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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Internationalisation of Venezuelan Higher Education (2004–2014): An Attempt at Ideological Diffusion in Latin America

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This article explores the Venezuelan government higher education internationalisation program through student mobility in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and argues that its role as an ideological diffusion mechanism affected its implementation. This qualitative analysis employs Venezuelan, international and regional organizations statistics, documents, and declarations, plus information gathered from academic literature based on field work and interviewing. We found that the ideological diffusion role of the program lowered the quality of the educational experience for students and may have contributed to its stagnation in the 2010s, together with the end of the oil boom and the shrinking number of 'friendly' governments in Latin America. The article improves our understanding of internationalisation at the regional level and suggests the need to focus on performance and achievements as well as declarations of intent and announced projects.

Keywords: student mobility; internationalisation; ideological diffusion; Mercosur; ALBA; Venezuela

Este artículo explora la ejecución del programa de movilidad estudiantil del gobierno venezolano en la Alianza Bolivariana de Nuestra América (ALBA) y el Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur) y argumenta que su rol de mecanismo de difusión ideológica afectó su implementación. Este análisis cualitativo incorpora estadísticas, documentos y declaraciones oficiales de Venezuela y organizaciones internacionales y regionales, además de información de fuentes secundarias basadas en trabajo de campo y entrevistas. Los resultados muestran que el rol de difusión ideológica del programa afectó la calidad de la experiencia educativa recibida por los estudiantes y puede haber contribuido a su estancamiento en la década del 2010, junto con el fin del auge petrolero y la disminución del número de gobiernos 'amigos' de Venezuela en América Latina. El artículo contribuye a entender el proceso de internacionalización mediante programas de movilidad estudiantil y sugiere la necesidad de prestar atención a su ejecución práctica además de declaraciones e intenciones.

Palabras clave: movilidad estudiantil; internacionalización; difusión ideológica; Mercosur; ALBA; Venezuela

Introduction

The twenty-first century witnesses an increased interest in higher education (HE) internationalisation because the complexity of present issues and the level of global interdependence achieved make it necessary to incorporate more human and technological resources than those provided by national university systems. Internationalisation programs take many forms, and among them student mobility is important because of its impact on the personal and professional lives of students and the social and economic development of their societies. Student mobility can be informal or individual, promoted by international programs, bilateral agreements, or government policies (ALFA-Puentes, 2013, 29). Mobility programs are affected by political and theoretical controversy regarding the role of HE – is it a market product or a public good? should it provide credentials for work, critical thinking, or ideological support for change? –, and most literature looks at that aspect. But their outcomes must be evaluated to offer useful decision-making insights for other programs. This makes their implementation a key component of any attempt at assessing student mobility.

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Two Venezuelan administrations (Hugo Chavez, 1999–2013; Nicolas Maduro, 2013–2021) developed a student mobility program that raises questions about the goals of HE internationalisation for a government bent on modifying the social and political make-up of its nation, the resources needed to implement them, and the motivations of participating students. We argue that Venezuelan student mobility attempted to diffuse the government (Bolivarian) ideology abroad based on the financial resources provided by oil exports and a new pool of geopolitical allies in Latin America. However, the attempt stagnated in the 2010s not only due to the end of oil financial resources and the shrinking of the allies' pool, but also because the quality of the program did not fulfill students' objectives.

Latin American literature on HE internationalisation discusses how public and private universities and academic networks deal with student mobility programs, if regional integration processes attempt to harmonize or provide incentives for those programs, and why students prefer some destinations to others. Internationalisation is defined as '…the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education… to enhance the quality of education' for students and their societies (Hunter, 2015, n/p). At the regional level, it is expected to promote regional integration, strengthen human and scientific resources, increase the quality of education, and foster cooperation in solving problems and achieving development (UNESCO-IESALC, 2008). Though both definitions presuppose that internationalisation needs specific policy mechanisms to translate objectives into actions, there is little research on the implementation of mobility programs and in Latin American intraregional mobility (Kondacki et al., 2018, 533). The Venezuelan program provides a vantage point to look at how internationalisation aims are translated into actions when mobility is employed as an ideological diffusion mechanism.

Corson (1995, 89) defines ideology as a system of ideas expressed through discourse that by means of distorting reality serves the interests of an individual or group. Ideological diffusion implies a deliberate process that transfers an integrated system of ideas from a zone of high concentration to another where they are less prevalent, with the aim of altering that situation and helping the transmitter to develop soft power (i.e., becoming a model for the receiver). Diffusion requires active promotion by various actors and is usually conditioned by domestic politics ('spurred emulation', Lenz, 2012, 157), denoting the existence of some conditions of superiority of the transmitter and an active pattern of propaganda to receivers. Student mobility programs are a key component of ideological diffusion as soft power originates more from civil society contacts than from governments (Nye, 2013).

The usual view about outbound student mobility in low-and-middle income countries is that it helps to qualify students and promote economic growth (Grant Thornton, 2016, 6), usually through selecting strategic areas of study for scholarships. Russia dealt with its brain drain since the end of the Soviet Union by financing postgraduates to study overseas with the commitment to work in state organisations or enterprises upon returning to Russia. Sending students abroad is also a feature of emerging economies, like India and China, that want to improve their human resources and establish or increase good relations with host destinations (Grant Thornton, 2016). But when governments use student mobility to exercise influence in other nations, they can do so by financing foreign students in their universities to spread political, economic, or religious ideas among them. There are, however, differences between educational programs that expose students to ideas through immersion on a different cultural and social environment (ideational diffusion by socialisation) and those that use political action (incentives and/or coercion) to transmit only one perspective (ideological diffusion) (Heinze, 2011; Peters, 2015).

Venezuela is a Latin American petrostate that twice increased public expenditure on HE mobility programs. The first time was during the oil boom of 1973–1979 and the State program favoured developed nations as destinations for Venezuelan students, and the second in the 2000s changed destination nations and included a proactive drive to attract students from certain nations. Classic realism interpretations link that behaviour to the affluence of material resources when the international price of oil is high. Colgan (2013), for example, claims that petrostates tend to follow proactive and/or aggressive foreign policies when oil prices are high because their governments' control of oil resources frees them from domestic constraints. The Venezuelan mobility program of the 2000s can also be linked to the assertion that foreign policy may be at the service of an elite or a statesman [in nations without an internal check and balance equilibrium], in such a way that 'total autonomy' in foreign policy usually equals 'absolute domestic tyranny' (Schenoni & Escudé, 2016, 3–4).

Analysis of the student mobility program of the Venezuelan Bolivarian government provides a glimpse at how a petrostate bent on producing radical social and economic transformation domestically and extending its political ideology regionally uses HE internationalisation. Identifying Venezuela as a petrostate is important because it has been claimed that, although in the 2000s the arrival to power of left-leaning parties in Latin America fostered a re-examination of HE policies, only Venezuela was able 'to implement reforms that realize their discursive pronouncements' due to the availability of financial resources (external condition) and the Executive's 'control over the main branches of government…' (internal condition) (Peralta & Pezzuto, 2014, 622).

Our initial objective was to evaluate the government mobility program as a case study of a petrostate extending its political ideology through HE internationalisation in two regional integration groups (Bolivarian Alliance for Our Americas, ALBA, and Southern Common Market, Mercosur). Unreliable and incomplete data (see Parra-Sandoval, 2018) allowed us to assess only two aspects: implementation (process) and partially its results, but not its outcome and cost-benefit impact (Yin, 1992).

Accordingly, this is a qualitative quasi-case study employing data from Venezuelan official statistics, documents, and declarations and those of international and regional organisations, and information from secondary literature based on fieldwork and interviewing. We look, first, at the goals and resources of the mobility program; secondly, at its implementation in Mercosur and ALBA; and, in the third section, at the recent situation of the program. The conclusion links our findings to the literature on HE internationalization and political diffusion.

Our timeframe is 2004 to 2014 because in December 2003 the government established the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (Spanish acronym UBV), central axis of Venezuelan internationalisation (Parra-Sandoval, 2011), and in December 2004, Venezuela and Cuba signed the first ALBA agreement, delineating the pool of acceptable ('friendly') nations and institutions. 2014 is the last year the Venezuelan Ministry of People's Power for HE (MPPES, later for University Education, MPPEU) has published an official report.

I. Objectives and Resources of the Venezuelan Program

The Chavez administration aimed at including the excluded from HE through the creation of new experimental universities (or the political control of the existing ones), which formed a parallel subsystem called the Sucre Mission (Misión Sucre).[1] Official documents granted it the role of transforming values towards developing socialism among students (cited at Peters, 2015, p. 147), leading observers to claim that the subsystem functions as a hub of political and ideological preparation (Pineda, 2017), with responsibility in disseminating the government's ideology and defending the government against external and internal aggression (Hocevar et al., 2017; Ramirez, 2017; Rojas & Baquero, 2017). Most studies look at the domestic objective of the subsystem, following the lead of the MPPEU (2015, p. 160) that states that the mission's goal is to make HE a component for the construction of a socialist society.

Muhr (2016a) considers the new subsystem inseparable from the state interventionist development strategies implemented by Venezuela, and internationalisation an effort to upscale those policies to the regional level through South–South cooperation. For Gonzalez (2009, 182) the anti-imperialist character of the government impelled it to grant HE an important role in Latin American integration and 'cooperation with the peoples of the South.' That role was based on a geopolitical redefinition of Venezuelan alliances because the program favoured students from countries ideologically close to the Bolivarian government or 'traditionally subjugated' (Parra-Sandoval, 2018, 46). As foreign students with Venezuelan scholarships went to universities controlled by the government in the parallel subsystem, Venezuelan internationalisation is assumed to have the same objective than the Sucre Mission.

Since 1973 Venezuela was a member of the Andean Community (CAN), a regional agreement with Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, which had signed the Andres Bello Convention (1970) to develop and plan the education needs of member nations as a support platform for economic integration (Ramírez, 2003). Its main contribution was the recognition of primary and secondary education studies that allowed Andean students to enter Venezuelan universities. Venezuela also ratified a treaty with Latin American nations (Ley Aprobatoria …, 1976) to validate the qualifications of Venezuelan students returning with degrees obtained elsewhere in the region, after the government launched a massive scholarship program in 1974 (Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho Program, Fundayacucho) to finance student mobility with resources of the first oil boom. When Venezuelan economic conditions deteriorated, Fundayacucho scholarships diminished and stopped (Morles et al., 2003).

In 2003, the Bolivarian government reactivated Fundayacucho but restricted outgoing scholarships to the post-graduate level (*Fundayacucho en dos tiempos*, 2013, 87, 89), and incorporated scholarships for foreign students at the undergraduate level and the goal of ideological formation by linking scholarships to the parallel subsystem. Regionally, the goal of diffusing the Bolivarian ideology became paramount aided by Venezuelan close political association with Cuba – that provided the model to follow --, the existence in the region of governments sympathetic to that ideology, and the financial resources of the oil boom.

II. Implementation of the Venezuelan program in Mercosur and ALBA

In 2006 Venezuela left CAN, asked for membership in Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay) and enlarged ALBA with Bolivia. *Educación Superior en Iberoamérica* reported foreign students in Venezuela and Venezuelans studying abroad in 2007 and 2010 (**Table 1**). In order of importance the receiving countries in 2007 were the United States (U.S.), Cuba, Portugal, Spain, France and had not changed by 2010, though Cuba had more Venezuelan students than before. While only few of the students in traditional destination can be assumed to have Fundayacucho scholarships, most or all those in Cuba must have had them (see Discussion section).

Mercosur had promoted academic exchange programs among its members since its creation to ensure comparable quality standards in university degrees, facilitate job mobility, and coordinate educational policies (Verger & Hermo, 2010, 112). When Venezuela entered the group there were different education accreditation programs, but, by 2013, many decisions regarding HE were

Table 1: Foreign and Latin American students in Venezuela and Venezuelan nationals studying abroad.

	Foreign students in Venezuela	Latin American students as % of foreign students	Venezuelans studying abroad
2007	2,472	83.3	9,569
2010	1,913	97.0	2,207

Source: Compiled by Author; data from *Educación Superior en Iberoamérica*, 2007, 94; 2011, 176–177.

not implemented (Scotti & Klein, 2013), except for the Accreditation System of University Careers of Member States and Associated States (ARCUSUR), where participation was voluntary (Gacel-Avila & Rodriguez, 2018, 194). Careers accredited in ARCUSUR allowed for Mercosur student mobility under the Regional Academic Mobility in Authorized Degrees (MARCA, 2005). Venezuela entered ARCUSUR and established a Committee of Evaluation and Accreditation of Programs and Institutions of HE (2008) to implement the accreditation of selected programs (*Educación Superior*..., 2011, 408). By 2010 it had accredited careers in Agronomy, Architecture, and Veterinary, but after 2012 its participation stopped (Pol & Gonzalez, 2013), and Venezuela was not mentioned as a member of MARCA (Gacel-Avila & Rodriguez, 2018, 195).

Venezuela became a member of a Mercosur, Chile, Bolivia, and Venezuela network of International Relations and Cooperation Coordinators (2006) (Fernandez et al., 2018, 255), but the literature does not mention Venezuelan efforts to foster, modify or substitute Mercosur HE cooperation mechanisms. This may be linked to the fact that by 2006 the regional group was experimenting with new programs of accreditation and mobility that might have left little room for radical changes, like the ones Venezuela promoted. Argentina, a Venezuelan "friendly" Mercosur member looking for ways to enlarge its own internationalisation, reported mobility programs with Mexico, Chile, and Colombia rather than Venezuela (Fernandez et al., 2018, 236–237).

Anyway, since 2006, there were more Venezuelan students attending Argentinian and Brazilian universities after Fundayacucho increased financial help and redefined its "geopolitics to choose destination countries and areas of study for Venezuelan scholarship holders abroad" (*Fundayacucho en dos tiempos*, 2013, 87–88). Even if there are not reported Venezuelan attempts to prioritize Mercosur as a source of incoming international students, their enrollment in Venezuelan HE also grew. In 2013, ALFA-Puentes (2013, 23) and Paso & Granato (2018, 29) hardly acknowledged Mercosur HE students in Venezuela, but the following year the MPPEU (2015, 14) mentions that out of 3,172 foreign students in Venezuela, 2,317 were South Americans, without identifying countries of origin, receiving universities or if they had government scholarships.[2] The underreporting of Mercosur students in Venezuela may be due to studies failing to include the subsystem or to the inexistence of "push factors" (social turmoil, limited academic opportunities) in their countries that, according to Kondacki et al. (2018), motivate students who cannot afford studying in developed nations to choose other nations' universities in the region.

An exception to the low recording of Mercosur students in Venezuela is a study of the Southern Venezuela-Northern Brazil border zone, declared a priority area for HE by the Bolivarian government in 2006. Since 2004, a university "aldea" [Ambiente Local de Desarrollo Educativo Alternativo Socialista] functioned in the border town of Santa Elena de Uairén, where Venezuelan experimental universities delivered UBV programs (Muhr, 2016b, 258). Brazilian students were attracted by Venezuelan careers with access restrictions in their country, such as medicine. In 2012, "according to one interviewee, most of the students of the National Program of Integral Community Medicine are Brazilian, ... live in Santa Elena de Uairén..., and some stay on after graduation" (Muhr, 2016b, 264–265).

The underreporting of Mercosur in the Venezuelan mobility program can be linked as well to the fact that the ALBA and International Cooperation Office managed all programs to incorporate students from ALBA, Central America, South America, and Africa (Parra-Sandoval, 2018) and controlled Fundayacucho scholarships. In 2010 ALBA – which had grown to 8 nations (see below) -- established an accreditation program and a Commission for Registration and Monitoring (Muhr, 2010) following the *Agreement on the Recognition of Higher Education Titles or Diplomas* (2009). The agreement (Ley Aprobatoria..., 2009) recognized titles and degrees to nationals of the country granting recognition for studying and professional exercise purposes but limited to titles and degrees obtained through ALBA projects or cooperation agreements. It is not clear that titles obtained through other means are included. In 2012, Nicaraguan universities gained accreditation in Venezuela (Bokiner & Gurcan, 2016), and in 2014 Venezuela published the official norms for recognising degrees obtained by its nationals in other ALBA nations (Gaceta Oficial..., 2014). Additionally, in 2009, Venezuela founded the University of ALBA, a university network with programs in medicine, education, and oil geopolitics, one "nodal" university in each ALBA country, and headquarters in Venezuela (Muhr, 2010, 11–12).

Of the 4,125 foreign students in Venezuela between 2005 and 2012, 3,593 (88%) came from Latin America and the Caribbean (*Fundayacucho en dos tiempos*, 2013, 94) and went mainly to the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM-Venezuela, 2007), modelled after the ELAM-Cuba. Though Cuba is a prominent member of ALBA, student mobility between Venezuela and Cuba results from a separate agreement with Cuba to train healthcare personnel in Venezuela and provide entry to its medical schools for Venezuelan students, later widened to other careers. The Venezuelan-Cuban mobility program is not included here because it merits a separate study, but it is usually mentioned by the Bolivarian government as an achievement of its ALBA mobility program. Its ideological diffusion objective is stressed by Sandra Moreno, director of the ELAM-Venezuela, "...Venezuela returns a battalion of white coats [doctors] to the historically oppressed peoples of the world, *a battalion with political awareness which knows what its responsibility is*" (cited in Pearson, 2013, n/p).

The ALBA scholarship program included ELAM-Venezuela, the parallel subsystem, and the Latin American Agroecological Institute "Paulo Freire" (IALA-PF), founded in 2006 by Venezuela, the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST) and La Vía Campesina (Muhr, 2016, 261). IALA defines itself as a network of schools of agroecological and political formation that trains militants to become cadres and facilitators of La Vía Campesina and MST (McCune, et al., 2014, 2017; Rosset et al, 2019), stressing its role as an agent of ideological diffusion.

In 2013, ELAM-Venezuela graduated its first 289 medical doctors and informed that they have come from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, El Salvador, Surinam, Panama, and Uruguay, among other countries (Pearson, 2013). The existence of graduates from Mercosur nations confirms that they were quantified under ALBA. The government also announced that UBV was forming 3,670 community medicine students, that together with those being formed at ELAM (1,808 students) and other experimental universities would make an estimated total of 18,000 (Pearson, 2013). Most students should have been Venezuelan and other Latin American nationals because *Informe de Gestión de la Secretaría del ALBA* (2014, 24) gives the following numbers between 2004 and 2014: 1) *ALBA students enrolled in Venezuelan Integral Medicine Programs*: Antigua & Barbuda 2; Bolivia 389: Dominica 14; Ecuador 155; Nicaragua 50; Saint Vincent & the Grenadines 12 (*total 622*); 2) *ALBA students with Venezuelan scholarships graduated*: Bolivia 551; Dominica 43; Ecuador 112; Nicaragua 71; Saint Vincent & the Grenadines 9; Saint Lucia 3 (*total 789*).

Venezuela's implementation of the mobility program shows that the government favoured its own regional integration group (ALBA) rather than using or modifying Mercosur internationalisation mechanisms. By so doing Venezuela probably aimed at modelling internationalisation according to its objectives and widening the visibility of the program in a regional organisation it promoted and controlled.

III. Recent Situation and Discussion

It is hard to evaluate the mobility program but anecdotal evidence (reported even by authors who support the Bolivarian political project) points to the contrast between its exalted goals and weak implementation. Venezuelan official declarations define education as a public good and human right and mention HE "integral formation with quality" and "university inclusion with quality and relevance" (Castellanos, 2010, 383). However, the need to ensure that professors and students conformed to government ideology translated into academic quality becoming a secondary consideration for hiring, promotion, and graduation (Garcia, 2012).[3] After field research between 2008 and 2011, Ivancheva (2013, 16) finds that UBV professors were mostly first-generation entrants to HE, few had post-graduate studies,[4] and they and MPPEU officials enrolled their children in autonomous or private (i.e., traditional) universities. Sucre Mission had promised students social integration (by opening the university to them) and economic integration into the labour market, but, until 2010, UBV and "aldeas" graduates could not find jobs because their degrees were not officially recognized – integral medicine degrees became recognised in Venezuela in 2011 --, and even after that year, state-owned companies preferred traditional universities graduates (Ivancheva, 2013, 11, 16).

Another quality limitation was that most Sucre Mission careers reduced undergraduate studies from 5 to 4 years, while incorporating more political or ideological formative courses in their curricula. A Fundayacucho coordinator also acknowledged that the assignation of scholarships was linked to political-party ID cards ("carnet de la patria") (18 años! Mire cuantas becas..., 2017, n/p), so educational background, expertise or knowledge were unnecessary considerations for students' financial support if they participated in party activities. Lack of preparation may have compounded the quality problem by slowing down the pace of teaching.

Though there are different concepts of educational quality – the traditional one of preparation for professional life and the concept of fulfilling a human right and fighting social exclusion --, Peters (2015) claims that by not participating in international studies or providing data about students' achievements the Venezuelan government displays lack of interest in any type of quality. But assessing the subsystem quality is necessary because most foreign students with Fundayacucho scholarships attended the UBV and experimental universities. So, they should have faced problems derived from poorly staffed institutions in which professors' loyalty to government was more important than academic credentials and from sharing classes with students who lacked previous preparation.

After the end of the oil boom, economic limitations exacerbated the problems of experimental universities and Fundayacucho. The UBV complained about insufficient funds to hire new teaching personnel, augment student enrollment or open new programs (MPPEU, 2015, p. 2,041). The Venezuelan government announced that, starting in 2014, 1,000 new students with Fundayacucho scholarships would enter ELAM each year to fulfill the objective of training 60,000 community medicine doctors by 2019, but only 1,469 community doctors graduated from ELAM between 2013–2019, including Venezuelan and foreign students (128 International..., 2019). An official Ecuadorian document stated that Venezuelan government scholarships did no longer cover all students living expenses and had forced the Ecuador government to supplement them (cited at Vergara, 2016, 62). In 2014, La Prensa (Managua) reported that 220 Nicaraguan students attending ELAM-Venezuela had returned to Nicaragua because the Venezuelan government could not afford to maintain them (Díaz, 2014).

When the MPPEU (2015, p. 2,798) informed about financial support for 316 Venezuelan students abroad, 67 of whom had received scholarships in 2014, these scholarships resulted from agreements with Russia, France, Argentina, Spain, and Belarus, showing the substitution of Venezuelan scholarships abroad for international scholarship programs or bilateral agreements. Meanwhile 2,593 foreign students were enrolled in Venezuelan universities, but that number included students from Palestine, Africa, and the Middle East (MPPEU, 2015, p. 2,800).

In the 2010s, the Sucre Mission did not disappear, but the government created more experimental universities that diminished contact between "aldeas" and communities. Ivancheva (2017a, 262) considers that the UBV-"aldeas" nexus "aimed to follow the Cuban example in municipalizing... education", but later changes promoted "more small universities with hierarchically structured

administrations controlled directly by the Ministry... [and] short-term technical training programs, instrumental to a future planned economy", under the Programa Nacional de Formación (National Formation Program) created in 2008. The mobility program did not end, but the number of foreign students with Venezuelan scholarships seems to have diminished (6 more Dominicans ...2015; Press release ..., 2016) as well as the number of national students in missions (Peters, 2015, 145).

According to a table of Outbound Internationally Mobile HE Students of Latin America and the Caribbean-Country: Venezuela 2000–2014 (http://data.uis.unesco.org/), between 2006 and 2008 outbound Venezuelan students in Latin America went from 3,997 to 7,134, and since 2010 began to diminish. Resources from the oil boom enhanced the number of scholarships and Mercosur and ALBA enlarged the pool of destination countries, but Cuba became the second destination abroad for Venezuelan students, after the U.S. (Clark, 2013). Venezuelan students in the U.S., however, grew to 6,281 in 2012, up from 4,678 in 2009, and by 2013 Venezuela ranked fourth as a source of foreign students at U.S. universities.[5]

Enrollment open to all regardless of prior experience led the UBV to enroll more than 180,000 students by 2013 (Clark, 2013). Lack of previous preparation and large number of potential graduates explain unemployment among them. Ramoni et al. (2017) found that in 2012–2013 unemployed spent an average of 11 months looking for a job, with higher numbers for university graduates, a fact that signals insufficient labour demand due to a contracted productive structure. But returns to education were already declining in Venezuela between 2002 and 2008 and Sucre Mission played a role in that situation as alumni of the program graduated (Gonzales & Oyelere, 2009). A 1% increase in the share of Sucre Mission students in each Venezuelan province meant a decline of about 5.6 percentage points in the returns to university level of education in that province. Thus, the increase in university enrollment led to an increase in the supply of skilled labor while "a removal of quality constrains on university education" led to low quality of graduates and affected declining returns to education (Gonzales & Oyelere, 2009, 41).

Sucre Mission alumni (interviewed in Pineda, 2017) acknowledge little confidence in graduates from the new universities and similar observations led Peters (2012) to conclude that the subsystem titles are socially devalued in Venezuela for they are considered political (not academic) credentials. In summary, the parallel subsystem increased enrollment but failed to provide good quality education, so some might have abandoned studies or, if they graduated, they faced unemployment except in public service, where they confronted increasing competition.[6] Muhr (2016b, 260) has characterised the system as 'inclusion with segregation" or "stratified inclusion", because students from popular classes participated in the less prestigious experimental universities, and Ivancheva (2017b) agrees that the Bolivarian HE reform contributed to further stratification.

If the mobility program attracted foreign students to Venezuela, that does not mean that all inbound students supported the Bolivarian ideology. Some might have been interested in educational and job opportunities in a country that was experiencing an economic boom (Caruso & De Witt, 2015, in Fairlie, 2021, 28). We assume that most foreign students had political and ideological ideas in favour of the Bolivarian political project – as we assume that Venezuelan students attending Cuban universities support that project --, but the literature on student mobility shows a complex web of motivations behind decisions to study abroad (geographical location, language knowledge, among others)**.** In Latin America, Fairlie (2021) finds that the strongest element defining a country's attraction is its income level. The fact that Venezuelan income level was high between 2003 and 2008 suggests that economic conditions could have been a pull factor, alongside the existence of scholarships and/or political/ideological affinity.

Students supporting the Bolivarian project and students interested in economic and personal improvement suffered the reduction and lack of financing of student mobility after the end of the oil boom. That might not have affected the political ideological allegiance of students favouring the government, but the exalted government discourse and goals might have increased their expectations and subsequent disenchantment when they were unfulfilled.[7] The negative impact must have been harder by students more interested in economic mobility than ideology.

Not only perceived lack of quality represented a problem, because what Wajner & Roniger (2019, 468) call "the boomerang effect" of the aggressive discourse of Venezuelan ideological diffusion diminished the attraction of its scholarships for foreign students not committed to radical ideas and explains why by 2010 Latin American students did not see Venezuela as an important destination for HE (Gacel-Avila & Rodriguez, 2018, 94). The first countries of reception of Latin American students were still the U.S., Spain, and France. Though Cuba attracted 3,520 Venezuelan students, it was not the favourite destination for students of any other Latin American country (UNESCO Compendio Mundial de Educación, 2010, cited at Santos, 2017, 67), and Macrander (2017) found that South American students favoured Brazil and Chile between 2008 and 2012.

Previous sections showed that the mobility program goals were ambitious and stressed the diffusion of the Bolivarian ideology among students and, through them, in the region, to enhance support for the Venezuelan government. Though Fundayacucho emulated the program of the 1970s because it was tied to the financial resources of the oil boom, the earlier program goal was to improve the educational expertise of university students and foster national economic and social development by granting scholarships to Venezuelan undergraduates and postgraduates to study in developed nations. In the 2000s, the goal of ideological diffusion required to attract undergraduates from friendly or politically related nations and to send Venezuelan postgraduates and undergraduates mainly to Cuba. The role of transmitters of ideas was expected from foreign undergraduates in Venezuela and from Venezuelans in Cuban universities. As some incoming

foreign students were already attracted by radical ideas, the program partially preached to the converts.[8] Only Bolivia and Ecuador adopted and adapted the Venezuelan political script but in response to their domestic development needs suggesting that endogenous factors were more important than political diffusion (De la Torre, 2017, 1272).

Venezuelan internationalisation concentrated in ALBA, attempted to replicate the program of the 1970s, and followed the lead of Cuban educational diplomacy with the ELAM. At the regional level, Venezuela poured more resources in ALBA than in Mercosur, probably because its control of ALBA made it easier for the government to model internationalisation as a tool for ideological diffusion and attribute any gains of the program to its own regional organisation. Quantitative factors stand out, such as that foreign students coming to Venezuela grew in number and went to the parallel subsystem, and Venezuelan students in Cuban universities increased almost five times from 2004 to 2007 and slowed down afterwards. In qualitative terms, foreign students in Venezuela suffered the effects of lack of attention to quality in the new universities, that devaluated titles and degrees from the parallel subsystem domestically and may have influenced the stagnation of the program regionally, together with the end of the oil boom and the shrinking pool of friendly nations in the 2010s.

Conclusion

In HE internationalisation, by 2014 Venezuela had failed in getting a place among the nations that Latin American students considered attractive destinations for studying abroad, in replicating Cuban education diplomacy, and in sustaining its foreign scholarship program. To explanations that emphasize the fall in oil financial resources and disappearance of kindred governments in Latin America, we add that the mobility program did not adequately fulfill students' expectations, because Venezuela relied more on material resources than on education quality. And, though it managed to increase the number of outgoing and ingoing students, after the end of the oil boom it failed to maintain the necessary financial support for them to finish their careers.

Regarding ideological diffusion, this is an interactive phenomenon entailing a contract between transmitter and receiver; that contract is transactional when it includes benefits for the individual, organization, or country on the receiving end, and ideological if both transmitter and receiver pursue a common value cause. When the transmitter mistreats the receiver, abandons the cause "upon which the exchange was premised" (Thomson & Bunderson, 2003, 12), or is unable to fulfill the expectations of participating students (Pineda, 2017), the contract is broken. Without subscribing that the response would necessarily be moral outrage and distancing from the transmitter (Thomson & Bunderson, 2003, 14), we accept that foreign students attracted not only by ideology but also by interest in social-economic mobility must have felt betrayed by low quality and diminishing funds. Granted that there were other simultaneous mechanisms for diffusion of the Bolivarian ideology ("casas del ALBA", etcetera), Bolivarianism was emulated in the region when there were important crises of political parties and democracy (De la Torre, 2020), a fact that questions the efficacy of the mobility program and/or points to the need for a longer period of implementation to obtain positive results.

Finally, this article raises questions that may lead to new analysis of HE internationalisation in Latin America. The first one is the role played by material resources in governmental mobility programs. Besides the negative effects of transmitters' perceived decoupling of rhetoric and practice (Jetschke & Ruland, 2009) and "the boomerang effect" of aggressive ideological campaigns (Wajner & Roniger, 2019, 468), soft power is achieved by normative power or emulation. The former depends on the transmitter rewarding receivers for acceptance of its power, and in the latter the transmitter success at solving problems makes receivers eager for its cooperation (Lenz, 2013, 213). Scholarships can be seen as rewards for receivers when they translate into benefits for students and nations involved, but there are no reliable data to attempt a cost-benefit analysis of the program. Venezuelan official discourse stressed its success in enlarging the number of HE students as worth to emulate, but the counterfactual question is if enlargement and internationalisation would have taken place without Venezuelan oil financial resources.

Venezuelan regional cooperation reflects the realist character of its foreign policy (Vergara, 2016, 98) because in internationalisation Venezuela does not promote itself as a "problem-solver" or transmitter of its culture but as an advocate of ideological change based on material power. Accordingly, Venezuela measures its success by the increase in number of students disregarding other elements of soft power like quality of education (Wojciuk et al., 2015, 302). This may be linked also to the notions that political actors in government can better diffuse its ideology abroad when there is not an internal check and balance equilibrium (Schenoni & Escudé) and to the propensity of petrostates to develop proactive foreign policies in boom years (Colgan). Though not analysed in-depth here, both provide perspectives for future research linking the realist undertones of petrostates foreign policies to their ideological diffusion programs through HE students' mobility.

Our findings, though incomplete, contribute to the Latin American literature on HE internationalisation by focusing on the implementation level. Regarding its results, though the concept of education as a human right may have inspired the program, its implementation by a government unconstrained by resources or independent domestic institutions produced inclusion with segregation (Muhr) and further stratification (Ivancheva), and its role as a mechanism of ideological diffusion was responsible for that situation. Our findings question as well if ideology, material resources, and willingness to play a leadership role are enough for a nation to develop soft power through ideological diffusion if other elements or benefits for receivers are missing.

Notes

[1] Venezuela first created experimental universities in the 1970s after the French students' 'rebellion' of May 1968 (Ziritt & Ochoa, 2008, 36). Experimental universities do not elect their authorities like autonomous universities, but the government appoints them.

[2] Brouwer (2011, 140) notices that the first largest group were Bolivians, and the second oscillated between Ecuadorians and Peruvians, so participation of Mercosur students was not prominent.

[3] Cuban personnel in ELAM-Venezuela may have been better prepared, but courses were taught by physicians working in Barrio Adentro (Brouwer, 2011; Muhr, 2016a) with limited time to prepare classes.

[4] During his fieldwork, Pineda (2017, 139–140, 272) observed accelerated promotion 'from students to teachers or even to coordinators within some years or even months'.

[5] The 2008–2014 increase in students in the U.S. follows the increase in security problems in Venezuela (Hajiyev, 2017, 33), and since then, the increase in Venezuelan outmigration.

[6] MPPEU (2015, 241) mentions that some UBV students had 'temporarily discontinued' their studies. Many of Pineda's (2017, 280) interview partners in 2013–2014 reported high dropout rates and were afraid that 'aldeas' programs would close due to lack of students.

[7] According to Hidalgo & Alvarez (2016), supporters' disenchantment contributed to the victory of the opposition in the 2015 Venezuelan parliamentary election.

[8] Peruvians among the first ELAM foreign students applied through socialist youth groups in Peru (Brouwer, 2011, 140).

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Competing Interests

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