

# REFLEXIONES CONCEPTUALES EN TORNO A LA EDUCACIÓN TERCIARIA

**Dr. Lorenzo Guadamuz Sandoval, Ph.D.**

## REFLEXIONES CONCEPTUALES EN TORNO A LA EDUCACIÓN TERCIARIA

Dr. Lorenzo Guadamuz Sandoval, Ph.D.

Existe desde inicios del siglo pasado la costumbre entre los especialistas, investigadores, ministerios de educación y organismos internacionales de utilizar, como parte de las estructuras educativas, la analogía de niveles educativos crecientes, por lo que se menciona educación primaria, educación secundaria y , como siguiente nivel, la educación terciaria.

Referirse a la educación superior, como educación terciaria, es punto común al revisar la literatura de UNESCO, BID, Banco Mundial y estudiosos de la educación superior, desde las propias Universidades.

Por ejemplo el Banco Mundial<sup>1</sup>, señala que *“Atendiendo a la complejidad y diversidad de los sistemas de enseñanza superior modernos, en este estudio se usa una definición genérica para referirse a todas las instituciones post secundarias académicas que forman personal profesional de nivel medio y superior en programas que otorgan títulos y certificados. Las expresiones enseñanza o educación superior, terciaria y post secundaria se utilizan aquí en forma intercambiable.”*. Banco Mundial. La Enseñanza Superior. Las lecciones derivadas de la experiencia. *El desarrollo en la práctica*. Washington, 1994.

Por su parte, el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID)<sup>2</sup>, en el mismo año, utiliza el concepto educación superior como educación universitaria.

La OCDE define la educación terciaria como “un nivel de educación más allá de la educación secundaria” Ello permite incluir toda la oferta educativa que realizan instituciones educativas terciarias, tanto públicas como privadas, sean universidades, colegios universitarios, institutos politécnicos, y también en una amplia gama de otras instituciones que ofrecen algún servicio post-secundario, como escuelas de educación secundaria que adicionan ofertas preparatorias para la universidad o para el trabajo, uno o dos años de educación, centros de trabajo que institucionalizan estudios post-secundarios para capacitación para el trabajo , o las ofertas basadas en el uso de TICs para educación virtual de nivel post-secundario no universitario.

Siempre desde el punto de vista de las estructuras educativas, a partir de las reformas promovidas en los años setentas, luego retomadas en los años noventa (ejemplo Plan Decenal en la República Dominicana) los niveles educativos se amplían, dándole a la educación pre-primaria una importancia significativa, por lo que se crea como un nivel independiente de la educación primaria. Por ello se mencionan cuatro niveles educativos: el nivel de educación inicial, el nivel de educación básica, el nivel de educación diversificada y el nivel de educación superior.

---

<sup>1</sup> Banco Mundial. La Enseñanza Superior. Las lecciones derivadas de la experiencia. *El desarrollo en la práctica*. Washington, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> BANCO MUNDIAL UNIÓN DE UNIVERSIDADES DE AMERICA LATINA-*La educación superior en América Latina. Testimonio de un Seminario de Rectores*. Ed. Salvador Malo y Samuel Morley, Washington, nov. 1994.

En esta clasificación, en la práctica, se ha seguido usando educación terciaria para ubicar todos aquellos programas no universitarios, como veremos más adelante en la clasificación de la UNESCO.

La educación superior, en estas estructuras educativas, se considera como aquella oferta educativa que tiene como requisito el haber concluido la educación secundaria, media o diversificada y tener un título o certificado de Conclusión de la educación media o diversificada.

La Educación Superior se clasifica –según estas estructuras- en Educación Superior Universitaria o educación superior de corto ciclo y en Educación Superior No Universitaria.

La educación superior no universitaria ofrece cursos de una duración variable, generalmente de hasta dos años y no ofrecen un grado universitario. No se vincula a la actividad de docencia la función de investigación. Acá se ubican muchas de las ofertas de colegios universitarios, colegios comunitarios, institutos politécnicos o instituciones educativas de empresas, del tipo de “learning technology center”.

La Educación Superior ofrece grado (bachiller universitario y/o licenciatura) y post-grado (maestrías, especialidades y doctorados) y su actividad de docencia se tiene que acompañar con la función de investigación.

En tanto el Banco Mundial<sup>3</sup>, señala que “Atendiendo a la complejidad y diversidad de los sistemas de enseñanza superior modernos, en este estudio se usa una definición genérica para referirse a todas las instituciones post secundarias académicas que forman personal profesional de nivel medio y superior en programas que otorgan títulos y certificados. Las expresiones enseñanza o educación superior, terciaria y post secundaria se utilizan aquí en forma intercambiable.” Se elude entonces la discusión, que parece ser el centro de preocupación de la propia universidad.

Por su parte, el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID), en el mismo año, utiliza el concepto educación superior como educación universitaria.

La Organización de las Naciones Unidas Para la Educación la Ciencia y la Cultura, creó la Clasificación internacional normalizada de la educación, C.I.N.E<sup>4</sup>, ( en inglés International Standard Classification of Education, ISSCED 1997) , la cual define así el nivel terciario:

---

<sup>3</sup> Banco Mundial. La Enseñanza Superior. Las lecciones derivadas de la experiencia. *El desarrollo en la práctica*. Washington, 1994. Ver: Prefacio.

<sup>4</sup> C.I.N.E. Pág. 18

### *“Tercer Nivel De Educación (Enseñanza Terciaria)*

78. *Esta categoría comprende los programas con un contenido educativo de nivel superior al impartido en los programas del ciclo superior de la enseñanza secundaria y en los de la nueva categoría 4 que se propone. Para tener acceso a estos programas se requiere una calificación en el ciclo superior de la enseñanza secundaria, que se confiere después de 12 o 13 años de escolarización en la enseñanza primaria y secundaria. El tercer nivel de educación puede impartirse en múltiples conjuntos institucionales de diversa índole como universidades, colegios, institutos politécnicos, centros de formación e instituciones educativas dirigidas por empresarios u organismos relacionados con las empresas. Los programas de nivel terciario difieren muy considerablemente tanto por su estructura como por su alcance y también son muy distintos de un país a otro. En función de los países, también existen amplias diferencias con respecto a los requisitos mínimos generalmente exigidos para ingresar en este nivel, su duración teórica, el grado de especialización de sus programas y los medios de calificarse para obtener un certificado de haber cursado los programas (por ejemplo, unidades de valor obtenidas, exámenes específicos de índole nacional o institucional, tesis de investigación). Se necesitan múltiples dimensiones para captar la variabilidad de contenido que va de par con esta amplia diversidad de la estructura de los programas. Es obvio que no se obtendrán estadísticas comparables entre países recurriendo a la denominación de los programas de tercer nivel o a la institución que los imparta.*
79. *Las categorías de los programas comprendidos en este nivel se clasifican utilizando cuatro dimensiones: la duración acumulada de los programas; el tipo de calificación (grado universitario o equivalente, o bien grado no universitario o equivalente); la posición en la estructura nacional de grados y calificaciones (calificación intermedia, primer grado, segundo grado, tercer grado, etc.); y el hecho de que el programa desemboque o no en la atribución de estudios avanzados. Los programas del tercer nivel que no conduzcan directamente en una calificación de estudios avanzados se clasifican en la categoría 5 y los que conducen a una calificación de estudios avanzados se clasifican en la categoría 6.(1)*

## ANEXOS

Ejemplos de uso del concepto de educación terciaria en diversos organismos.

### Desafíos para la Educación Terciaria

**Una publicación del Banco Mundial (abril 2002) sobre los desafíos que enfrenta la educación superior en la sociedad del conocimiento. Un diagnóstico de la evolución de los sistemas de enseñanza terciaria en el mundo.**

El Informe de Educación Terciaria explora cómo los países pueden adaptar y diseñar sus sistemas de educación terciaria de modo que puedan enfrentar exitosamente esta combinación de desafíos antiguos y nuevos, que en un contexto de nuevas fuerzas de mercado, nacionales e internacionales, emergen en la educación terciaria. El documento analiza si se justifica o no continuar con el apoyo del sector público a la educación terciaria y revisa cuál sería un rol apropiado para un Estado que debe apoyar un crecimiento económico orientado por el conocimiento. Analiza las experiencias recientes del Banco Mundial en apoyo a la educación terciaria, sacando de ellas lecciones que incluyen formas de minimizar el impacto político negativo de las reformas a la educación terciaria y recomendaciones estratégicas para los futuros involucramientos del Banco.

En síntesis, los mensajes de este documento son los siguientes: a) el progreso social y económico se logra principalmente a través del avance y la aplicación del conocimiento; b) la educación terciaria es necesaria para una verdadera creación, diseminación y aplicación del conocimiento, como asimismo para construir capacidades técnicas y profesionales; c) países en desarrollo y en transición están más en riesgo de quedar marginalizados en una economía mundial crecientemente competitiva porque sus sistemas de educación terciaria no están adecuadamente preparados para capitalizar la creación y el uso del conocimiento; d) el Estado tiene la responsabilidad de establecer marcos que promuevan que las instituciones de educación terciaria sean más innovadoras y respondan más activamente a las necesidades de una economía del conocimiento competitiva globalmente y a los cambiantes requerimientos del mercado laboral con un capital humano avanzado.

International Standard Classification of Education. ISCED, November 1997.

En el punto 28 en adelante se define:

28. The notion of 'levels' of education is taken to be broadly related to gradations of learning experiences and the competences which the contents of an educational programme require of participants if they are to have a reasonable expectation of acquiring the knowledge, skills and capabilities that the programme is designed to impart. Broadly speaking, the level is related to the degree of complexity of the content of the programme. This does not imply that levels of education constitute a ladder where the access of prospective participants to each level necessarily depends on having successfully completed the previous level. It also does not

preclude the possibility that some participants in educational programmes at a given level may have previously successfully completed programmes at a higher level.

29. The notion of 'levels' of education, therefore, is essentially a construct based on the assumption that educational programmes can be grouped, both nationally and cross-nationally, into an ordered series of categories broadly corresponding to the overall knowledge, skills and capabilities required of participants if they are to have a reasonable expectation of successfully completing the programmes in these categories. These categories represent broad steps of educational progression from very elementary to more complex experiences with the more complex the programme, the higher the level of education.
30. The classification of the levels of education is undertaken within an overall taxonomic framework that considers the educational system as a whole, and specifically for parameters that are of key interest to policy-makers in international educational comparisons or that are closely related to the definition of the levels of education. Such parameters can be the general orientation of the programme, the field of education, the service provider and the educational setting or location, the mode of service provision, the type of participant or the mode of participation. Some of these parameters do not necessarily provide direct attributes of the educational programmes but are rather attributes of the institutions that provide the programmes or general attributes of the modes of provision. However, these attributes serve an important function in distinguishing the nature of the programmes in many countries. They further play a crucial role when defining the scope of data collections. Thus, while ISCED is a classification system of educational programmes, these other – often closely interrelated – parameters will help to establish an overall reference framework.

#### LEVEL 4 - POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

##### **Principal characteristics**

71. ISCED 4 captures programmes that straddle the boundary between upper-secondary and post-secondary education from an international point of view, even though they might clearly be considered as upper-secondary or post-secondary programmes in a national context.
72. ISCED 4 programmes can, considering their content, not be regarded as tertiary programmes. They are often not significantly more advanced than programmes at ISCED 3 but they serve to broaden the knowledge of participants who have already completed a programme at level 3.
73. Typical examples are programmes designed to prepare students for studies at level 5 who, although having completed ISCED level 3, did not follow a curriculum which would allow entry to level 5, i.e. pre-degree foundation courses or short vocational programmes. Second cycle programmes can be included as well.

##### **Classification criteria**

74. It requires as a rule the successful completion of level 3, i.e. successful completion of any programme at level 3A or 3B, or, for 3C programmes, a cumulative theoretical duration of

typically 3 years at least. However, the criterion of successful completion of ISCED 3 should be interpreted in the context of the duration of the programme. For example, a programme that builds on a 2-year programme at ISCED 3 and has a duration of 4 years, would normally be classified at ISCED 4 even though the preceding 2-year programme at ISCED 3 does not qualify for the completion of ISCED 3.

The programme content can be expected to be more specialized or detailed and the applications to be more complex in some cases than those offered at the upper-secondary level, and this irrespective of the institutional setting of the programme.

- The students are typically older than those in upper secondary programmes.
- It has a typical full-time equivalent duration of between 6 months and 2 years.

### **Complementary dimensions**

75. Three dimensions are needed to subclassify this level:
- type of subsequent education or destination (see paragraph 36);
  - the cumulative theoretical duration in full-time equivalence since the beginning of level 3; and
  - the programme orientation (see paragraph 36).

#### **Type of subsequent education or destination**

76. According to this first dimension, level 4 can be subdivided into:

- 4A programmes that prepare for entry to ISCED 5; and
- 4B programmes not giving access to level 5 (primarily designed for direct labour market entry).

#### **Cumulative theoretical duration**

77. This duration is to be considered from the beginning of ISCED 3.

#### **Programme orientation**

78. The three categories are defined above in paragraphs 56 to 59:
- general education;
  - pre-vocational or pre-technical education; and
  - vocational or technical education.

### **LEVEL 5 - FIRST STAGE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION (NOT LEADING DIRECTLY TO AN ADVANCED RESEARCH QUALIFICATION)**

## **Principal characteristics**

80. This level consists of tertiary programmes having an educational content more advanced than those offered at levels 3 and 4. Entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3A or 3B or a similar qualification at ISCED level 4A.
81. All degrees and qualifications are cross-classified by type of programmes, position in national degree or qualification structures (see below) and cumulative duration at tertiary.

## **Classification criteria**

82. For the definition of this level, the following criteria are relevant:
  - normally the minimum entrance requirement to this level is the successful completion of ISCED level 3A or 3B or ISCED level 4A;
  - level 5 programmes do not lead directly to the award of an advanced research qualification (level 6); and
  - these programmes must have a cumulative theoretical duration of at least 2 years from the beginning of level 5.

## **Complementary dimensions**

83. Three complementary dimensions are needed to subdivide this level:
  - the type of programmes dividing programmes into theoretically based/research preparatory/giving access to professions with high skills requirements programmes on the one hand, practical/technical/occupationally specific programmes on the other hand;
  - the cumulative theoretical duration in full time equivalence; and
  - the position in the national degree or qualification structure (first, second or further degree, research).

Combining these three independent dimensions is the only way to capture the broad variety in the provision of tertiary education. The choice of the combination depends on the problems to analyse.

## **Type of programmes**

84. The first dimension to be considered is the distinction between the programmes which are theoretically based/research preparatory (history, philosophy, mathematics, etc.) or giving access to professions with high skills requirements (e.g. medicine, dentistry, architecture, etc.), and those programmes which are practical/technical/occupationally specific. To facilitate the presentation, the first type will be called 5A, the second, 5B.
85. With the increasing demand for tertiary education in many countries, the distinction between long streams and short streams is very important. The long stream programmes are more



theoretical and can lead to advanced research programmes or a profession with high skills requirements. The short streams are more practically oriented.

86. As the organizational structure of tertiary education programmes varies greatly across countries, no single criterion can be used to define boundaries between ISCED 5A and ISCED 5B. The following criteria are the minimum requirements for classifying a programme as ISCED 5A, although programmes not satisfying a single criterion should not be automatically excluded. If a programme is similar in content to other programmes meeting each of these criteria, it should be classified at level 5A.
87. ISCED level 5A programmes are tertiary programmes that are largely theoretically based and are intended to provide sufficient qualifications for gaining entry into advanced research programmes and profession with high skills requirements. They must satisfy a sufficient number of the following criteria:
  - they have a minimum cumulative theoretical duration (at tertiary) of three years' full-time equivalent, although typically they are of 4 or more years. If a degree has 3 years' full-time equivalent duration, it is usually preceded by at least 13 years of previous schooling (see paragraph 35). For systems in which degrees are awarded by credit accumulation, a comparable amount of time and intensity would be required;
  - they typically require that the faculty have advanced research credentials;
  - they may involve completion of a research project or thesis;
  - they provide the level of education required for entry into a profession with high skills requirements (see paragraph 84) or an advanced research programme.
88. Qualifications in category 5B are typically shorter than those in 5A and focus on occupationally specific skills geared for entry into the labour market, although some theoretical foundations may be covered in the respective programme.
89. The content of ISCED level 5B programmes is practically oriented/occupationally specific and is mainly designed for participants to acquire the practical skills, and know-how needed for employment in a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades - the successful completion of which usually provides the participants with a labour-market relevant qualification.
90. A programme should be considered as belonging to level 5B if it meets the following criteria:
  - it is more practically oriented and occupationally specific than programmes at ISCED 5A, and does not provide direct access to advanced research programmes;
  - it has a minimum of two years' full-time equivalent duration but generally is of 2 or 3 years. For systems in which qualifications are awarded by credit accumulation, a comparable amount of time and intensity would be required;
  - the entry requirement may require the mastery of specific subject areas at ISCED 3B or 4A; and
  - it provides access to an occupation.

### **Cumulative theoretical duration**

91. For initial programmes at tertiary, the cumulative theoretical duration is simply the theoretical full-time equivalent duration of those programmes from the beginning of level 5.
92. For programmes that require completion of other tertiary programmes prior to admission (see national degree and qualification structure below), cumulative duration is calculated by adding the minimum entrance requirements of the programme (i.e. full-time equivalent years of tertiary education prerequisites) to the full-time equivalent duration of the programme. For degrees or qualifications where the full-time equivalent years of schooling is unknown (i.e. courses of study designed explicitly for flexible or part-time study), cumulative duration is calculated based on the duration of more traditional degree or qualification programmes with a similar level of educational content.
93. The categories to be considered would be:
  - and less than 3 years (particularly for ISCED level 5B);
  - and less than 4 years;
  - and less than 5 years;
  - and less than 6 years;
  - years and more.

### **National degree and qualification structure**

94. This dimension cross-classifies both ISCED 5A and 5B qualifications by their position in the national qualification structure for tertiary education within an individual country.
95. The main reason the national degree and qualification structure is included as a separate dimension is that the timing of these awards mark important educational and labour market transition points within countries. For example, in country A a student who completes a three year Bachelor's degree programme will have access to a wide range of occupations and opportunities for further education, whereas the same student studying in country B (which does not distinguish between a first and second university degree) will only obtain a labour market relevant qualification after the completion of a full four or five year degree programme, even though the content may be similar to that of a second (Master's) degree programme in country A.
96. The 'position' of a degree or qualification structure is assigned (first, second or further, research) based on the internal hierarchy of awards within national education systems. For example, a first theoretically based degree or qualification (cross-classifying 'theoretically based' type of programme 5A with 'first' in the national degree and qualifications structure) would necessarily meet all of the criteria listed above for a theoretically based programme and lead to the first important educational or labour market qualification within this type of programme. The research degree is intended for the countries which have a non-doctoral

research degree such as the Master of Philosophy in some countries and want to have it clearly distinguished in international statistics.

97. When 'theoretically based' programmes are organized and provide sequential qualifications, usually only the last qualification gives direct access to level 6, but all these programmes are allocated to level 5A.
98. Bachelor's degrees in many English-speaking countries, the 'Diplom' in many German-speaking countries, and the Licence in many French-speaking countries meet the content criteria for the first theoretically based programmes. Second and higher theoretically based programmes (e.g. Master's degree in English-speaking countries and Maîtrise in French-speaking countries) would be classified separately from advanced research qualifications, which would have their own position in ISCED 6 (see below).
99. Degrees or qualifications with a different numerical ranking in two countries may be equivalent in educational content. For instance, programmes leading to a 'graduate' or second degree in many English-speaking countries have to be classified at level 5 as is the case for long first degrees in many German-speaking countries. It is only by combining national degree structure with other tertiary dimensions, such as cumulative theoretical duration and programme orientation, that enough information is available to group degrees and qualifications of similar education content.

#### **LEVEL 6 - SECOND STAGE OF TERTIARY EDUCATION (LEADING TO AN ADVANCED RESEARCH QUALIFICATION)**

##### **Principal characteristics**

103. This level is reserved for tertiary programmes which lead to the award of an advanced research qualification. The programmes are therefore devoted to advanced study and original research and are not based on course-work only.

##### **Classification criteria**

104. For the definition of this level, the following criteria are relevant:

##### **Main criterion**

It typically requires the submission of a thesis or dissertation of publishable quality which is the product of original research and represents a significant contribution to knowledge.

##### **Subsidiary criterion**

It prepares graduates for faculty posts in institutions offering ISCED 5A programmes, as well as research posts in government, industry, etc.

**Complementary dimensions**

105. As the scope of this level is very restricted, no complementary dimension is needed.

**Includes also:**

106. The part concentrating on advanced research in those countries where students beginning tertiary education enrol directly for an advanced research programme (see paragraph 101).