


**PHD IN EDUCATION IN MEXICO – EXPERIENCE REPORT OF A BRAZILIAN TEACHER** <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.038-003>**Francisco Nilson Gonçalves Balbé<sup>1</sup>, Jair Arody Del Valle López<sup>2</sup> and Silvia Cristina de Oliveira Quadros<sup>3</sup>****ABSTRACT**

This experience report presents the experiences of doctorate-level studies carried out at the Universidad de Morelos, Mexico, from January 2020 to December 2023. The course focused on knowledge about education aimed at a healthy lifestyle. This report aims to present the activities experienced in *the stricto sensu* graduate program, to tell about the challenges, difficulties and successes achieved, but also, it proposes to motivate the interest of Brazilian students who wish to carry out their studies at *the stricto sensu level* in another country. Of note are the experiences in activities of construction of a tutorial action project, problem solving, research fair, participation in a thesis contest, guest teacher to teach classes, partnership for a school of parents, construction of educational content using information and communication technologies (ICT), participation in congress and activity carried out in the form of a technical visit to a technological institute. This experience corroborated the importance that internationalization has in the human and academic growth of a higher education professor, in addition to demonstrating how *soft skills* and creativity can help in the challenges experienced.

**Keywords:** Creativity. Internationalization. *Softskills*. *Stricto Sensu*.

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<sup>1</sup> Master in Collective Health  
Federal Institute of Tocantins – Palmas Campus  
Palmas, Tocantins, Brazil.  
E-mail: balbe@ifto.edu.br

<sup>2</sup> Doctor of Business Administration  
University of Morelos.  
Morelos, Nuevo León, Mexico.  
E-mail: jdelvalle@um.edu.mx

<sup>3</sup> Post-doctorate in Education  
Adventist University Center of São Paulo  
Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, Brazil  
E-mail: silvia.quadros@unasp.edu.br



## INTRODUCTION

Publications referring to the internationalization of higher education (HEI) began in 1995 with the first international study (Knight; De Wit, 2018). Over the years, there has been a great growth of the HEI, moving from a phase that was characterized by international projects and scholarships for students from other countries to reaching the current state of development (Knight; De Wit, 2018). Over the years, internationalization has always been on the agenda in the world university context (Morosini, Marcelino, Mentges, Woicolesco, 2024) and has become a criterion of quality (Cerdeira, Castro, Lauxen, 2024).

International doctoral programs, including the one at the University of Montemorelos (Mexico), work very well with the concept of *in*, that is, of attracting students (Leiro, Fantin, Morosini, 2024). A student who participates in an internationalization process becomes involved as a participant in the relationship between two nations, two cultures and even between two global realities (Knight; De Wit, 2018).

However, in the course of a study experience in another country, in addition to the numerous benefits that promote the student's growth, it is natural that difficulties and frustrations also occur, which can be alleviated when the student has developed his *soft skills* and creativity.

Soft skills are defined as "personal attributes that improve an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects" and refer to friendliness and optimism, fluid language, personality characters, personal habits, and social elegance (Pachauri; Yadav, 2014, p. 22) and also being part of the soft skills is creativity, which is understood as part of the human being's potential to carry out a transformation in the environment, through innovation, and this action is carried out intentionally (Mendes, 2021).

Based on these premises, we present this Experience Report, which is the result of an option made by a Brazilian university professor who decided to carry out his doctoral studies abroad, in Mexico.

In this experience report, teaching-learning aspects will be presented that cover the academic-scientific experience in a foreign country, having Spanish as a second language and from the reported experiences, we present issues such as the importance of the development of global citizenship today, the development of *Soft skills* and creativity to contribute to the development of education outside the country of origin.

In the following topics, the experiences will be presented, mixed with reflections by authors who have studied the importance of citizenship for the world. The experiences explained below are described in the text in the following order: activity of construction of a tutorial action project, activity of problem solving, activity in a research fair, activity of



participation in a contest, activity of participation as a guest teacher to teach classes, activities in partnership for a school of parents, activity of construction of educational content using information and communication technologies (ICT), Participation activity in congress, activity carried out in the form of a technical visit to a technological institute.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In a globalized world, the internationalization of education is a growing reality (Correia-Lima; Riegel, 2015), which according to De Oliveira Quadros (2024) is presented in four aspects: the first is internationalization at home, which refers to the school space, understanding that internationalization and interculturality should be present in the school curriculum, both in high school or as a part of the curricular components. The second is internationalization by curriculum, which is characterized by the introduction of the foreign language curricular component, with English as a predominance. As a third aspect is internationalization by mobility, which is already a little more complex because it corresponds to leaving the country of origin and going to another, and has the advantage of intercultural experience in various aspects of life. And, finally, there is internationalization through international collaborative learning, based on international and distance partnerships, using virtual learning environments to carry out teaching-learning projects.

Internationalization through mobility is already part of the Brazilian educational scenario (Bardaquim; Dias, 2019; Zasso; Nogueira, 2021; Dos Santos; De Camargo, 2022; Olivatto; Di Lollo; Masiero, 2023; Saints; Campos, 2023), becoming a reality and contributing to a unique experience in the academic life of university students at various levels.

In a context of internationalization through mobility, a graduate student can avoid many problems and also solve others if he expands his soft skills: fluid language, communication, problem solving and creativity (Arat, 2014). These skills are expanded through personal development training (Klaus, 2008) and through the willingness to solve previously unknown needs.

In view of the above, and with the objectives of sharing learning and motivating Brazilian students who wish to participate in any *stricto sensu graduate program* of internationalization by mobility, the experiences lived during 4 years by a doctoral student at a Mexican university, who is also a university professor, will be reported.



## METHODOLOGY

This is a study with a qualitative approach, descriptive nature: report of experiences, with the objective of describing the activities that were experienced by a foreign graduate student, reporting their challenges, difficulties and successes achieved and also with the interest of motivating other Brazilian students to participate in the internationalization process through in-depth studies in a foreign country.

According to Minayo (2004), in a qualitative approach, the researcher participates, understands and clarifies the social events of his study and according to Musi, Flores and Almeida (2021) the report of experiences expresses in writing the experiences lived and collaborates in the formation of knowledge.

The data for the present report were obtained from the record of the experiences that were systematically saved over the course of four years in a folder (such as a field diary) on the computer. And the data analysis followed the methodological guidelines of Minayo (2004).

The experiments took place at a private, confessional Mexican university located in the state of Nuevo León. This university has a total number of 2,613 students, has 28 undergraduate courses, 2 master's courses and five doctoral courses,

The period in which he was studying at the University was from January 2020 to December 2023. The doctorate focused on knowledge about education and education for a healthy lifestyle.

Regarding Ethics in Research, according to Resolution No. 510, of April 7, 2016 of the National Health Council, research does not need to be submitted to the Ethics Committee, since it is a report of lived experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the following paragraphs, the activities experienced will be described, reflections that arose from the dialogue with authors studied during the process of living in *the stricto sensu* abroad.

## TUTORIAL ACTION PROJECT CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

In 2020, in the first semester of studies, we developed a tutorial action project. In principle, this project started as one of the evaluation tools for the academic tutoring discipline, however, in the first month, it was thought that the project could be applied with a group of students within the university itself, but, with the advance of the pandemic, the project had to be reorganized for a practical application in a post-pandemic moment.



The experience of theoretical construction of this project enabled a knowledge that had not been deepened until then. Teaching through tutors is something that has existed for many years in other countries, however, we had not experienced it either in undergraduate or graduate (master's) training; and, when I came into contact with this form of intermediation of knowledge, there was great surprise and immense eagerness to know more about how to use it.

From the deepening of the theory and the understanding of the importance that teaching can have when using tutors to help students. The theoretical project developed had as its theme: "tutorial action project" and among the items of implementation of the plan were described: semester and weekly duration, characteristics of the participants, responsibilities in the actions, weekly hours of work used by tutor and mentee, teacher responsible for the tutor, what kind of support would be given and how the evaluation would be at the end of the semester. One of the great contributions that took place during the reading phase for the construction of the project was to discover that some students understand the content better when they are taught by their colleagues (peers), among the reasons that explain this fact are two, very interesting: similarity in language and difficulties and similarities in learning. Also, we learned throughout the study process on this subject that there are many pedagogical gains for the participants, among them we can mention: a greater commitment to reciprocal learning and teaching (Karia *et al.*, 2024), greater learning, when compared to other activities such as studying alone (Dass; Kaleigh St; Muldner, 2024) and greater engagement with the university (Cornelius; Wood; Lai, 2016). All these gains led us to the motivation to implement a peer mentoring project in our workplace in the future.

### TROUBLESHOOTING ACTIVITY

During the second semester of 2021, we held the discipline of "Teoría y diseño curricular". The course had as its proposal for completion the resolution of a curriculum problem in one of the higher education courses of the University.

As in the first semester of 2021 there had been an exchange of experiences in an informal conversation with the coordinator of the nursing course and he had commented on some problems of lack of basic knowledge with students who were already advanced, and the lack of this knowledge made, even preventing students from understanding the explanations that were given by the professors, Thus, we understood that it would be the appropriate place to apply the knowledge learned in the discipline I was taking. After formalizing the meeting with the coordinator and listening to him, we began the study to



solve the main problem identified: there were seven disciplines that depended totally on previous knowledge of anatomy and physiology, however, this anatomy and physiology content had a total workload of only 5 face-to-face credits, that is, insufficient time to provide a good basis for students to advance in the other disciplines. Within the final product, four suggestions were presented to assist the coordinator in solving the problem, the suggestions were organized: containing the name of the stage, the description (what would be done), date and place where it would be carried out, costs and those responsible. The teacher of the discipline was interested in following the whole process and did so, presenting reflective questions and suggesting actions. With this experience, it was possible to reflect that the problems related to insufficient workload are not only present in Brazilian universities, whether private or public, we understand that they also involve economic issues of quantity and availability of professors able to teach certain disciplines. It was gratifying to be able to contribute to the nursing course and to have the report that the application of the proposed project was useful for solving the identified problem. The experience of this activity was highly productive due to two facts, the first was the possibility of studying *in loco* in the university environment, because according to Leiro, Fantin and Morosini (2024), the internationalization experiences of doctoral programs reach greater depths only when the doctoral student is in person. The second fact that contributed to the success of this activity was the ability to use a *soft skill* called problem solving (Caballo, 2016; Del Prette; Del Prette, 2009).

### ACTIVITY IN RESEARCH FAIR

In 2021, the University of Montemorelos promoted, as part of its annual agenda, a research fair called "Feria de Investigación". That year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event took place *online*, considering that we were starting an *online project* on healthy lifestyle education, we then decided to participate in the fair to get more experience in the modality – oral presentation in another language. The theoretical organization of the presentation (*slides*) took place individually, following the rules proposed by the organizers of the fair itself. The activity was recorded and sent to the event. This type of presentation provided an important experience for building self-confidence to make recorded presentations using the Spanish language. The need to develop *the communication* soft skill (Caballo, 2016; Del Prette; Del Prette, 2009), also called fluid language (Pachauri; Yadav, 2014) in another language, contributed to motivate and equip for participation in the thesis contest.



## PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY IN THESIS CONTEST

In 2023, the University of Montemorelos, through the Department of Graduate and Research, with the purpose of encouraging master's and doctoral students to improve the ability to synthesize their dissertations and theses, promoted the contest: your thesis in 3 minutes. Incomplete research papers (as long as they already had partial results) or complete research (which had not yet been published or had already been published) could be enrolled in this type of contest. At the time, we were preparing an article in the area of health-promoting lifestyle, we had already collected data, obtained the results and carried out the analysis. The major limitation was to present the work in 3 minutes, since making the presentation in Spanish quickly was a considerable barrier, since three years of experience in a foreign language is not enough for a fluid presentation in three minutes. But even with these limitations, the result was achieved, the people who watched gave positive *feedback*. This experience in the last year was another one that contributed to the paradigm shift of avoiding new experiences without longer preparation, which was important to rethink that knowledge gains occur on the road that is taken to achieve them and not only in the final result.

## PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY AS A GUEST PROFESSOR TO TEACH CLASSES

During the period of the doctoral studies, we were invited to teach two classes to undergraduate students at the University of Montemorelos. The first class took place during the pandemic, so it was *online*, the theme worked on was: spiritual health in the context of disease prevention. The invitation to teach this class came from the coordinator of the nursing course. The students were from different states of Mexico, each with their own accent of their region, which already makes communication a little slow and, added to this, we were in a process of improving the language, so on this day the class did not flow as planned, and it was necessary to repeat the phrases that were exposed many times. At the end of the class, it was possible to reflect on the limitations that a foreign teacher goes through when he starts teaching in another country, because, in addition to needing to master the new language, he needs to understand different accents. Associated with the limitations mentioned above comes the gains from understanding how the place where one is living works, how one should live in that environment, respect for the culture of the other and the experience of universal principles of society (Leiro, Fantin, Morosini, 2024).

The second theme worked on was: Spiritual health and academic performance. This class took place in the building where the engineering classes are taught, at the invitation of the professor of religion, who, when contacted, reported that he would like his students to



understand, based on scientific evidence, that good spiritual health could positively influence their academic performance. Approximately 35 students participated in the class, who, at the end of the class, asked several questions about the theme presented. This class was face-to-face, and a personal computer and a projector were used as pedagogical resources. The class went very smoothly.

## PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES FOR A PARENTS' SCHOOL

Due to the pandemic, in the first two years of the doctorate, the economic situation in Mexico changed a lot, with a significant increase in inflation, which was also reflected in the university's tuition fees. The galloping increase in inflation in Mexico, together with the need to advance in new experiences related to education, has led to the search for solutions to contemplate this new demand. And so, in August 2022, in partnership with a colleague with a degree in psychology, we structured a parents' school. This parents' school had two themes as its theoretical foundations: the importance of parents' affection for their children's learning and the construction of values in families for a successful education of children and adolescents. After structuring this school of parents, we presented the proposal to a Catholic school, which promptly assimilated it. We developed the parents' school for a month, with a weekly meeting. The weekly meeting took place in the afternoon with the training of teachers (which was a request of the school principal) and in the evening, specifically, with the parents' school. As one of the strategies we used to get parents involved during the month we worked on was the creation of a *whatsapp group* where we put weekly tasks to be completed together with the children. Already in the second meeting we realized that it was not working, so we changed the strategy to small commitments publicly established during the meetings, and this strategy worked better, as several parents were willing to report what they had done together with their children and the results they obtained. This experience was a great learning experience, since it provided lectures to an auditorium full of parents and the certainty that they were understanding us was essential for the continuity of the work.

Every day when we ended the activities we felt very fulfilled, because the parents came to talk and tell how the meetings were helping to change the relationship with their children and the improvements that the children and adolescents were having in learning.





## ACTIVITY OF BUILDING EDUCATIONAL CONTENT USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

A very important support in this international journey was the knowledge acquired in the discipline of "Basic Technological Applications in Education", when a new horizon opened up and we produced the first *short youtube* videos, all in the area of health.

In the production of these videos, we learned to use a fast and efficient tool to disseminate knowledge. We also understand that with a cell phone camera you can produce expository classes from anywhere in the world. Another important learning was that, right at the beginning of the recording attempts, we realized that it was not enough to have only mastery of the content, but to develop the ability to transmit it in an organized and succinct way in another language and maintaining the accent of the audience to which I would like to teach and communicate a certain knowledge. Before the recordings, we also found that he needed to rehearse the content several times, if he did not do so, he ran the risk of losing what he had already recorded. In the construction of this experience, I recorded 3 *short youtube* videos about health for people who need to reduce their body fat percentage.

Another experience also lived in the area of using technologies for teaching was the structuring of a course on healthy lifestyle, using a platform. The course had a total duration of 12 hours and was open to people of any age who wanted to enroll. The course was hosted on the *learnworlds* platform and had the following objectives for the participants: to obtain and deepen theoretical knowledge about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, to experience the practice of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and to develop an innovative proposal to motivate participants to produce a change in their lifestyle to a healthier one. This experience was extremely important for the trajectory as an educator, as the years of work go by and the professional demands increase, the teacher gets involved with different disciplines, extension and research projects and, sometimes, a little of something basic in teaching is lost: the diagnosis. When we used the Strength/Opportunity/Weakness/Threats (SWOT) matrix to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the participants, it was possible to reflect on how the students' knowledge was before starting a certain activity, whether theoretical, practical, face-to-face or *online*. The course was important to recover this gap in professional life, which people usually have.

One of the challenges in building the *online course* was to institute the biblical-Christian principles and values of the University, that is, the healthy lifestyle course should be both scientific and educational, without, however, losing the biblical foundations. This activity presented two difficulties, the first was finding interested parties in a course



promoted by someone who was not known on social networks in the area of the course and, the second, the handling of the digital platform.

## CONGRESS PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY

In 2023, the V University Research Congress of the Inter-American Division took place, with the title: Research, training and sustainability before the challenges of the pandemic: A spiritual and social commitment. This Congress, despite presenting a specific theme, accepted papers in several areas. The Congress had two ways of presenting scientific papers (after the authors received the acceptance of the congress), the first was face-to-face, that is, the authors would go to the Congress in Costa Rica and present their work there, and the second was a modality in which the presentation was recorded and then sent to the organizers, And this modality was chosen, and the language was English, which was also a barrier to be overcome.

Considering the limitations of presentation in English, we looked for alternatives such as using the *teleprompter*, writing the English pronunciation of all the words that would be part of the presentation and, finally, on the day of the recording, the presentation of the work was carried out from the reading of the content. This experience provided reflection on the ability we have to solve different situations in education when we really propose to do them, in addition, it reinforced the importance of cooperative work among educators in solving problems, since people proposed to assist in the instrumentalization to facilitate the recording of the presentation. As a negative point of the experience, it is emphasized that the lack of mastery of the English language is a very large limitation, especially when thinking about the establishment of dialogue with the global north, more specifically, in the publication of articles. Leiro; Fantin; Morosini (2024) point out that without mastery of the English language, publications on the internationalization of education do not have international circulation. As positive points, this experience helped us to understand and value the importance of creativity, which, according to Meng *et. al.* (2017) and Zhou; Shalley (2003) defines himself as a production of ideas with two characteristics: novelty and utility, or even, according to Mendes (2021), a part of the human being's potential to carry out a transformation in the environment through innovation, this action being carried out intentionally.



## ACTIVITY CARRIED OUT IN THE FORM OF A TECHNICAL VISIT TO A TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

In this experience, in 2023, there was the opportunity to get to know the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, popularly known as Tecnológico de Monterrey or Tec de Monterrey. This institution is a private institution, founded in the year 1943 and ranked as one of the top three Mexican universities. The Institute is based on 12 principles, 5 values and a mission.

The visit to this place had two main objectives: to get to know the physical structure of the Tec de Monterrey and to observe how the *Future of Higher Education & Workforce Summit event* worked. In carrying out this visit we had the support of the professor and coordinator of the courses of Arts, Graphic Design, Communication Science and Architecture of the University of Montemorelos. This professor was a facilitator in all aspects of the visit, taking us from the University of Montemorelos to the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, in addition to presenting the most varied physical spaces, explaining the operation of higher education courses, gave a real class on the Mexican culture of higher education and how Tec de Monterrey has contributed to the advancement in the area of technological education for Mexico, he also commented on the agreements that Tec has made with American universities to leverage their teaching. Tec de Monterrey has university agreements in more than 50 countries, according to the verbal report of the professor who accompanied us on the visit.

The visited Institution has modern architecture, large, well-lit and organized buildings, a high flow of students and a great stimulus to the arts, especially music.

This last activity provided us with a reflection on the importance that a university administration with a vision of policies aimed at the internationalization of education has on institutional growth. Teaching using high technology, international events and agreements signed with several countries are proof that internationalization places a university at a higher level of quality (Cerdeira; Castro; Lauxen, 2024).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This report aimed to share the activities experienced by a Brazilian university professor who chose to study abroad at a Mexican University, to report his challenges, difficulties and successes achieved, but also to motivate the interest of Brazilian students who wish to carry out their studies at *the stricto sensu level* in another country.

The exposure to new experiences (structuring a school for parents, presentation of works in another language and thesis contest) that were not common in the professional



routine provided a rethinking of the limitations of the professional performance that has been carried out over the years, limitations that are also due, in part, to the extensive work demands, which limit the professional by placing him in an endless work circle.

The experience of studying in another country makes it possible to understand the importance of mastering English as a tool for expanding scientific knowledge, in addition, it also made it possible to become aware that *soft skills* are extremely important in solving unknown problems, especially when you are in another country.

To be willing to live an experience of internationalization through mobility is to be willing to overcome unforeseen challenges, resulting from situations of cultural, cognitive, and socioeconomic adaptation. The victories resulting from overcoming the challenges of an experience of internationalization through mobility provided growth as a human being, teacher and researcher.

The classes, the assignments, the bibliographic and field research, the readings, the reflections carried out in the classroom and outside it and this report provided great academic gains. Thus, overcoming the language barrier, acquiring new knowledge and embracing opportunities that arose, extrapolated the personal and professional reality to also contribute to the academic society to point out ways and possibilities to have an experience of studying abroad and; In addition, with this linguistic improvement and the exercise of teaching practice, it is possible to contribute to society in the second instance.

This report has limitations, since the experiences are always lived in a specific context and within a time, in addition to considering that each individual brings different sociocultural and linguistic baggage.

In this sense, it is recommended that those interested in living an experience of internationalization through mobility try in advance to know the study requirements of the program they will be participating in and this includes not only the specific activities of the disciplines, but also the rules that govern the program and the criteria for its completion. Thus, difficulties can be overcome with more objectivity.

From this experience reported here, other works can be carried out by those who decided to carry out their study journey in another country, such as reporting their motivation trajectory before the mobility process, their theoretical-practical growth and, later, presenting effective results of their experience in the future application in the classroom or other professional environment.



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