From theories to practices: advances and challenges in the incorporation of a gender perspective in the curricular and teaching development of undergraduate programs

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Abstract. Different reflections have addressed androcentrism and cissexism in curricular proposals (Buquet, 2013; National University of Rosario, 2020), but there is a relative lack of research that accounts for the professional work carried out by the responsible areas within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to reverse this situation. That is why we consider it particularly relevant and a significant contribution to present a systematization and reflection on the work carried out by the Directorate of Curricular and Teaching Development (DDCD) and the Gender Department (DG) of the Diego Portales University (UDP). In this work, we seek to describe, analyze, and characterize advances and challenges arising from the processes of incorporating a gender perspective (GP) into the curricular development of 21 undergraduate programs in the period 2019-2023. The findings from this period are valuable for those involved in these processes as they allow for anticipation of the effects and limitations of their own interventions, thereby enriching not only the diagnostic work and reflection for Curricular Innovation with GPs but also the specific support needed to carry out this challenging task.

Keywords: Higher Education, Quality of Education, Educational Program Development, Gender Issues

1   Introduction

In Chile, the process of institutionalizing gender equality in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) gained significant momentum after the so-called "Mayo Feminista" (Feminist May) (Ubilla et al., 2019), also known as "Tsunami Feminista" (Feminist Tsunami) (Hiner and López Dietz, 2021). Universities were urged to implement protocols to address gender-based violence (Flores-Bernal, 2019) and establish gender units with the objective of implementing equality policies (Ramírez-Saavedra, 2019). This mandate

was gradually fulfilled with varying degrees of progress until Law 21.369 was enacted in September 2021, which regulates sexual harassment, violence, and gender discrimination in the field of higher education.

Although the "Feminist May" emerged from situations of sexual harassment, the petitions made by feminist assemblies, both student and academic, encompass a wealth of issues that go beyond this problem. Among them is the demand for the **incorporation of a gender perspective in educational processes**. The question of how universities are translating feminist demands into specific gender architectures and agendas (Gaba, 2020) and whether they are comprehensively responding to the demands raised during the " Feminist May" remains relevant. This shift towards what constitutes the essence of HEIs demonstrates the critical richness of feminist disruption in academia, understanding that demands for environments free from sexual violence, gender-based discrimination necessarily require a cultural transformation (UNESCO, 2022) that must be embedded in the educational project.

2   Theoretical Framework

In this context, the advancement in curriculum development with a deliberative approach (Galton and Moon, 1986; Null, 2011; 2016) and GP is a strategy to address sexist education, from teaching practices both inside and outside the classroom to problematizing androcentrism as a constitutive part of the development process of contemporary disciplines (Bernabé, 2019; Guil, 2016). This operates as an instance of epistemological vigilance over the concept of the human as equivalent to the masculine, the content of the offered learning, the methodologies used and considered valid for knowledge generation, as well as the very purpose of the knowledge generated. The aim is to address the already identified issue of non-sexist education through the incorporation of GP in the curricular design of study plans, seeking to diagnose the Study Plans to enhance the capacity for analysis, reflection, and intervention from all disciplines towards a socially equal and human rights-respecting project.

Curricular and teaching development, in general, seeks to problematize what learning achievements or performance related to the discipline or profession students should attain upon completion of the Study Plan. To do so, various diagnostic actions are carried out to identify the main strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats of the current curriculum, taking into account changes in higher education, such as the demands for non-sexist education that are part of the challenges to be addressed.

The effectiveness of a diagnosis for Curricular Innovation with GP will be achieved when the knowledge being transmitted is problematized and how it represents and guides social and academic practices and principles (Galton and Moon, 1986; Null, 2011; 2016). This point is not only about analyzing and developing the Curriculum from an instrumental and prescriptive standpoint but also questioning its nature and the effects it has on the educational pathways of students and all individuals involved in its development.

3 Method

The diagnosis methodology of the Study Plan at UDP for curricular and teaching development involves the analysis of evidence related to four elements (Figure 1): 1. Formative experience of the program, 2. Comparative formative experience, 3. Analysis of the external context, and 4. Academic community consultation. The methodology developed to incorporate GP into the Undergraduate Study Plans was part of a process that emerged from collaborative and interdisciplinary work, where teams were committed to advancing in this direction but lacked a methodology or successful case from other institutions of higher education to design upon. As a result of this collaborative process, a shared approach methodology was structured between the Gender Department (GD) and the Directorate of Curricular and Teaching Development (DCTD), providing evidence for each element of the diagnosis.

The Gender Department contributes to the element of the Formative experience of the program by conducting a content analysis with a GP of the graduate profile, curriculum plan, and course programs of the current curriculum. This analysis verifies the presence/absence of concepts related to gender, sexualities, human rights, discrimination, gender-based violence, sexual diversities, and intersectionality. Additionally, it examines the use of non-sexist language and references to regulations on the prevention and punishment of discrimination and gender-based violence. This review aims to identify problematic aspects, such as stereotyped content, and provide specific guidance on opportunities for incorporating GP in different courses.

The other three elements are addressed by the DCTD and curriculum committees in collaborative workshops, where the survey aimed at the academic community is reviewed. The survey addresses topics such as the inclusion of performance indicators that promote the appreciation of diversity and non-discrimination based on genders in the graduate profile, the respectful treatment of teachers in the classroom, gender equity in expectations and demands in evaluations, the presence of gender stereotypes in class comments, and gender parity in the reference bibliography. Additionally, a comparative analysis of graduate profiles and curriculum plans from similar programs at national and international levels was conducted to identify references to GP. Norms and manuals on GP developed by other public and private organizations related to the discipline/program were also examined in the analysis of the external context.

4 Results

This systematization considers the work carried out over a period of 4 years (2019 to 2022) with 22 programs from 9 out of the 11 faculties of the University. The analysis of the Formative experience of the program was conducted in 20 programs, reviewing graduate profiles and curriculum plans, including nearly 700 associated course programs. The consultation with the GP community was conducted in 16 programs, surveying and interviewing over 5000 individuals. Comparative training experience and external context analysis were conducted in all 22 programs. The complete process was

implemented in 14 programs. In all cases, a diagnostic report was prepared and presented to the curriculum committee, along with a summary report highlighting the main advancements by faculty (Gajardo and Rosales, 2020).

Figure 1. Diagnosis Process for Curricular Innovation with Gender Perspective
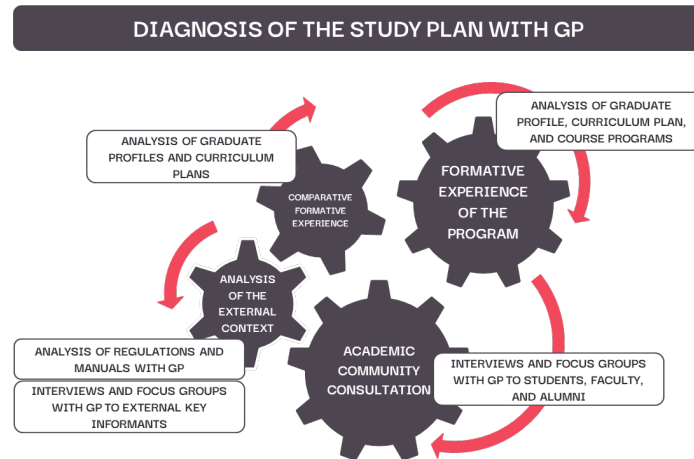
In the consultation with the academic community, a favorable appreciation of the incorporation of GP in the current plan can be observed. In general, there is agreement at the UDP level for all questions. When disaggregated by respondent group, higher levels of agreement are seen among alumni and faculty than among students. However, from the analysis of the content of the curricular products, the results are more conservative. Approximately 10% of the nearly 700 reviewed programs have explicit references to gender, sexualities, and/or a GP in the course descriptor, which amounts to 1 in every 10 programs reviewed. At the level of learning outcomes, this is only 6%, and in terms of content, it is 10%. Regarding the use of non-sexist language, more than 50% of the programs include it either fully or to an advanced extent. However, this average hide highly disparate situations among the programs, as in some cases, 95% of the programs still use the masculine form as the generic, while in other cases, it is the opposite.

Regarding the Comparative formative experience, there are few experiences in Chile that incorporate a reference to a GP in their Graduate Profiles. In this regard, notable examples are Pontificia Universidad Católica, Universidad de Chile, Universidad de Concepción, and Universidad Austral, which mention the application of gender approaches in some fields of specialization, the ability to identify and challenge power structures based on gender, promoting equal opportunities and respect for diversity, as well as designing and implementing projects and policies that promote gender equality and the eradication of discrimination.

Based on this evidence, opportunities for incorporating a GP were discussed, including examples of learning outcomes, problematizing the approach to certain content and teaching practices, proposing concepts that can be incorporated, and suggesting

specific bibliographies. As an example, in the health field programs, the focus of the orientations was to problematize gender inequalities in the health/illness/care process. In the case of programs associated with the educational field, the following questions were addressed: What is the stance of the program regarding the challenge of non-sexist education? What skills, competencies, and abilities will professionals have to lead and promote educational processes aimed at the transformations we need? Reflection was also given to how the field of Arts finds in feminism a space to legitimize changes as a unique, collaborative, and critical artistic-pedagogical possibility.

5   Discussion

The diagnostic methodology for Curricular Innovation with a deliberative approach and a gender perspective has allowed, over the course of four years, to characterize the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats of 22 out of 39 undergraduate programs at UDP. This process involved the engagement of over 5000 individuals and identified areas for improvement and spaces for reflection to ensure that new Study Plans incorporate this approach.

The main conclusions and recommendations resulting from the diagnosis of the Study Plans allowed for informed and evidence-based decision-making. These decisions are related to designing educational pathways with GP, strengthening assessment and monitoring systems of learning outcomes with GP, promoting teacher training regarding GP, and establishing concrete strategies and actions to promote gender equity and educational inclusion.

The analysis of UDP's curricular products shows progress compared to other national research that has conducted exploratory studies reviewing the presence of gender in the formal curriculum (Arcos, Molina, Fecci, et.al. 2006), where there was no incorporation of GP in the programs, specifically in their description, objectives, or pedagogical structure.

Regarding the guidelines provided to the curriculum committees, aspects that are not being sufficiently incorporated are considered, for example, in healthcare according to various expert sources (Sen & Östlin, 2007, Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007). But above all, the aim is to contribute to deconstructing false androcentric objectivities in favor of contextualized, intersectional, and co-constructed knowledge that serves as a driving force for changing and transforming patriarchal power relations (Guil, 2016).

On the other hand, based on the various meetings, workshops, and training sessions held with the curriculum committees, the diagnosis of their study plans, the work on modified proposals of curricular products, and the final graduate profile approved by resolution, in the programs where this situation has arisen, we have encountered some recurrent difficulties, which form three challenges: (1) There are communities that tend towards reductionism in understanding the GP as synonymous with women, non-sexist language, and/or gender parity in the bibliography. (2) The visibility of gender inequalities opens up reflection on other inequalities that undoubtedly exist and are

of crucial importance to the professional field, leading to the inclusion of all these diversities, resulting in such a broad generalization that the GP disappears. And (3), in some modified graduate profile proposals, references to gender appeared only in learning outcomes associated with the ethical and moral commitment of the profession, which suggests that the GP is solely linked to individuals and their attitudes, behaviors, and/or values without deconstructing the disciplinary field.

6   Conclusions

The process of institutionalizing gender equality in Higher Education Institutions in Chile has experienced significant advancements in recent years, especially after the May Feminist movement. The demand to incorporate a gender perspective in educational processes has become increasingly relevant, and universities have responded to these demands with varying degrees of progress. However, there are still important challenges that need to be addressed.

The diagnostic methodology for CI with a deliberative approach and GP has been an effective strategy to characterize and analyze the Curriculum Plans at Universidad Diego Portales over a period of four years. This process has involved over 5000 people and has identified areas for improvement and reflection in order to incorporate a GP into the new curriculum plans. It is particularly valuable to reflect on our own experiences and the process itself, identifying the main resistances and difficulties that arise. Systematization processes like this one allow us to anticipate these resistances by incorporating reflections around them even in the delivery of the diagnosis to the participating programs.

The conclusions and recommendations derived from the diagnosis have allowed for informed and evidence-based decision-making. These decisions are related to designing educational pathways with a GP, strengthening evaluation and monitoring systems for learning outcomes with GP, promoting teacher training in this area, and implementing concrete strategies to promote gender equity and educational inclusion.

It is essential to overcome the reductionism of understanding the GP solely as synonymous with women, non-sexist language, and gender parity in the bibliography. Furthermore, it is necessary to address gender inequalities alongside other relevant inequalities in the professional field, avoiding excessive generalizations that dilute the importance of the GP. Likewise, it is important to avoid solely linking the GP to ethical and values-based aspects without delving into the deconstruction of the disciplinary field.

In conclusion, the process of diagnosis and continuous improvement of the UDP's Study Plans has allowed for progress in incorporating a GP into the educational processes. However, there are still pending challenges to ensure higher education that promotes gender equality and the transformation of patriarchal power relations.

7   Limitations and Future Research

The study focused on 22 undergraduate programs at the Diego Portales University, which limits the generalization of the results to other educational institutions or study programs. For future research, it is important to:

1. Expand the scope of the research nationally, including different higher education institutions, to obtain a broader understanding of the incorporation of a GP in curriculum plans.
2. Conduct long-term monitoring of the implementation of proposed changes in the curriculum plans to assess their effectiveness and adjust based on the results obtained.
3. Investigate the impact of incorporating a GP on academic performance and the holistic development of students, as well as the promotion of gender equality in the professional field.
4. Explore innovative strategies and best practices used by other educational institutions to effectively incorporate a GP into curriculum plans, with the aim of generating recommendations and practical guidelines for future implementations.

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