Elaboration of a Teaching Program in Development Cooperation in the University of Alcalá

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Abstract

COOPUAH, a group of teachers and researchers of the University of Alcalá (UAH), who belong to different disciplines, consider that the training offered to students in Development Cooperation by their institution has some deficiencies. The group pursues the general objective of reflecting about and evaluating in particular how this field is included in the university curricula in order to propose a teaching program that could fill the that gap.

The main results highlight that the current teaching offer is insufficient, it comes from the environmental and health sciences fields, and in organizational level, is concentrated in the 2nd semester. We therefore believe that we need a multidisciplinary work to expand this teaching offer, redistribute it both semesters, and to offer a program addressed to all students of the University of Alcalá and recognized officially by the institution.

Keywords

Development Cooperation, teaching program, transversal subjects.

1. Introduction

University teachers have to undertake a type of teaching based on the training needs of students in the society in which they have to develop, both professionally and personally, (Pozo, 1998; Zabalza, 2002; 2003), a society that has become very complex and dynamic (Cano and Ion., 2012). Different authors mention that learning consists of acquiring skills and forms of action that can be preserved and applied "a posteriori" (Säljö, 1979; Marton et al, 1993; Chalmers and Fuller., 1996), and on relating parts of different disciplines to each other or to the real world. This involves changing the meaning of things and how, by reworking our own knowledge, we understand them; it also involves our personal development and a different way to understand the world in order to change ourselves.

The challenges of university teachers have to do with enhancing students' acquisition of skills (specific and generic) and with putting forward an active learning that allows them to achieve that acquisition (Lopez, 2011). But university teachers have another important challenge: social responsibility in promoting Human Development (*Universities' Code of Conduct in the Sphere of Development Cooperation*). However, sometimes, universities are so focused on educational work aimed at the short-term needs of the labor market that they do not cover the important social space that, according to their characteristics, they should fulfil (Unceta, 2004).

It is true that those are complex challenges and responsibilities and so is understood by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), when it refers to Global Dimension of Education and gives teachers a role that goes far beyond transmission of knowledge, making them responsible for educating an active, global citizenship, able to work together for a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

In recent years, the role and functions of International Cooperation in University Education are undergoing deep conceptual and instrumental changes, related to both the increasing demand for quality and relevance of universities, and the generalization of the objective of teaching internationalization, research and institutions themselves (Sebastian, 2012).

The University Cooperation for Development Observatory (OUCD, 2015) understands the University Cooperation for Development (CUD) as "*the set of activities carried out by the university community aimed at social transformation of the poorest countries, pro-peace, equity, human development and world environmental sustainability. Institutional and academic strengthening have an important role in this transformation*".

The latest report published by the OCUD (2014), presents the most common types of CUD actions. The report analyzes in detail the assistance received for university development in 2013. It is based on data obtained through the support survey launched annually by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in which a number of Spanish universities participate since 2006, and also on documents prepared by CICUE Cooperation Group for Development (GT CUD) through its Centre for University Cooperation for Development. The types of CUD actions include scholarships, grants for cooperation projects and technical assistance, funding calls for Spanish volunteer students (with NGO), postgraduate courses funding, and Education Actions for Development and Awareness (this latter includes courses, conferences, awards, research, publications ...). Actions concerning teaching in undergraduates studies are not included.

A group of teachers and researchers of the University of Alcalá (UAH), who belong to different disciplines and participate in Development Cooperation, consider that training offered to students in Development Cooperation has three major problems or deficiencies: (a) it is insufficient because, in general, it involves only elementary training focused mainly on a few areas of study; (b) most subjects are optional or transversal, a factor which hinders continuity since subjects offered depend on teachers' availability; and (c) it is not recognized officially in the same way as other academic programs.

Nevertheless, the International Development Cooperation and Poverty Reduction demands greater professionalism and rigor which leads to the conclusion that this type of training should increase, offer proven quality, be acknowledged by institutions and be coordinated among teachers of different disciplines to respond to reality and to the type of training and research required and expected by society in order to live in a more just world.

This group of teachers, created in 2014, is included in the *Multidisciplinary Research Group for Human Development in countries with low Human Development Index (HDI)*. Under the acronym COOPUAH, the group pursues the general objective of reflecting about and evaluating university Development Cooperation (CUD), particularly cooperation carried out in the UAH, university where they play their teaching role. These teachers' course of action is the following:

- Water, health and environment.

- Habitat, territory and local development.

- Teacher education and cultural exchange.

- Education for Development and awareness.

- Gender and development cooperation.

- Safety and human rights.

- University management.

- ICT and development cooperation.

The group' starting premise is that universities are privileged institutions in charge of promoting knowledge, research and debate on global development issues. Universities also play a crucial role in Development Cooperation Policy as they:

- Bring together a large team of experts, teachers and researchers able to advise governments and organizations in countries or areas with low HDI;

- Act as educational centers that contribute to human resource training and implementation of policies and development and international cooperation actions; and

- Contribute to the institutional strengthening of university systems through the improvement of their teaching and research capabilities to enhance their role as development agents (University Code of Conduct on CUD matters).

Universities also have great potential in Development Cooperation:

- As institutions with highly qualified technical and human resources;

- As spaces for awareness and dissemination of solidarity and humanitarian values in the university community and especially among students;

Universities do not only have important social responsibility regarding research for development, but also concerning dissemination of development issues, social awareness on North-South and South-South matters, consciousness of poverty and inequality in the world, social engagement and participation and international volunteering. Universities, therefore, can play a fundamental role in promoting human development.

The group believes that these opportunities should be used to transfer that vast potential to university students. They also consider that the field of Development Cooperation should occupy a prominent position (or at least the one that belongs to it) in university education.

Therefore to undertake this issue, the research group COOPUAH applied for a Project on Teaching innovation which had three objectives: (a) identify and catalog the academic offer related to Cooperation in the University of Alcalá, an offer dispersed among different departments (there is not an specific instrument to assist in its location); (b) develop a Guideline Document which included the academic offering in Development Cooperation (including both undergraduate and graduate courses and complementary activities) so that students could evaluate it and improve it; and (c) propose to academic authorities the best way to coordinate the academic offering with the purpose of creating a multidisciplinary, accredited program in Development Cooperation and/or Reduction of Poverty and Inequality.

In order to obtain this, specific objectives are:

- Exploring the educational offer in the field of development cooperation in the UAH (transversal subjects and related activities -seminars, university extension courses, immersion programs in underdeveloped or emergency contexts, etc.-, contents, teachers involved, etc.);

- Working from an interdisciplinary point of view to complete and improve the offer aforementioned, with the ultimate goal of providing students with high quality training which promoted ethical values in the field.

2. Proposed methodology

For an initial diagnosis of the activities that are (or could) be related to the field of Development Cooperation, a search for transversal subjects (all 6 ECTS) offered by the University of Alcalá was carried out (see Table 1). Objectives, competences and contents were analyzed as well as year, semester and degree in which they were set. In order to establish which of them fit the field of Development Cooperation, this search was completed by reviewing the offer of complementary training activities the UAH put forward annually.

Table 1. UAH Degrees consulted.

UAH CENTRES
ART AND HUMANITIES DEGREES
• Dual Degree in Humanities and Teacher Training (Primary Education)
• Hispanic studies
• English studies
• History
• Humanities
• Modern Languages and Translation
HEALTH SCIENCE DEGREES
• Health Biology
• Physical Activity and Sports Science
• Nursing
• Pharmacy
• Physiotherapy
• Medicine

ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURE DEGREES
• Urban Planning and Architecture
• Building Science Technology
• Computer Engineering
• Electronic Engineering Communication
• Telecommunication Engineering Systems
• Telecommunication Technology Engineering
• Computing Engineering
• Telematic Engineering
• Information Systems
LEGAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
• Dual Degree in Law and Business Management
• Dual Degree in Tourism and Business Administration and Management
• Business Administration and Management
• Audiovisual Communication
• Accounting and Finance
• Law
• Economy
• Economy and International Business
• Teacher Education (Primary and Preschool)
• Teacher Education (Primary)
• Tourism
SCIENCE
• Biology
• Environmental Science
• Chemistry
UAH ATTACHED CENTRES
HEALTH SCIENCE DEGREEES
• Medicine (DUC)

•   Psychology (C.U.C.C.)
<u>LEGAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE</u>
•   Social Education (C.U.C.C.)
•   Teacher Education –bilingual program- (Primary and Preschool) (C.U.C.C.)
•   Teacher Education –blended- (Preschool) (C.U.C.C.)
•   Teacher Education –bilingual program- (Primary) (C.U.C.C.)
•   Teacher Education –blended- (Primary) (C.U.C.C.)

After this analysis, the group discussed the option to promote a coherent and coordinated training offer in the field of Development Cooperation in the UAH. Next, a meeting with the UAH Head of Education Management was arranged with the intention of setting the project objectives and exploring the possibilities of creating a program and its academic recognition. The results of both processes are presented below.

3. Discussion of proposal and results

3.1. Offer of subjects related to Development Cooperation

Subjects related to Development Cooperation found are presented in Table 2.

These are the most important results:

a. Insufficient training offer. Out of the nearly 50 degrees analyzed only 7 transversal subjects related to the topic, of a total of 88 transversal courses, were found (offered for the academic year 2014/2015; this represents 7.95% of the total).

b. Few subjects were focused on Development Cooperation (or where it has a leading role); some of them only include inequality or social marginalization, but not international cooperation for development specifically. Although there are multiple disciplines that approach the subject, they are linked more to Environmental and Health Science than to Social Sciences.

c. Most subjects are scheduled for the second semester, therefore, in case of creating a training program in this field, subjects should be distributed more homogenously throughout the year in order to facilitate students' attendance and encourage a blended learning methodology. This would also facilitate that students from different degrees could choose subjects of the program in case of timetable overlapping.

Table 2. UAH transversal subjects related to Development Cooperation

Subject name	Degree	Year /Semester	Department
Volunteering and Development Education	Teacher Education (Preschool)/ Teacher Education (Primary)/ Teacher Education (Primary) + Teacher Education (Preschool)/ Social Education/ Psychology	4º/1º	Teaching Pedagogy
Gender Diversity and Right Equality	Law	No information/2º	Legal Science
Water, Environment and Health in Development Cooperation	Environmental Science	4º/2º	Geology, Geography and Environment (External Geodynamics area) / Surgery, Social Science and Medicine (Preventive Medicine and Public Health area)
Environmental Sustainability and Cooperation: Workshop in the south of Morocco	Environmental Science	4º/2º	Geology, Geography and Environment (External Geodynamics area)
Introduction to Development Cooperation	Medicine	2º/2º	Surgery, Social Science and Medicine (Preventive Medicine and Public Health area)
Tropical Disease and Global Health	Medicine	2º/2º	Biomedicine y Biotechnology
Global Health	Nursing	3º/1º	Nursing and Physiotherapy

In addition, the UAH has a range of complementary training activities in Development Cooperation not comprised in official studies but recognized through open credits

(former) or transversal credits (ECTS). This offer, renewed each academic year, also includes a variety of activities related to the field of Development Cooperation, such as a Conference on Research applied to Development Cooperation: Actions and Future Prospects: Is inequality sustainable? (1 ECTS); Human Rights and Cooperation through film (1 ECTS); Water and environmental sanitation in emergency projects and Development Cooperation (1 ECTS); Symposium on Tropical Diseases and International Health (1 ECTS). Other activities involve two months stays (or longer) in Social Campus projects in Central America (4 credits per month of stay). As these activities appear in a list of over 100 multi-themed activities, where summer courses, music room, dance class, etc. are mixed, identification of those related to cooperation is a complicated task.

3.2. Proposal for a specific training program in Development Cooperation in the UAH

After the working group discussion and the meeting with the head of the University Education Management in January 2015, two important aspects emerged: the theoretical approach and the technical approach.

From a theoretical perspective (understood as the philosophical framework of the topic to be discussed), the idea of designing a training program in Development Cooperation would be significant if aimed at considering this area as a fundamental element of UAH culture. In other words, the field of Development Cooperation ought to be recognized as a pillar within the university functions, just as the university values other transversal themes that give character to the institution (for instance, sustainability or, currently, corporate social responsibility). Consequently, the university could incorporate the program in its formal educational offering as a real, coherent and attractive proposal for students, constituting a distinguishing hallmark of the UAH.

From the technical point of view, these were the issues discussed:

a. Given the proposal, difficulties arose in recognizing this type of training in term of credits as students must take a series of transversal credits whose number is not the same in all undergraduate degrees (it depends on the total credits of each degree). The

debate focused on whether the number of transversal credits could increase in order to include more subjects in a specific program of Development Cooperation, and whether, given the current price of tuition, students could really benefit from this modality.

b. From the perspective of the organization of academic offer, it was proposed that - within the range of transversal subjects- the UAH electronic enrollment documentation could incorporate a joint highlighted block listing the range of subjects under the heading of Development Cooperation, (which could increase both their visibility and attractiveness).

c. In order to recognize the program officially, it was proposed that the student's academic worksheet specify that the student had taken that concrete program during his/her university education.

These agreements and/or proposals will continue to be developed for their possible application in the 2015-2016 academic year, though the process can be long since its application depends not only on the Academic Secretary and university departments but also in other instances, such as those related to computing (IT) issues.

4. Conclusions

Though the offer of transversal subjects and complementary activities related to Development Cooperation in the UAH is limited and perhaps biased towards health and environmental issues, it can be a starting point for organizing a "complementary learning program" in that area if it were diversified. To offer a coherent proposal and increase the possibility of enrollment by students, logistical issues such as semester distribution or possibility of offering blended learning methodologies would have to be considered as well. Moreover, it would be interesting to promote the offer of this type of subjects from the field of Social Sciences, where current offer is limited.

On the other hand, for the future organization (or unification) of a program on Development Cooperation, any training activities the UAH could offer should be

considered more systematically, highlighting those than can be sustained over time, and including them as part of that program.

Based on the discussion, contribution and results and being conscious of the need to start offering a transversal training program (attempting to avoid training initiatives biased in the field of Social Sciences), the group COOPUAH decided to implement a basic highly interdisciplinary subject. This subject -addressed to all students of the University of Alcalá- entitled "Sustainable Development and Cooperation: Road to dignity for 2030" aims at situating students in and making them aware of the new framework of Sustainable Development Goals. In its broadest sense, it contributes to university social responsibility by covering wide-ranging and complementary fields such as Rights Human, Sustainable Economy, Gender, Environment, Health, Habitat and Territory, etc.

The group believe that technical problems that may appear in order to include the "program" in the university curricula will be easily solved with the support of the Vice-Rectorate for Teaching and Students, and in particular with the help of the Head of Education Management. What the group consider key is to keep on working so that the institution recognizes the field of Development Cooperation as a significant element within the UAH objectives.

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