students with communities and academic organizations in other countries through the use of Information and Communication Technologies and the generation of spaces for dialogue and interaction" (CECAR - PEI, 2022, p.60).

The processes of internationalization in the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe CECAR are articulated with the course of professional practice, because the student of any academic program can perform his practice in a scenario located at national or international level, which enables cultural exchange, the application of knowledge in different contexts, the strengthening of knowledge networks from the realization of the practicum (CECAR - PEI, 2022). In this respect, the professional practice is not only seen as a course that the student must pass to obtain the professional degree, but it allows him/her to approach real contexts where he/she can apply the knowledge acquired. In this vain, CECAR conceives the internship as the real scenery that allows students to strengthen the competencies related to their professional profiles but also transversal abilities that will be essential to develop in the working world (Coordinación Institucional de Práctica profesional y Pasantía - CECAR, 2019).

According to the above, students can choose to perform their professional practice in any context, articulating with the internationalization activities offered by the university, considering that the practice enables the student to be linked to a learning context immersed in real scenarios, which is consistent with their professional profile and thus strengthen knowledge, skills and competencies for work performance in local, regional, national and international environments (Carey and Vargas, 2016).

Attitudes

Attitudes are dispositions that the individual has towards a stimulus, which will influence the behavior he/she has towards a person, situation, element or object; an attitude is not the same as behavior, but it guides the behavioral response. In this regard, attitudes can be defined as a "mental and neural state of disposition to respond, organized by experience, directive or dynamic, on behavior with respect to all objects and situations with which it is related" (Allport cited in Escalante et al., 2011, p.4).

Attitude precedes behavior, since before acting the individual experiences a series of previous internal dispositions, that is, it permeates the behavioral responses to social stimuli; according to the Three-Dimensional Model, attitudes have three components: cognitive, affective and conative-behavioral (McGuire, et al. cited in Fernández, et al. 2004). It should be noted that attitudes will result in a positive or negative stance with which the individual will evaluate his or her reality, which is theoretically known as attitude object (Eagly, Chaiken cited in Briñol et al., 2007).



3. METHODOLOGY

The present Research had a mixed approach of descriptive type, the research design was non-experimental, cross-sectional, taking into account that "it measures the study variables in a single temporal

moment, the data collection was gathered only once in each unit of analysis" (Chan-Pavón et al., 2018, p.3). The population under study were the students who attended the professional practice during the period 2021-2 at the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe CECAR. The sample consisted of 562 students; the participants are detailed below by the academic program to which they belong, as evidenced in the following table.

Table 1.

Study participants per academic program

Academic program	N° of participant students
Social work	55
Industrial Engineering	37
Business administration	21
Public Administration	38
Laws	50
Architecture	48
Bachelor in English	32
Psychology	51
Sports science and physical activity	36
Bachelor in early childhood	58
Public accounting	28
Bachelor in Linguistics and literature	54
System Engineering	47
Economy	7

Note: Authors' elaboration.

The instruments used to collect the information were a Likert scale of attitudes towards the internationalization of CECAR, which consisted of 16 items that evaluated the dimension of Acceptance, rejection or ambivalence towards the internationalization processes carried out in CECAR, the response options were 4: Totally agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and totally disagree. The application of the scale lasted 15 minutes and to students in professional practicum. The second instrument to collect information was a documentary review, which allowed obtaining information related to the benefits of internationalization in higher education, this technique allows recognizing and detailing the elements, characteristics and relationships of the constructs of interest; for this purpose, CECAR's databases, books and virtual platforms such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Sciencedirect, Redalyc were accessed. After obtaining the information described above, we proceeded to analyze the information and then to triangulate the information and extract the significant elements.

4. RESULTS

Attitudes towards internationalization processes.

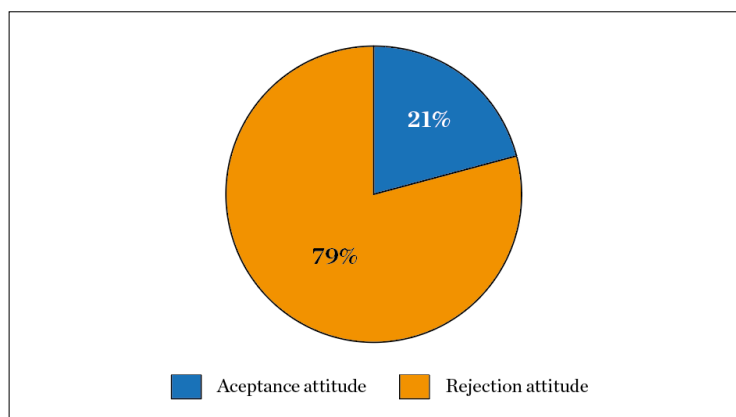
The results obtained from the application of the scale of attitudes towards internationalization



processes showed the willingness of students who are doing their professional practice at the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe CECAR to participate in activities offered by the University's Office of Inter-institutional Relations. The most relevant findings are detailed below:

Figure 1.

Attitude towards the activities and processes of internationalization

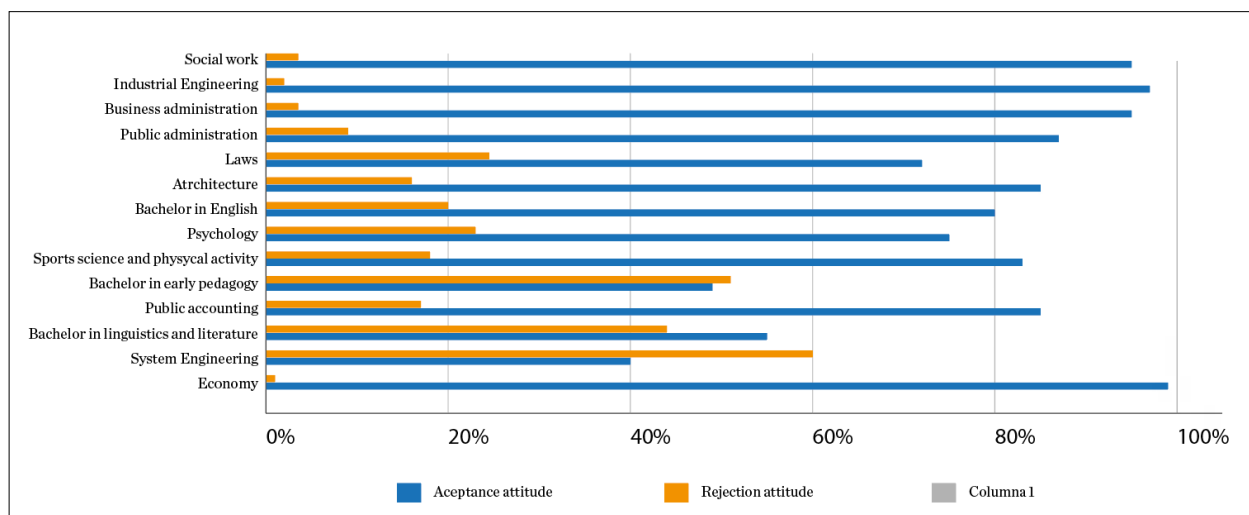


Note: Authors' elaboration.

According to Graph N°1, it is evident that 79% of the students who are studying professional practice in the period 2021-2 present an attitude of acceptance and only 21% an attitude of rejection towards the activities and processes of internationalization. This shows that these students are willing to carry out academic mobility, internationalization of the curriculum, double degree agreements, Internationalization Week, cultural exchanges and participation in knowledge networks.

Figure 2.

Attitude towards internationalization activities and processes by academic program.



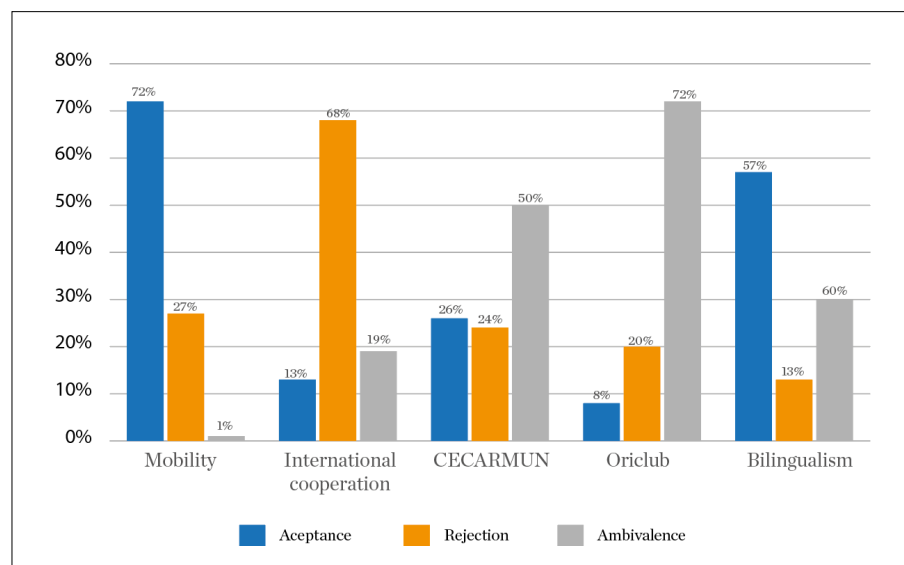
Note: Authors' elaboration.

Regarding the attitude towards the activities and processes of internationalization by academic program, it was found that the students who carry out the professional practice 2021-2 of the following

programs: Social Work, Industrial Engineering, Business Administration, Public Administration, Architecture, Bachelor's Degree in English, Psychology, Sports Science and Physical Activity, Public Accounting and Economics show an attitude of acceptance, while the students belonging to Systems Engineering, Law, Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education, Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics and Literature showed a mostly negative attitude towards these processes.

Figure 3.

Attitude towards internationalization activities held in CECAR



Note: Authors' elaboration.

Graph N°3 shows that students in professional practice show receptivity to the internationalization activities carried out by the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe- CECAR such as Mobility, Bilingualism, CECARMUN. However, a high number of students showed an attitude of rejection in the participation of activities associated with International Cooperation; as well as they are ambivalent in the participation in the ORI Club and CECARMUN.

5. DISCUSSION

Internalization provides many benefits to the education and training of professionals because it gives an international vision to higher education with a greater exchange of knowledge, technology transfer and research, which facilitated the incorporation of students in a globalized world. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), there is a permanent increase in the number of students, professors and researchers who study, teach courses, research, live and communicate in an international framework, which is a good example of this new general situation, which is clearly beneficial. It also argues that it is important to promote programs and exchanges to reduce existing imbalances in internationalized education and to facilitate access to and transfer of knowledge (UNESCO, 1995). Therefore, the internationalization of higher education fosters the improvement of accreditation standards of academic programs of HEIs, making them focus

on the criteria with which the quality of academic programs and institutions in different countries is evaluated.

Nevertheless, the main benefits of internationalization in the professional practice processes are related to the contribution in the formation of global professionals with critical thinking who can communicate assertively in different contexts, this indicates that internationalization is seen as a transversal axis that allows the student in practice to face real scenarios with competencies associated with their professional profile where they can make the approach in any context where their place of practice is located (de Wit et al., 2015; de Wit, 2018; de Wit & Altbach, 2021). The above, taking into account that the internationalization of the practice curriculum allows students to acquire new languages and values, as well as cultural practices not only in the national context but also worldwide (Qiang, 2003).

Another benefit is the generation of international academic communities and networks, which allow the student who is in the internship to integrate into the labor, educational, social and cultural groups that are present in the internship site and the national or international alliances that the organization has. In addition, internationalization in HEIs enables the generation of quality academic and personal relationships, as well as knowledge networks around the world, which provide students with an essential element to strengthen their professional areas and the knowledge of new labor sceneries at a global level.

Through this study, it was evidenced that the attitude of the students who are studying the professional practicum during the period 2021-2 showed an attitude of acceptance in terms of internationalization in higher education. Trigos (2016) raises that the student's vision linked to a higher education institution conceives its training process in an integral way where it matches the learning processes research, extension and participation of formative spaces at institutional, departmental, national and international levels (Oleksiyenko & Ros, 2023).

Students in professional practicum showed a good attitude towards participation in academic mobilities, internationalization of the curriculum, double degree agreements, Internationalization Week, cultural exchanges and participation in knowledge networks, which shows that students of the XXI century wish to globalize their professional training and acquire competencies that respond to international and intercultural dynamics.

This is supported by the fact that the educational processes of higher institutions must take into account student and teacher exchange, the reception of international students, the development of competencies in graduates with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (de Wit et al., 2015; de Wit, 2018; de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Trigos, 2016).

Regarding the benefits of internationalization in professional practicum in the present study, it was evidenced that it is related to the contribution in the training of global professionals with critical thinking who can perform in national and international contexts. What is aligned with Quintana Zavala & Paravic Klijn (2011), Brandenburg et al. (2019), Altbach (2002) who state that internationalization offers students a broad vision of their professional work, lets them to acquire resources and interpersonal skills, offers the possibility of developing positive aspects on their personal and professional levels, encourages respect for cultural differences, interests in cross-cultural problems, understanding and international perspective of their disciplinary practice.



According to Quintana Zavala & Paravic Klijn (2011) internationalization allows students to "strengthen research within the discipline, expand work networks, increase the curricular flexibility of undergraduate curricula and emphasize the importance of learning foreign languages within training" (p. 10). The above is related to the results of the present study where it was found that internationalization allows students in professional practicum to generate international academic/labor communities and networks.

6. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the educational processes have evolved for answering to contextual needs; hence, professional teaching has expanded its vision to the dynamics of a globalized world. That is the importance of incorporating the curriculum internationalization and of the activities promoted by higher education institutions with the intention to foster global competences associated to their professional profiles.

The internationalization in higher education benefits and contributes to educate better professionals strengthening the teaching-learning processes, resulting from the international professional practicum in which the professional potential can be entirely developed; which provides better job opportunities due to the knowledge and the experiences acquired during the practicum either national or international. Notwithstanding, it results essential to comprehend that internationalization does not only focus on international academic mobility, but also on increasing the quantity of academic exchanges that come from abroad to national universities; thus, the professional quality and the academic benefits which can be the most relevant aspects of the internationalization of higher education programs, generating high quality professionals with a high capacity to perform in a competitive way at any context.

Finally, undergraduate professionals have forayed little by little in the internationalization processes that (HEI) offer. This has let that exist more receptiveness to participate in internationalization activities and events. This is evidenced in the obtained results of the current study where data reflects a favorability towards internationalization from CECAR's practicum students.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.



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