

Service-learning in the Spanish university system: A study based on deans' perception

Aprendizaje-Servicio en las universidades españolas: un estudio basado en la percepción de los equipos decanales

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Abstract

The third mission of the University consists of returning to society part of what it receives. This way of understanding the relationship between society and university involves the use of new teaching/learning methodologies, in which teachers cease to be mere transmitters of knowledge, and students acquire an active and critical role in response to the social needs. Service-Learning is a methodological strategy that combines the theoretical training in a field of knowledge and the implementation of the knowledge acquired through provision of a service to the community. This methodology is appropriate to make that third mission of the university institution possible. The objective of this work is to understand the willingness of the Spanish faculties or university schools to promote and create opportunities that lead to the implementation of service-learning projects in their centers. Among the conclusions of the study, the institutional perception should be pointed out. According to it, the use of this methodology turns the university into a more open institution, which interacts with the community and the environment, expanding its training field beyond the technical and scientific knowledge, in order to provide a service of social transformation

Keywords: Higher Education; Competences; Civic Engagement; Service-learning; Deans; Institutionalization.

Resumen

La tercera misión de la universidad implica devolver a la sociedad parte de lo que de ella recibe. Este modo de entender la relación entre sociedad y universidad supone la implementación de nuevas metodologías de enseñanza-aprendizaje, en las cuales el profesorado deja de ser un mero transmisor de conocimiento, y los estudiantes adquieren un papel activo y crítico en respuesta a las necesidades sociales. El aprendizaje-servicio es una estrategia metodológica que combina la formación teórica en un ámbito de conocimiento con su aplicación a través de la prestación de un servicio a la comunidad. Esta metodología es apropiada para hacer posible la tercera misión de la institución universitaria. El objetivo de este trabajo es comprender la disposición de las facultades y escuelas universitarias de España para promover y crear oportunidades que den lugar a la implementación de proyectos de ApS en sus centros. Entre las conclusiones del estudio cabe destacar la percepción institucional, ya que el uso de esta metodología convierte a la universidad en una institución más abierta, que interactúa con la comunidad y el entorno, ampliando su campo de formación más allá del conocimiento técnico y científico, para brindar un servicio de transformación social.

Palabras clave: Educación Superior; Competencias; Compromiso Cívico; Aprendizaje-Servicio; Decanos/as; Institucionalización.

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We live in a complex world, in which problems and challenges constantly emerge (Bauman & Donskis, 2015). Universities, as part of the society, cannot be unmoved by the

situations that constantly challenge them, and must react by adapting their structures, their organization, their models, and teaching and

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evaluation methodologies to the new social demands and students' educational needs.

For some time, society has been calling for a model of university that goes beyond the training of future professionals; it requires a university committed to the community of origin, which is asked to train a critical, responsible citizenship that works to overcome existing injustices and inequalities, seeking the common good (Martínez Martín, 2016). This university should adopt new methodological proposals, many of which will be developed in different educational environments, which will imply an improvement of the training options available to students (Piqué & Forés, 2013).

The university must be aware that its mission is in constant transformation, and the present times require a special sensitivity to growing social needs (Santos Rego, 2016). Alongside traditional teaching and research functions, in recent years, particular emphasis has been placed on the so-called "third mission of the university", whereby it is considered that part of what it receives from society should return to it, according to the requirements of its citizenship (Yáñez, Okada, & Palau, 2015). This implies a constant dialog and communication between the university community and civil society, in order to identify needs and seek ways of collaboration.

This approach entails, among other aspects, the use of new teaching/learning methodologies, in which teachers cease to be mere transmitters of knowledge. They become guides and companions of their students in the co-construction of knowledge and its implementation (Gros, 2016). For their part, students should assume a more active role and become the protagonists of their own learning process.

It is now considered that a quality university education must include scientific knowledge of excellence and both generic and specific competences, necessary for good performance in the workplace, as well as in the exercise of participatory and supportive citizenship (Martínez-Vivot & Folgueiras, 2015).

However, this approach implies a transformation of the universities, not only in terms of structure of the studies or content of the subjects, but also in teaching and learning methodology, which should be more active and oriented towards performance goals.

In this context, the learning of competences is fundamental for students to relate theoretical knowledge to the execution of practical activities in a given context (Moyá & Luengo, 2011). This implies the implementation of real experiences, programmed and supervised by the teachers, who provides feedback on the process and facilitate reflection on what has been learned.

The University Strategy 2015 (Ministerio de Educación, 2010) stands for the modernization of the Spanish universities, by including in their training model practical activities referring to the preparation of students for a career, along with the corresponding exercise of social responsibility. To this end, universities should move towards an institutional model that promotes sustainability and university social responsibility.

This approach is endorsed by legal regulations such as Article 64.3 of the Royal Decree 1791/2010 of 30 December (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2010), approving the University Student Status, which calls for universities to favor practices of social and citizen responsibility that combine academic learning in different degree programs and the provision of services to the community, aimed at improving the quality of life and social inclusion. It is also endorsed by the Royal Decree 1027/2011, of 15 July (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2011), amended by the Royal Decree 96/2014, of 14 February, establishing the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, known as MECES, which both at the level of Bachelor's degree and Master's degree, anticipates, as a result of learning, students' ability to make ethical reflections in their field of study.

The anticipation of learning outcomes of this nature implies understanding University also as

an ethical learning space (Parker et al., 2009), as well as the need to define strategies and methodologies, such as Service-Learning, that make it possible, as defined by CRUE (2015) in their report on Service-Learning as a teaching strategy within the framework of University Social Responsibility for the promotion of Sustainability at University level. It is well-understood that this teaching and learning methodology (henceforth, SL) is one of the most appropriate opportunities for students to put into practice what they learned in the classroom and to develop competences based on their active participation in experiences associated with community service.

Service-Learning (SL) is a methodological strategy that combines the theoretical training of a subject with the implementation of the knowledge acquired through provision of a service to the community. It is based on a process of learning-by-doing, which is one of the fundamental principles of modern pedagogy, which applies to both intellectual and moral environment (Batlle, 2013; Santos Rego, Sotelino & Lorenzo, 2015). This principle puts students at the center of the educational process, placing them in the role of protagonist who takes control of their own training (Gil-Gómez, Moliner-García, Chiva-Bartoll, & García López, 2016).

SL is an innovative teaching and learning method, of an experiential nature, which integrates academic knowledge and service to the community, facilitating students' personal growth and civic responsibility (Caspersz & Oлару, 2015; Lin, 2015). It is a form of active learning, integrated into the curriculum, in which students learn by performing service experiences that cover social needs and enable them to put into practice what they learned in the classroom and to acquire professional competences. The novelty of this methodology lies in the integration of these two elements, fundamental for the learning process, within the well-articulated, coherent framework of a single project.

It is important to keep in mind that SL is not a specific activity, but a well articulated and coherent project in which participants learn to work on the real needs of the environment, with the purpose of improving it. They are complex activities that require the formulation of objectives and planning of tasks, both for service and learning, and which are executed in different phases (Puig, Batlle, Bosch, & Palos, 2007): analysis of the current situation, development of a plan of action, execution of the proposal and delivery of evaluable results. The challenge is that these activities are not isolated from the rest of the educational context in which students learn, as there is evidence that SL improves learning outcomes and human relationships between students and teachers, while increasing the sense of civic responsibility (Chui & Leung, 2014).

The experimental evidence of the SL effectiveness as a teaching-learning methodology accounts for several lines of research. On the one hand, it refers to a better long-term memory for complex concepts and ideas, when linked to experience, and it favors the transfer of skills and knowledge to real situations (Torío & García-Pérez, 2015). On the other hand, SL contributes to the development of critical thinking and resolution of real problems in a social context, which implies awareness of social responsibility and development of values (Folgueiras, Luna, & Puig 2013; Ibarrola & Artuch 2016). Finally, there is a third line under which SL, insofar as it is addressed primarily to people and groups who are socially disadvantaged and at risk of exclusion, allows students to become aware of the need for social justice, as well as learning to analyze issues and situations with a critical eye (Herrero & Tapia 2012; Rubio, Prats & Gómez, 2013).

The summary of the evidence on SL effectiveness in the acquisition of different competences was performed both in qualitative reviews and meta-analyses, which together account for hundreds of studies showing positive results of this methodology on academic, personal, social and professional

competences. One could cite, for example, the review conducted by Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray (2001), which included 136 qualitative and quantitative studies; the meta-analysis performed by Conway, Amel, and Gerwien (2009) on 103 independent samples; the meta-analysis of Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki (2011), which summarized the SL effects found in 62 studies that included 11,837 unique participants; and the meta-analysis carried out by Yorio and Ye (2012) which focused on 40 studies and 5,495 unique participants. The studies conducted by Eyler et al. (2001), and Yorio and Ye (2012) refer exclusively to the effects of SL on higher education, while the two meta-analyses included studies carried out both at university level, and at levels 1-4 of the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) classification. The statistical data used in the meta-analyses show that the greater effect size is associated with academic learning (see also the meta-analysis performed by Novak, Markey, and Allen (2007); and that of Warren (2012). In addition, significant effects are observed on civic commitment, social competences and different personal attributes (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, and attitudes).

This scientific evidence, along with the constant criticism that the university continues to be oblivious to social needs, is turning SL into the necessary motivation to generate a major change in educational institutions, also used by critical pedagogy (Deeley, 2016). This methodology has therefore gained great popularity and is rapidly catching up with new generations of teachers and students, particularly sensitive to generating social change that contributes to alleviate growing injustice and inequality.

As a methodology of university education, Service-Learning is consolidated in many regions of the world, although its institutionalization situation is quite varied. In the United States, SL pervaded both the educational practice and research in many

universities, such as Maryland, Colorado, Indiana, San Francisco or Duke, which have Service-Learning departments that organize and promote the activities of this learning method (Rodríguez Gallego, 2014).

In Latin America there has also been a great theoretical and methodological development of SL, particularly in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay or Chile, especially since the creation in 2005 of the Latin American Center of Learning and Solidarity Service (CLAYSS), which laid the groundwork for the creation and current consolidation of the Iberoamerican Service-Learning Network.

In Europe, the task is still a work in progress, since the first institutions and legal regulations have not emerged until the beginning of the century. Among the most relevant are the Council for Citizenship and Learning in the Community, Service Learning: Dialogue between Universities and Communities (the Leonardo Project: CIVICUS) and Lernen durch Engagement. In Spain, the Spanish Service-Learning Network was created, which integrates and coordinates the different networks throughout the Spanish territory. In the University context, the Service-Learning Network (Red Universitaria de ApS) was also generated, and there are several Spanish universities (of Navarra, Barcelona, Seville, Santiago de Compostela or Valencia, among others) which are carrying out Service-Learning research and projects, and taking considerable steps towards the institutionalization of this methodology.

The general objective of this research is to understand the willingness in the Spanish faculties or university schools to promote and create opportunities leading to Service-Learning projects. To this end, an interview was prepared for male and female deans¹, keeping in mind that they are people who, due to their positions, have relevant information on the topic and can provide key data to establish the

¹ When referring to male and female deans, we also include chancellors, vice-deans, assistant managers of teaching

organizations, quality assistant managers of the faculties and university schools selected.

state of the question, that is, to find out what is the starting point when considering an institutionalization of SL at university level. This overall objective is specified further by the setting of the following specific objectives:

- 1) To have a reference to the commitment acquired by the faculties to the “third mission of the university”.
- 2) To evaluate the knowledge that exists in the university faculties on the SL methodology.
- 3) To establish an institutional diagnosis in order to evaluate the willingness of the university to implement SL as a learning methodology.

This research is part of a broader study, whose ultimate aim is to enable the transition of SL from the current de facto situation, made up of a set of individual initiatives carried out in certain university courses, to an institutional program supported by stable university structures.

Method

The research was conducted in a representative sample of the faculties and schools of six Spanish universities (University of Santiago de Compostela, University of A Coruña, Complutense University of Madrid, University of Navarra, University of Córdoba and University of Valencia), focused on the degree of knowledge and implementation of the Service-Learning methodology at the university level. Another objective is to look for data on the willingness to use SL as a learning methodology. To this end, a total of 41 interviews were carried out with the deans of the selected faculties and schools.

Research design

For this study, a phenomenological approach was chosen, which would bring us closer to the knowledge and meaning that those responsible for university centers attribute to the SL teaching methodology in the context of its institutionalization process in Spain. Given this paradigm, a descriptive and exploratory, cross-

sectional design was articulated on the collection of information through structured individual interviews.

Sample

In the six universities linked to the research project, where the study was carried out, a total of 124 faculties and university schools were recorded. From this population, a stratified random sampling, without replacement and with probability proportional to the size, was performed using the SPSS software (v22) (Horvitz Thompson unbiased estimator), taking into account the number of degree programs of each center as size measurement (323 Degree programs were taught in all the centers, but with significant variations between them).

The stratification criteria referred to the branch and university, thus the total number of strata was 30 (5 branches x 6 universities). On the other hand, during the application, an initial percentage of 30% of the recorded units (centers) was chosen to be included in the sample, which later was modified, by delimiting a range of eligible units according to the size of the centers (between 1 and 3).

Taking all of the above criteria into account, the extraction of the sample yielded a total of 44 centers, representing the 124 centers of the six universities (35.5% of the total) and corresponding to at least 1 center to each of the 30 strata in which the population of faculties and university schools was classified.

Information collection

The interviews with the deans from the selected schools and faculties were conducted between September and December 2015, and all were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Prior to the interview, several days in advance, the member of the research team who was to act as an interviewer provided the interviewees with the questions they were going to ask.

Data analysis

The qualitative information obtained in the representative sample of the six Spanish universities participating in the project was

analyzed; there were a total of 41 interviews. The difference between the number of centers in the sample (44) and the number of interviews finally completed (41) is due, in one case, to the refusal of the person selected to participate in the study, and to the fact that it was impossible to agree on a meeting date in two others. In these three cases, substitution was impossible, as these faculties consist of a single center in the corresponding stratum. The conducted interviews are detailed by branches of knowledge as follows:

- 7 interviews to male and female deans of faculties or university schools in the area of Arts and Humanities,
- 6 interviews in the area of Sciences,
- 8 interviews in the area of Health Sciences,
- 14 interviews in the area of Social and Legal Sciences, and
- 6 Interviews in the area of Engineering and Architecture.

Once the information gathered was transcribed, the interview analysis was carried out using the ATLAS.ti. program, computer-aided qualitative analysis software that allows associating codes or labels with fragments of text, sounds, images, drawings, videos, and other digital formats that cannot be analyzed meaningfully with formal and statistical approaches, as well as searching for pattern codes and classifying them (Hwang, 2007; Varguillas 2006).

Transcripts of the interviews (primary documents) were imported into the program, which allows different coding options: open, live or by list. In this case, to codify each response, the open, axial and selective coding strategy was employed. This makes it possible to consider up to a level of detail, while developing certain provisional categories that are examined according to specific properties, in order to establish posteriori subcategories which contain several codes. The information was codified and categorized, identifying one or more text passages with a topic and relating it to a code. Names were assigned to all codes, as closely as possible to the concept they were describing.

The ability to navigate through many primary documents, provided by this program, made it possible to determine the connections between the codes as they arose. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which codes are extracted from data throughout continuous revisions. The contrast and comparison of these data allowed us to identify the main categories.

Results

From each of the interviews or primary documents, a number of statements were pointed out, which were classified into 51 codes that, in turn, were grouped in 8 dimensions to make the comparative analysis easier. The following table shows in columns the eight established dimensions (families) and the codes which comprise each of them.

Table 1. Established dimensions and codes

Being useful to the community	Linking to social entities	Third mission of the university	Teaching quality	Teacher training	Knowledge of SL	Activities, conferences, congresses	Projects shared among teachers
Knowledge transfer	Desire to do useful things	Collaboration agreements	Interest in teaching innovation	Lack of teaching skills	Teachers carried out SL	SL promotion	Activities shared by several subjects
Collaboration between teachers and community	Faculties open to the social environment	Social development	Innovative teaching methodologies	Existence of training courses	Teachers participated in SL experiences	Participation in conferences on SL	SL projects
Commitment to the community	Social unrest	Entrepreneurship	Innovative practices	Interest in innovative training			SL is included in the curriculum
Contact with society	Neighborhood movements	Third sector	Pilot projects	Interest and motivation in the courses			
Social environment	Obstacles of bureaucracy		Awarded projects				
Involvement of teachers	NGOs						
Vocational involvement	Joint reflection						
Educational programs with the community	Social repercussion						
Public institutions	Associative network						
Community service	Enriching experiences						
University and society	Social sensitivity						
	Educational workshops						

Ordering the information gathered in codes allowed us to give meaning to them. After analyzing the interviews, some significant aspects of the relationship between codes were detected. Two codes that support the entire data structure were found: “Being useful to the community” and “teaching quality”. “Being useful to the community” is associated with the following codes: “Knowledge transfer”, “collaboration between teachers and community”, “commitment to the community”, “contact with society”, “social environment”, “involvement of teachers”, “vocational involvement”, “public institutions”, “educational programs with the community”, “community service” and “university and society”. “Being useful to the community” was identified as part of the “teaching quality”. “Teaching quality” was associated with the codes “innovative teaching methodologies”, “innovative practices”, “pilot projects” and “awarded projects”.

The “knowledge transfer” (which is included within the dimension or family of codes “being useful to the community”) was placed as part of the “third mission of the university”. It was thus established that this family linked together the codes “Collaboration agreements”, “Social development”, “Entrepreneurship” and “Third sector”. It was also considered that “teacher training”, “projects shared among teachers” and “knowledge of SL” are part of the “teaching quality”. This family included the codes “interest in teaching innovation”, “innovative teaching methodologies”, “innovative practices”, “pilot projects” and “awarded projects”. It was determined that “teacher training” and “activities, conferences and congresses” led to “teaching quality” and “knowledge of SL”. The dimension “knowledge of SL” includes the teachers who performed SL: “teachers participated in SL experiences”.

It was also established that “linking to social entities” was associated with “being useful to the community” and included the following codes: “desire to do useful things”, “faculties open to the social environment”, “social unrest”, “neighborhood movements”, “obstacles of bureaucracy”, “NGOs”, “joint reflection”, “social repercussion”, “associative network”, “enriching experiences”, “social sensitivity” and “educational workshops”.

One of the most useful tools of the ATLAS.ti software is the Code-Link Manager, which allows the user to create links between the codes, giving rise to the construction of networks that graphically reflect the relationships or links between codes. The following graph shows the relationships between codes and families of codes by means of an elaborate network which allows us to perform a reflexive analysis of the information collected:

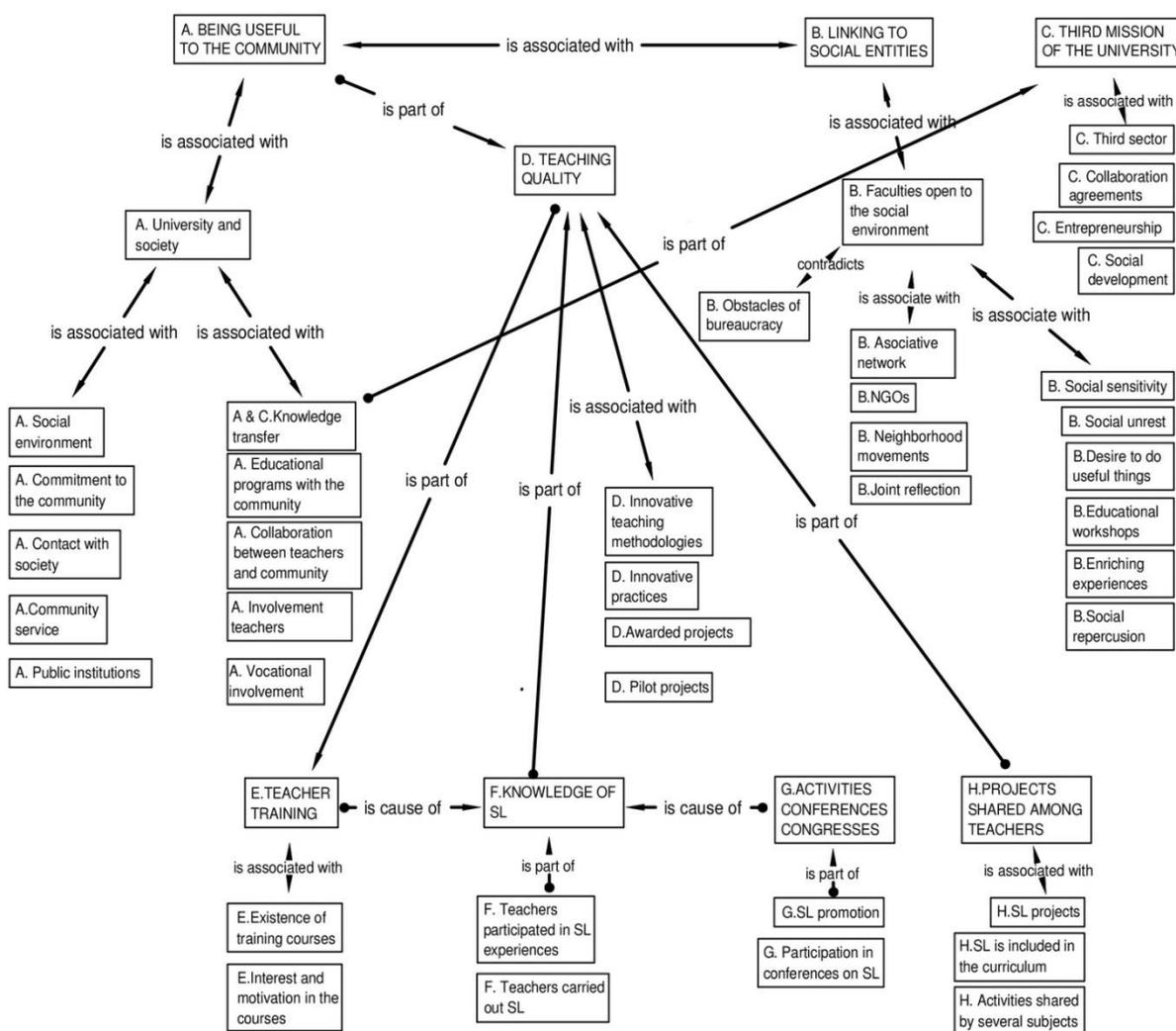


Figure 1. Relationships between codes

Analysis of data by areas of knowledge

The analysis of the distribution of codes by areas of knowledge allows us to obtain

valuable information on the importance attributed to the different dimensions in each area.

Table 2. Primary documents and code density

	Architecture and Engineering	Arts and Humanities	Sciences	Health Sciences	Social and Legal Sciences	TOTAL
Being useful to the community	35	39	54	54	100	282
Linking to social entities	23	21	27	24	72	167
Third mission of the university	33	26	33	37	67	196
Teaching quality	31	20	23	35	50	159
Teacher training	9	12	17	9	18	65
Knowledge of SL	0	1	4	1	6	12
Activities, conferences, congresses	3	0	1	1	5	10
Projects shared among teachers	23	10	13	24	35	105
TOTAL:	157	129	172	185	353	996

It should be noted that, in general, universities expressed regularly and, in one way or another, the desire to “be useful to the community” (282). It is also worth noting their interest in responding to the “third mission of the university” (196) and “linking to social entities” (167). There was also certain density in the codes related to the search for “teaching quality” (159). The lower density codes were

those related to the “knowledge of SL” (12) and execution of “activities or conferences for the dissemination of this teaching methodology” (10).

A more detailed analysis of the results obtained in the different areas of knowledge is presented as follows.

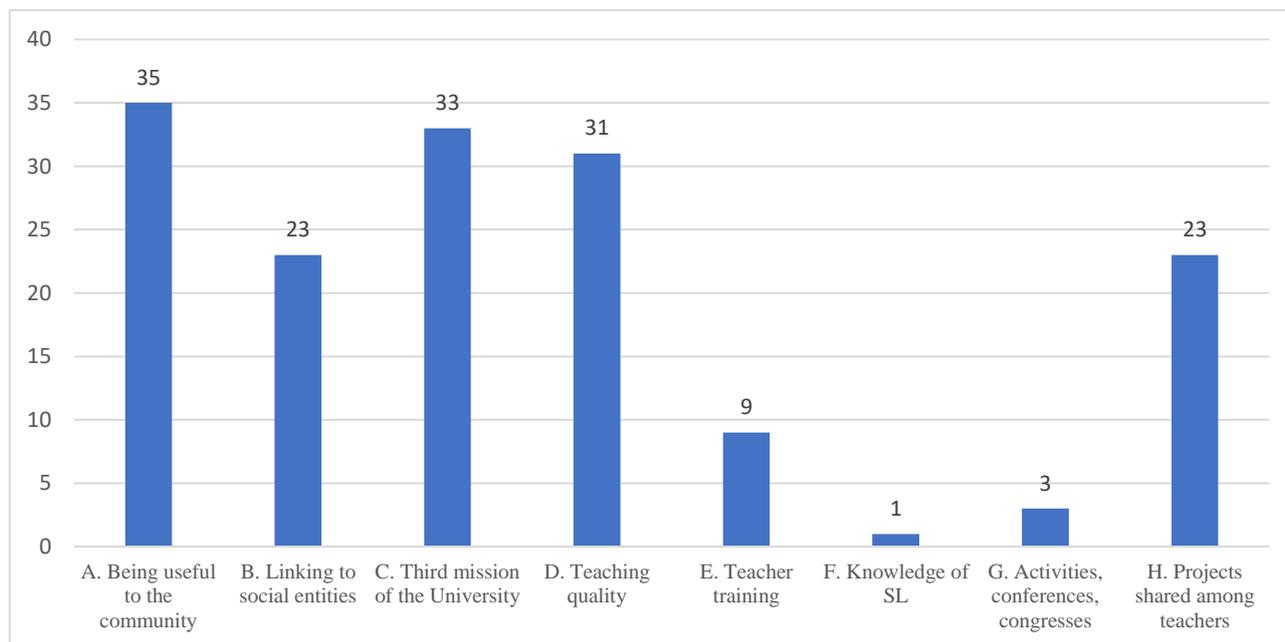


Figure 2. Code density by dimensions in the area of Architecture and Engineering

In the 6 interviews conducted in the area of Architecture and Engineering, it was observed that the codes with the highest density were those related to “being useful to the community” (35), followed very closely by the

“third mission of the university” (33) and “teaching quality” (31). The codes related to “being useful to the community” in other areas had a much higher density. This was the case of the Science areas (which had the same

number of analyzed interviews), Health Sciences (which had two more interviews under study), and Social and Legal Sciences (which had more than twice as many analyzed interviews).

If the interviews in this area of knowledge are compared to those performed in other areas, the density of codes related to “teaching quality” (31) stood out, since in other areas it had a lower or similar density -despite the fact that the number of interviews was much higher -. There was also a marked density in the codes related to the execution of “training projects coordinated between several subjects” (23)

when compared to other areas of knowledge. Finally, another important aspect refers the codes which showed that a certain activity of “dissemination of this methodology” had been carried out (3). If other areas with a higher number of interviews are taken into account, the density was almost equal or quite lower.

The interviews showed that most deans had no knowledge of SL (1) as a teaching/learning methodology, although they did mention that certain activities of “methodological innovation” (3) and “teacher training” (9) had been carried out.

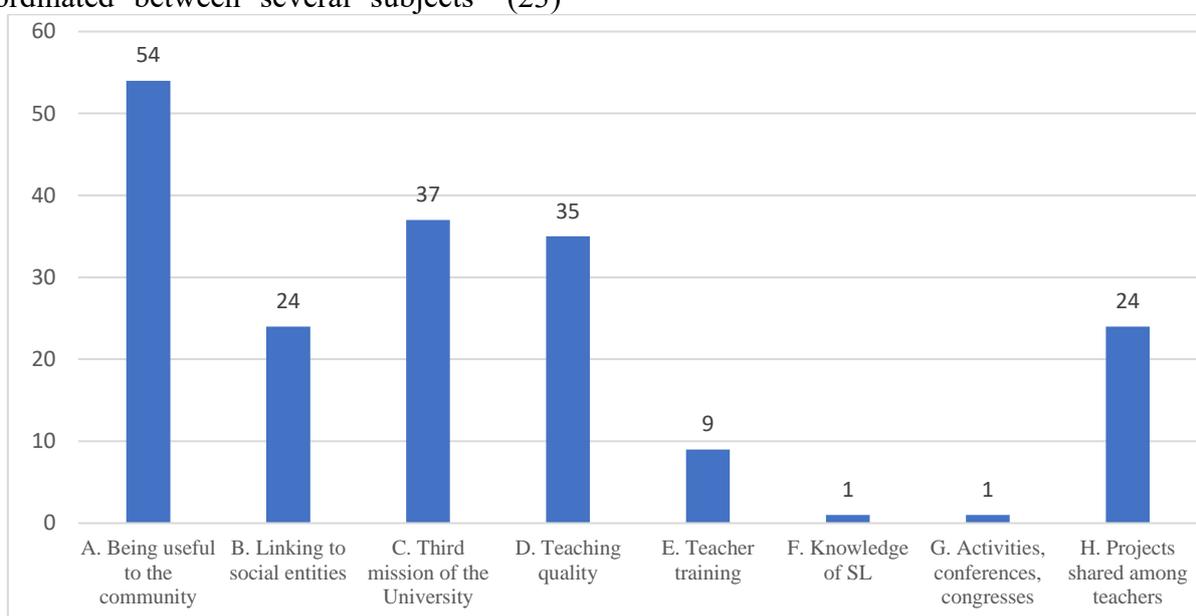


Figure 3. Code density by dimensions in the area of Health Sciences

In the eight interviews conducted in the area of Health Sciences, it was observed that the codes with the highest density were those related to “being useful to the community” (54), standing out above the rest of knowledge areas, if the number of interviews was taken into account. The density was similar to the one obtained in the area of Sciences, with six interviews. Both areas of knowledge had a strong vocation of service, as indicated by the density of codes related to this dimension.

The density of the codes referring to the “third mission of the university” (37) and “teaching quality” (35) was similar, and scored fairly high when compared to densities in other areas. There was also a high density in the codes related to the implementation of “training projects coordinated between several subjects” (24) and to “linking to social entities” (24). The interviews showed that most deans had no knowledge of SL (1), did not perform any dissemination activity of this methodology (1), and there was hardly any teacher training (9).

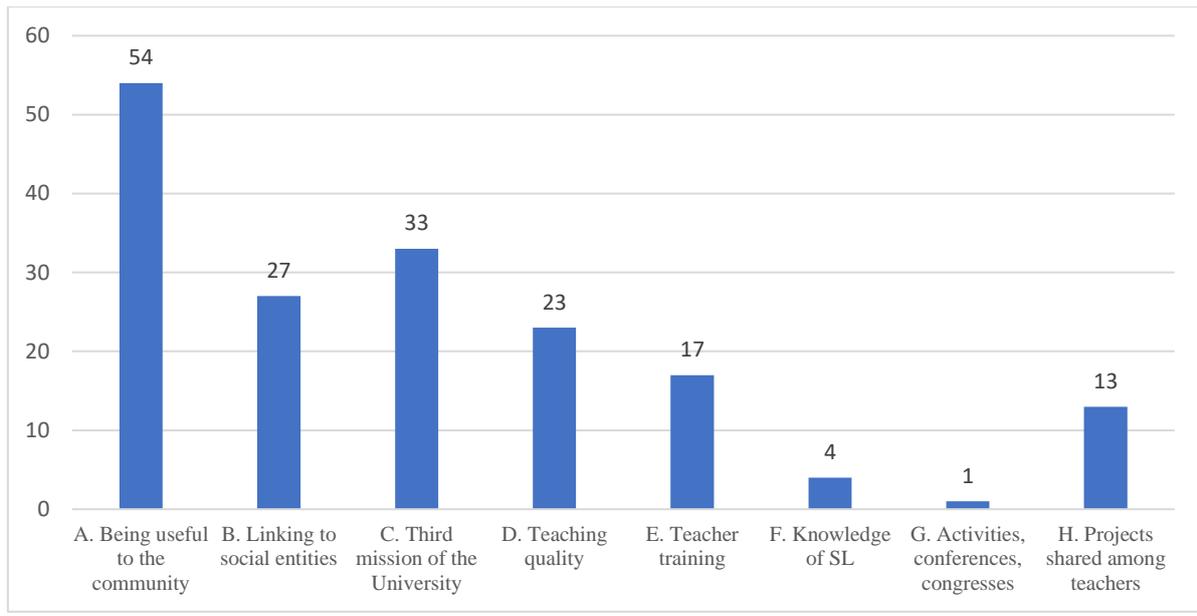


Figure 4. Code density by dimensions in the area of Sciences

In the six interviews conducted in the area of Sciences, it was observed that the codes with the highest density were those related to “being useful to the community” (54). The density was the highest of the five areas. Thus, it can be stated that the deans of these faculties reported a marked vocation of service.

The density of the codes referring to the “third mission of the university” (33), “linking to social entities” (27) and “teaching quality” (23) were similar to that obtained in other areas. There was a certain density in the codes related to the execution of “training projects coordinated between several subjects” (13). In

the interviews conducted, “teacher training” (17) stood out, since when considering the number of interviews, the density in this dimension was the highest of the five areas of knowledge. In the interviews performed, it was observed that “teachers had knowledge of SL” (4), although they had hardly carried out any dissemination activity of this methodology (1). The codes that showed that teachers had knowledge of this teaching methodology were quite significant in this area, if it is borne in mind that in other areas, with a greater number of interviews, the density was almost equal or quite lower.

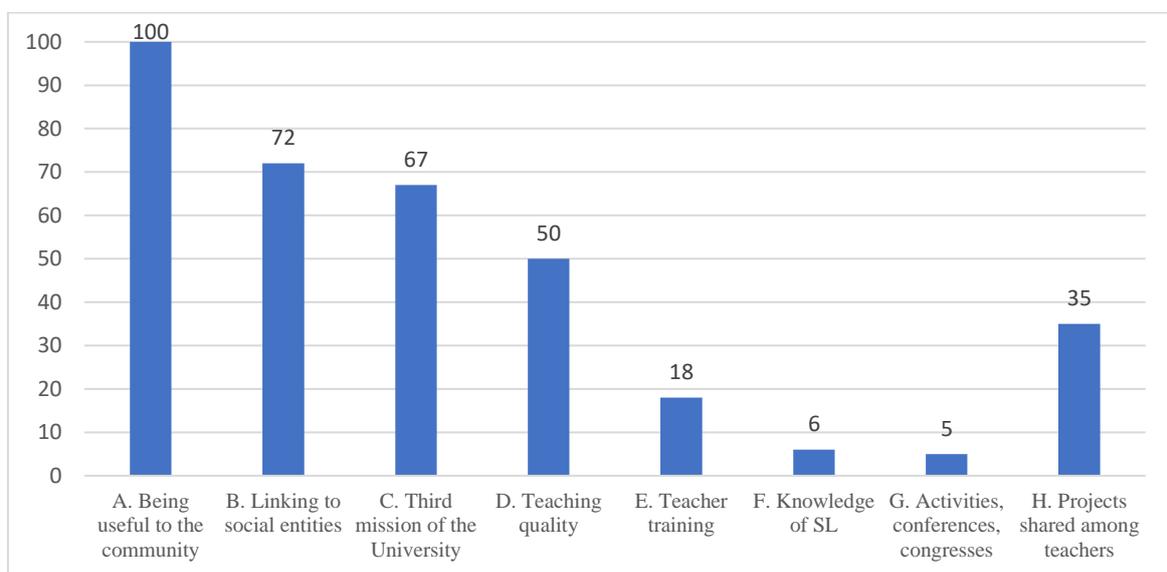


Figure 5. Code density by dimensions in the area of Social and Legal Sciences

In the fourteen interviews conducted in the area of Social and Legal Sciences, the codes referring to “being useful to the community” stood out (100). It should be taken into account that the number of interviews was also higher than in other areas and, therefore, the high density detected showed that the area of Social and Legal Sciences had a strong vocation of service, but it seems significant that density reported in the Science area was higher.

The density of the codes related to “linking to social entities” (72) and “third mission of the university” (67) was very high, also when compared to the densities obtained in other areas of knowledge. It was followed closely by

the density of codes related to “teaching quality” (50), being somewhat lower compared to the other areas of knowledge (with fewer interviews). There was a high density in the codes referring to the implementation of “training projects coordinated between several subjects” (35); this density was also comparatively similar to that found in other areas of knowledge (with fewer interviews).

The interviews showed that most deans had no knowledge of SL (6), no dissemination activity of this methodology was carried out (5), although certain activities related to teacher training (18) were organized.

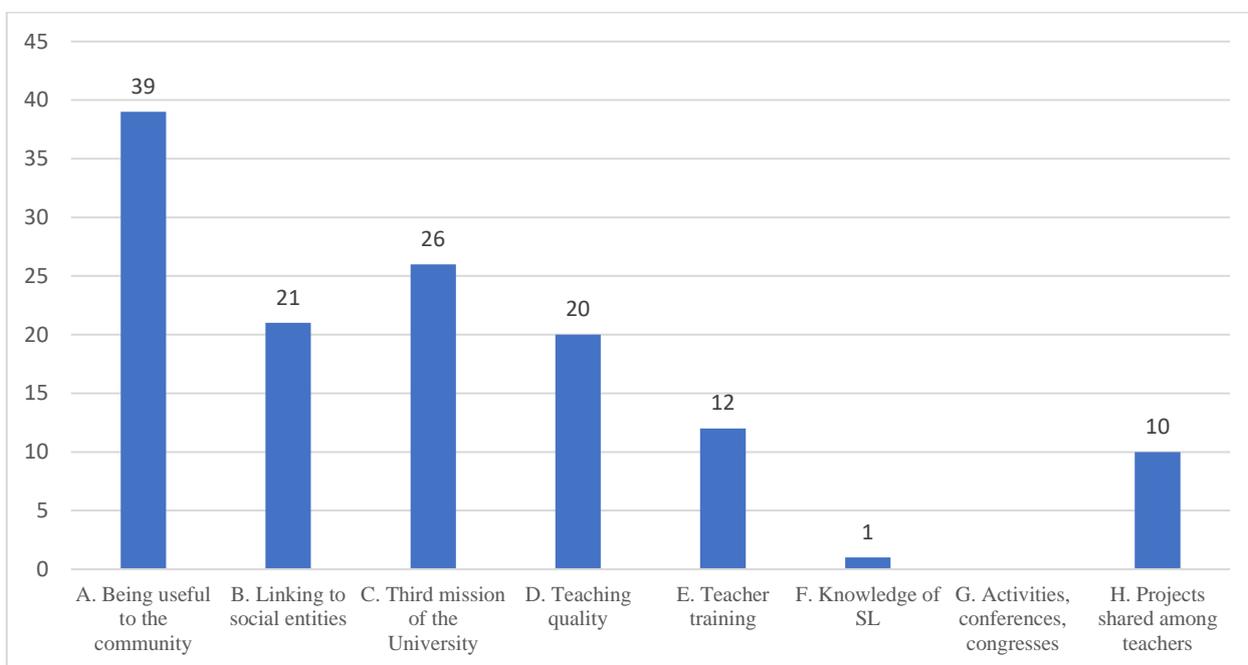


Figure 6. Code density by dimensions in the area of Arts and Humanities

In the 7 interviews conducted in the area of Arts and Humanities, it was observed that the codes with the highest density were those related to “being useful to the community” (39). However, the codes referring to “being useful to the community” in other areas of knowledge had a higher density (in the case of Sciences, Health Sciences and Social and Legal Sciences). There was a certain density in the codes related to the “third mission of the university” (26), followed by “teaching quality” (20) and to “linking to social entities” (21). The code density related to “teacher

training” (12) was also low, as well as the implementation of “training projects coordinated between several subjects” (10). The interviews showed that most deans had no knowledge of SL (1), and no dissemination activity of this methodology was carried out (0).

Discussion

The first conclusion that can be drawn from the qualitative analysis of the interviews puts us in an optimistic position in relation to the perception that already exists in the university

institution regarding itself and its mission towards society: in general, the social responsibility held by the university institutions is recognized, along with the impact that the educational and research activity should have on society. This fact certainly facilitates that the university perceives itself as a space propitious to materialize SL as a methodology that fuels the commitment to the current social, scientific and ethical problems.

However, once the above is pointed out, the analysis of the data obtained should be deepened, and the first thing that strikes us is the fact that deans have little, and, in certain cases, almost no knowledge about SL. Even in the branch of Social and Legal Sciences, which includes Education degree programs, the knowledge of what this teaching and learning methodology means is limited, taking into account the important number of projects that are being carried out in various subjects of the areas involved. The small number of teacher training activities, which may be related to SL projects, planned in different centers is another noteworthy example.

At the same time, the analysis of indicators referring to teacher collaboration and the development of shared projects is moderately positive. Given the individualistic culture which characterizes a great number of university teachers, it is very encouraging that deans understand there are a large number of members of the teaching staff who collaborate and share the development and implementation of learning projects. For the execution of SL projects, this information is vital, since collaboration between teachers and participation in common projects facilitates learning among teachers and enhances students' learning abilities.

On the other hand, the most relevant aspect of our research is that 80.72% of the established codes are grouped into four dimensions: "Being useful to the community", "Third mission of the university", "Linking to social entities" and "Quality teaching"; there is also a balance between the different areas of

knowledge, in the sense that all of them have a significant number of indicators in the above-mentioned four dimensions. From this information, it can be deduced that, depending on the codes they encompass, and according to deans' perception, in the university context there is a clear awareness that being useful to the community is necessary; faculties and university schools must be open to society and the environment in which they are located; collaboration is necessary with the regional social entities, such as NGOs, neighborhood associations, cultural entities, etc.; such collaboration can be very enriching for both teachers and students; university has the obligation to return to society part of what it takes, in the form of knowledge transfer, strategies and values; refreshing teaching methodologies, transforming practices, innovative projects are needed, as they have a positive impact on the quality and relevance of university teaching.

Obviously, all these indicators are strongest in the degree programs belonging to the area of Social and Legal Sciences, but the fact that they are present in a relevant way in all areas under study is favorable for reaching an institutionalization of the SL methodology in the Spanish universities. In the event that there is a bias on willingness towards community service, between the areas of Social and Legal Sciences and those of Science and Technology, this would be a major obstacle in the path towards institutionalizing the SL methodology in all areas of knowledge, because in our opinion, it is equally valid for all of them.

In summary, as a result of this research study, the information obtained is a vital condition for meeting its broader objectives. However, the reader should take into account the limitation of focusing only on a small number of people, the deans and management teams of the selected centers, who, due to their position, often possess inside information, which should be complemented, in our opinion, by broader studies covering a sample of university teachers. This is the line followed by our group, in the context of the aforementioned research, trying to obtain the

necessary information that will allow us to reach the ultimate goal of this endeavor: the institutionalization of Service-Learning in Spanish universities.

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