

Situated Learning and Comprehensive Training Through University Extension in Nursing

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HOW TO CITE:

Carmen Luisa David Martínez, Rikilda Isabel Rincón Jiménez (2026). Situated Learning and Comprehensive Training Through University Extension in Nursing. International Journal of Special Education, 41(16s), 580-585

ABSTRACT:

University extension is a substantive function of higher education because it articulates academic training with social transformation and the approach to community needs (Cedeño Ferrín & Machado Ramírez, 2012; De Manuel Jerez & Donadei, 2018). In this context, this article analyzes the impact of social and extension projects in the academic field of the Nursing Program of the Popular University of Cesar, based on a study focused on the participation of students, teachers and the community in experiences such as Move America, Road Safety, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Eco Nursing, Mental Health Guardians, Breastfeeding y Older Adult. The base document proposes a quantitative approach with a descriptive design and cross-sectional to evaluate the impact of these projects on the development of professional competencies, the strengthening of the university-community link and the improvement of curricular processes. The findings reported show a positive perception about the practical application of knowledge, the strengthening of disciplinary and transversal competencies, training in values and the contribution of the projects to the visibility and social impact of the program. However, challenges associated with the sustainability of processes, resource allocation, the need for continuous evaluation, and greater articulation between extension, curriculum, and research are also identified, in line with what Rincón Zapata and Pérez Cadavid (2018) and Taylor et al. (2005) have pointed out on impact evaluation and continuity of community projects. It is concluded that social and extension projects represent a relevant pedagogical strategy for comprehensive nursing training and for the consolidation of university social responsibility.

Keywords : nursing, university extension, university social responsibility, professional competencies, comprehensive training.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions are called upon to respond not only to the demands of disciplinary training, but also to the social needs of the contexts where they carry out their work, in correspondence with the social function of the university and with the guidelines of higher

education in Colombia (Law 30 of 1992; Decree 1330 of 2019; National Accreditation Council, 2022). In this framework, university extension is understood as an academic process through which the university interacts with the community, transfers knowledge, builds reciprocal learning, and participates in the

solution of social and health problems (Cedeño Ferrín & Machado Ramírez, 2012; Tenorio Bohorquez, 2020; Cruzata & Álvarez, 2019). In the field of nursing, this function acquires a special value because the profession is oriented towards human care, health promotion, disease prevention, and intervention in family and community settings (León Román, 2006; Rodríguez et al., 2017; Riegel et al., 2021). The analyzed document states that the Nursing Program of the Popular University of Cesar develops various Strategies, projects and activities of projection social and extension linked to the subjects of the curriculum and to the priority problems of the Valduparense environment. According to the text, these initiatives are part of the Program's Educational Project and the institutional mission of interacting with communities to raise awareness, research, and intervene on their needs through participatory strategies (Universidad Popular del Cesar, 2020). However, the same document recognizes that institutional self-evaluation did not have sufficient evidence on the academic impact of such projects, which justified the need for systematic research aimed at measuring their effects on students, teachers, and the community.

The relevance of this analysis is also related to the requirements of the National Accreditation Council, particularly with respect to demonstrating the effect of social projection actions on learning outcomes, curricular improvement, and the solution of social problems (National Accreditation Council, 2022). Consequently, studying the academic impact of extension projects not only allows us to assess their training effectiveness, but also to strengthen the quality of the program, guide decision-making, and consolidate university social responsibility as an integrating axis of training work (Petro et al., 2023; Villareal & Avellaneda, 2019).

Development

University extension and nursing training

The document argues that social and extension projects are situated learning spaces, in which students apply theoretical knowledge acquired in

the classroom to real contexts of community intervention. This articulation between theory and practice strengthens meaningful learning and metacognitive, since it allows us to understand health problems from a, real, contextual, critical and humanized, as proposed by Díaz Barriga (2006), Biggs (1993), and Alexander et al. (1991) when addressing the active construction of learning. In this sense, extension ceases to be a complementary activity and becomes a training strategy that favors the integration of disciplinary, ethical, and social knowledge (Bautista Jiménez et al., 2024; Rodríguez, 2023; Villalba Serna et al., 2023).

In addition, the study shows that the subjects with the greatest applicability in the projects were Public Health, Mental Health and Health Education, which reflects a close relationship between the curriculum and the community intervention scenarios. This correspondence strengthens the professional profile of the future nurse, by facilitating experiences where competencies in health promotion, community education, communication, care management, and interdisciplinary work are developed (Giraldo Osorio & Vélez Álvarez, 2013; Pender et al., 2011; Duque et al., 2024). For this reason, extension is consolidated as a relevant pedagogical resource for service-oriented training and commitment to the environment.

Impact on the development of student competencies

Among the most relevant findings, the document reports that 65% of the students surveyed had participated in some extension project of the program, which indicates an important integration of the student population with extramural practical experiences. Likewise, the phases with the highest participation were the execution of interventions, with 52%, and the planning of activities, with 49%, while the systematization of experiences presented the lowest proportion, with 23%. These results suggest that the student experience is mainly focused on direct action, although there is still the challenge of strengthening its link in processes of analysis, evaluation, and academic production, an

aspect that coincides with what Gertler et al. (2017) and Espinoza (2018) describe on the need to comprehensively evaluate applied learning.

The text also points out that participation in the projects favours the development of specific and transversal competences. Among them, the application of scientific knowledge, leadership skills, effective communication, teamwork, social sensitivity, and critical thinking stand out, a finding consistent with what was reported by Marrero Sánchez et al. (2018), Tobón (2008), and Zabalza Beraza (2017) on comprehensive training and competency development. In a complementary way, a strengthening of values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, and ethical commitment is described, which is especially relevant in a discipline focused on the comprehensive care of people and communities (Rodríguez et al., 2017; Mairal Buera et al., 2021).

Impact on teaching practice and on the university-community relationship

The impact of extension projects is not limited to students, but also reaches teaching practice and institutional processes. The document states that these experiences promote disciplinary updating, methodological innovation, transformation of pedagogical practice, and generation of academic products derived from work with the community, in line with what was proposed by Aguiar Melians and Baute Álvarez (2023), Fontanilla Lucena (2021), and Sartor et al. (2020). It is also highlighted that teachers assume the roles of mentors and facilitators, promoting a more contextualized and coherent teaching with the demands of contemporary public health.

Regarding the community, the results show a favorable perception of the university-community link and the relevance of the projects executed. The document reports high levels of recommendation of initiatives such as Road Safety, Move America, Sexual and Reproductive Health y Art and Nursing, with widely positive percentages of acceptance and appropriation. This response suggests that projects achieve social recognition, as well as attention to the needs presented by older adults, in the context of their chronic non-communicable diseases and

strengthen trust in the institution by contributing to community empowerment processes, although the need to deepen participatory dialogue, active listening, and the sustainability of the changes generated remains, as Sánchez Sanabria et al. (2015), Suárez Álvarez et al. (2018), and Nogueira González et al. (2024).

Challenges, sustainability and improvement

Despite the favorable results, the document identifies several challenges that must be considered to strengthen the academic impact of extension. Among them, the barriers to the sustainability of the projects stand out, related to individual, institutional and contextual factors, such as time, motivation, academic load, lack of resources, poor follow-up and certain sociocultural limitations of the participating population. These difficulties show that the permanence of the effects of the intervention does not depend only on the technical quality of the project, but also on institutional support and pedagogical continuity, as explained by Bandura (1986), Taylor et al. (2005) and Urstad et al. (2022).

Similarly, the need to strengthen impact evaluation, curricular alignment, systematization of experiences and the articulation between teaching, research and extension is highlighted. These actions would allow projects not only to be spaces for social practice, but also sources of academic evidence, educational innovation, and institutional transformation, as highlighted by Bravo Echevarría et al. (2017) and Rincón Zapata and Pérez Cadavid (2018). Consequently, the continuous improvement of these processes must be assumed as a strategic priority to consolidate a nursing training model that is more relevant, reflective and committed to the territorial reality.

Discussion

The analysis of the document allows us to affirm that university extension, when structured from a pedagogical, participatory and assessable approach, becomes a comprehensive training scenario for nursing students. The community experience favors the appropriation of knowledge, the understanding of the social

determinants of health, and the construction of competencies oriented to contextualized care, in line with the contributions of the World Health Organization (2020, 2023) and the Pan American Health Organization (2023) on public health, primary care, and social determinants. In addition, it strengthens the coherence between the curriculum and the needs of the environment, which increases the relevance of the academic program.

However, it is also evident that the true transformative potential of the projects depends on their institutionalization, monitoring and continuous evaluation. It is not enough to develop isolated community interventions; it is essential to consolidate mechanisms that allow measuring results, providing feedback on the curriculum, promoting derived research and sustaining actions over time, as Moskal et al. (2007) and Brown et al. (2023) argue in studies on extension and service-learning projects. From this perspective, extension should be assumed as a strategic dimension of the training process and not as a peripheral or accessory component.

Conclusions

The social and extension projects of the Nursing Program of the Popular University of Cesar generate a significant academic impact by favoring the integration between theory and practice, strengthening professional and transversal competencies, and promoting training with an ethical and social sense. They also contribute to institutional recognition, outreach to the community, and the development of more contextualized and transformative pedagogical experiences, in coherence with what Villareal and Avellaneda (2019) and Tenorio Bohorquez (2020) have stated about university social projection.

However, the analysis also shows the need to strengthen sustainability, the evaluation of results, the systematization of experiences and the curricular articulation of these initiatives. The institutional challenge is to consolidate university extension as a permanent, measurable academic process strategically linked to the educational quality and social responsibility of the program (National Accreditation Council, 2022; Petro et al., 2023).

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