Quality Equity in Higher Education: Case Study from University of Costa Rica

Equidad con calidad en la Educación Superior: estudio sobre la Universidad de Costa Rica

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Abstract

This article is the result of research carried out by the Node of the University of Costa Rica for the Regional Observatory of Equity with Quality in Higher Education in Latin America. This scientific contribution is a study whose objective was to review the state of the transversal and integral dimensions that guarantee equity with quality in the case of the University of Costa Rica. The study was applied to the teaching, student and administrative strata by means of an instrument with variables and made it possible to identify areas in which there are valuable opportunities for improvement for the University of Costa Rica. At the same time, since this was the first study of its kind at the institution, the inputs turned out to be of importance for the collection of academic information that will contribute to promoting quality equity in state higher education.

Keywords: educational institutions; higher education; equal education; educational quality.

Resumen

El artículo corresponde al resultado de la investigación llevada a cabo desde el Nodo de la Universidad de Costa Rica para el Observatorio Regional de la Equidad con Calidad en la Educación Superior de América Latina. Este aporte científico es un estudio cuyo objetivo fue revisar el estado de las dimensiones transversales e integrales que garantizan la equidad con calidad en el caso de la Universidad de Costa Rica. El estudio se aplicó a los estratos docentes, estudiantiles y administrativos por medio de un instrumento con variables y permitió identificar áreas en las cuales existen valiosas oportunidades de mejora para la Universidad de Costa Rica. A su vez, por tratarse del primer estudio de este tipo en la institución, los insumos resultaron ser de importancia para el levantamiento de información académica que contribuya a potenciar equidad con calidad en la educación superior estatal.

Palabras clave: instituciones educativas, educación superior, educación equitativa, calidad educativa.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The contemporary challenges of human development and personal growth, both at the individual level and in those that are of a social nature, are increasingly rooted and focused on the potential that each person can take advantage of during the processes of secondary, diversified and higher education. In the same sense, globalization, as a socioeconomic phenomenon of the modernity, has brought with it the need to gather in a multidimensional way elements, conditions and particularities based on diversity and the proliferation of demands that meet a logic of multi-culturalism, in the terms of Byung Chul Han (2018), so that each person can conduct themselves along the social paths of development that would eventually allow them the maximum possibility of growth, personal fulfill-ment and transcendence at each stage of the life cycle.

Despite the fact that historically the vehicle for this channeling has focused on education, seen as the engine of development that allows people to break down multidimensional inequalities and take advantage of the potential of opportunities to achieve those aspirations for growth and self-realization, the truth is that also in these socio-educational processes there are conditioning factors that affect the form and essential content of the quality with which each person manages to be part of a training process.

Under this idea, this academic contribution seeks to synthesize and contextualize from theoretical perspectives, the socio-educational sense of equity with quality applied to the specific space of education. The above, from the multidisciplinary perspective, manages to understand the educa-tional component from its transforming role in human development and in the transcendence of each person. For this, the theoretical delimita-tion will focus on equality studies that are limited to the field of higher education and, more specifically, through a study applied to the case of the University of Costa Rica (UCR).

As it will be later seen, the article represents the effort and scientific product of carrying out research processes aimed at improving human development, through analysis, problematization and the edge proposal linked to a quality approach to equity that can promote the improvement of higher education.

2 │ LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The social role of higher education

Bauman (2003) contextualizes the contemporary situation that world societies are currently facing: a liquid modernity in which development and human progress not only enhance its amplifying nature, but also the volatility of the conditions that stabilize it and the factors that are particularly complex in this symbiotic relationship of societies.

In such terms, the liquidity of contemporary societies is linked in a dichotomous way with those highly pluralistic dynamics tending to satisfy the needs of sociopolitical and economic development (Viveros, s.f.); while, in turn, it has not yet been necessarily certain that such globalizing strategies also aspire at the same level of effort and in parallel to an equitable satisfaction of the development and fullness of the human being. In addition, society, being liquid, quickly adapts to sociocultural changes and promotes a feeling of uncertainty and social instability. On this aspect, the following is theorized:

> It is as if the possibility of a fruitful and true modernity slipped through our hands like water through our fingers. This physical state is applied to this theory of modernity in the sense that, after the Second World War, we find ourselves with at least three decades of continuous and prosperous development, in which the human being finds solid ground to be and relate to the rest. That is, from a solid society it passes to a liquid, malleable, slippery society (Hernández, 2016, p. 279).

Under such a previous premise, it is necessary to mention that, since its birth, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have not only been the cradle of spaces to produce knowledge and the development of science. Niches that, certainly, have promoted the improvement of living conditions at social and individual levels (Bernasconi, 2014); However, these institutions have also been covered by the incidence on them by each of the contexts in which they are immersed: they are spaces for education and training that also respond to particular teaching needs due to those motors of socio-economic development that drive the growth of a country, a region or components of globalization.

Fulfillment of this dichotomous role can be balanced and weighted to a greater or lesser extent towards one of the two opposing possibilities. Previously, it is necessary to bring up that this is related to the conceptual determination or the trait of relevance in higher education that was established by the World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) in article 6

of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st century: "The relevance of higher education must be evaluated based on the adequacy between what society expects from institutions and what they actually do" (WHEC, 1998, p. 99).

In addition to recognizing the plurality and diversity in terms of the typology of the demands that HEIs effectively seek to satisfy, it is also necessary to establish in a simplified manner the causal link between social development and the role that universities play in promoting these socio-educational demands. Sánchez (2011) points out the following:

The social, economic and political changes produced in the world in the middle of the 20th century, made [sic, made] necessary an adaptation and restructuring of the pillars that supported and gave meaning to the university. Its function as a public service must meet the demands of society and, therefore, anticipate the future to prepare people capable of surviving in a type of society that changes at an abysmal speed and that separates the society in which the knowledge was acquired with the society in which it is required to put it into practice (2011, p. 3).

Article 6 of the aforementioned declaration continues by stating that one of the transcendental axes of higher education is, precisely, the reinforcement of its functions of service to society, emphasizing those activities that seek to "eradicate poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental deterioration and disease» (WHEC, 1998, p. 99).

In addition to the above, it is necessary to point out that, within those social responsibilities of educational institutions focused on university education, especially those that belong to the State, it is found the transformation of situations of inequality into real opportunities for growth and personal development through of educational equity with quality. However, in De Sousa Santos (1998) cited by Fuentes (2006), it is highlighted that the modern consolidation of a process that, within higher education spaces, has legitimized inequalities based on the very fundamental paradigms of these institutions. In particular, the following is indicated about the epistemological contradictions linked to the social role of higher education:

The first manifests itself as a crisis of hegemony, which is explained as a product of three dichotomies: high culture/popular culture, education/work, and theory/practice. The second refers us to the tension between hierarchization and democratization, since the lack of consensus and collective sense of the University is evident, which is reflected as a crisis of legitimacy (Santos, 1998, p. 16; quoted by Fuentes, 2006).

The foregoing supposes several theoretical perspectives that guide the approach, the study and the justification and relevance of promoting equity with quality in higher education. In the first place, it is recognized that the academic and social work of universities in the contemporary world is susceptible to distancing itself from the essential purposes that, at the time, served as foundations and essential postulates of the operation to improve the quality of life of the human beings through intellectual and scientific production. This supposes that, somehow, from the starting point of the genesis of higher education institutions and up to now, the directions have varied enough to establish that to some extent it is possible to find university teaching spaces strictly oriented to the productive logics of capitalist and neoliberal societies, completely neglecting the humanist component and fulfillment of the person as an individual and social subject in the region (Yuni et al., 2014).

The second element to consider is an immediate consequence of the previous one: the university-production approach ignores or distances itself from those possibilities of fulfilling the social role of transformation for people. That is to say, if one reflects on the terms indicated by De Sousa Santos (1998) regarding the university as a space to satisfy the needs of efficiency and production of development, this also supposes in some way to ignore the requirement of attention to the spaces and situations where inequalities are present and that loudly cry out for the transforming power of higher education. It should also be highlighted "guidance services, which must promote equal opportunities due to their accessibility to all citizens, especially those who are threatened with social exclusion, and responding to their specific needs" (Rodríguez-Moreno, 2002, p.40), where each student can receive comprehensive attention and support from the educational guidance service, thus favoring the democratization of education in the territories.

In addition to the above, the theory-practice relationship on which the author bases its discussion, could be assuming the channeling of important efforts in the scientific study of social inequalities and those spaces where there is a lack of socio-educational equity; However, in the same terms of the above quote, this dichotomy requires a sufficiently adequate balance to allow scientific studies to be projected into materialized actions on people's real lives: in essence, to reflect the social role of HEIs in the personal daily life of individuals. The issues raised above require a balanced symbiotic reinforcement, so that the social purpose of university education can be addressed through a precision of its relevance in the context of each community and transformative environment as referred to by Allvin (2019), hand in hand with the efforts to enhance equity with quality that

allows addressing the inequalities that turn out to be susceptible to transformation through these institutions.

2.2 Equity with quality in higher education

In the previous lines, it is problematized about the importance of the substantive processes of university education involving equity transversally within its development. At the beginning of the 1990s, "in Latin America, equity was configured as an essential criterion of educational policies, understood as equal opportunities and compensation for differences" (Fuentes, 2006, p. 66). However, over time, scientific studies in the field of education, as well as the evidence derived from socio-educational public policies, have denoted that in terms of equity it is not enough to guarantee massive access to the fundamental right of education as a vehicle to channel the improvement of people's quality of life; specifically, despite the fact that at the beginning of this type of structural positioning the immediate solution was the guarantee at the constitutional level of that access, the truth is that over time the educational reality has shown that these positionings were oriented to a greater extent to an approach of equality than one of equity (Lemaitre, 2005), so it has become imperative to require more tools so that the desired impact reaches a projection and satisfactory realization in people.

In the book *Equity in Higher Education: Challenges and Projections in Comparative Experience*, McCowan establishes some components that can guide the examination of public policies in higher education from his perspective of equity, among which are the availability, the accessibility and horizontality:

> The existence of quotas does not mean that they will be accessible, or at least not for all individuals and groups. There are barriers that affect those who come from poor quality schooling, geographic location of the institutions, as well as a series of other restrictions such as language, culture and identity. Considering the context in which these strategies are implemented to ensure access to the system for all, there are still problems of stratification. Consequently, horizontality is the characteristic of equal prestige and quality throughout the system. A more than sufficient egalitarian basis is needed for the distribution of higher education, given the positional nature of the good (McCowan, 2016, p. 76).

Equity with quality necessarily requires understanding that the provision of desks with spaces to study a career is not an absolute measure of effectiveness to achieve a transformation of social inequalities that

can be resolved by HEIs. As the author points out, there are pluralistic and diversified factors that, in the particular context of each socio-educational environment, condition elements such as quality, accessibility, availability, horizontality, and even the distribution of the resources derived from the university education to its final depositories.

The socio-educational policy that seeks some level of effectiveness in the university reality with a view to addressing inequalities requires the recognition of these factors as barriers to be overcome to guarantee each student an educational process that focuses on their academic particularities and that does not necessarily look for the generalization and homogeneity of the university community. This even crosses spaces such as academic-administrative management and vitally teaching performance. Mingo (2015) describes it as follows:

> Apparently, our universities educate their students for homogenization despite the fact that today the different cultures and the enormous diversity of the world are within reach of those who search for them on the Internet. The University does not think of itself as a space made up of diverse and heterogeneous beings, and the explicit teaching and curriculum validated by "scientific knowledge" continue to transmit gender stereotypes. On the other hand, it is known that multiple "micro-inequities" and "subtle discriminations" circulate in the "hidden curriculum" (2010, p. 158).

Inequities are multidimensional: not only do they go through objective elements of the teaching-learning process in higher education, such as curricular constructions, quality management policies, the determination of geographic growth, among others, but they also go by a plurality of components linked to the subject of the university community: the community where the social projection is made, the educational population, the teaching community and the network of administrative personnel. In addition to the above, it is necessary to make the details related to the fact that, although the efforts to enhance the quality of equity in university teaching spaces may lie in their institutionalization through normative legitimacy, the truth is that this could lead to an idea of "paper equity."

For all effects, the quality of equity does not necessarily consist in a focus on the quality of education from curricular or management dimensions, but in a series of factors, practices, policies and social and institutional actions that facilitate equitable treatment of all the populations participating in the university dynamics, recognizing the diversities and differences of contexts in each of the estates. Thus, then, it is not

enough that there are equity policies, since this must be accompanied by the fact that these policies and their corresponding materialization and implementation are carried out with quality. Studies on the quality of equity seek to analyze how good these practices are and how much equity is developed or enhanced in the realities of the estates that build a higher education community.

3 | METHOD

First, it is important to mention that, as a regional research node, the methodological work arose as a result of a trans-university academic process generated from the regional initiative of the Regional Observatory for the Quality of Equity in Higher Education (ORACLE). Based on Hernández Sampieri and Mendoza Torres (2018), this research "focuses on understanding the phenomena, exploring them from the perspective of the participants in their natural environment and in relation to the context" (2018, p. 390). The construction and validation of the instrument was gestated from ORACLE and provided to each of the nodes that are present in the universities of the region (35 HEIs in Latin America in total); In addition, the authorization of the regional project for the academic and scientific use of these data was granted, particularly in research work related to the publication in an arbitrated journal. The analysis of information data, according to Villalobos Zamora (2019), "begins with the collection of information and implies two analytical processes carried out sequentially: data reduction and its availability for extraction and verification of the conclusions of the study in the light of theory» (2019, p. 219). In this regard, the data collected, systematized and analyzed in this article correspond to the research process that was applied to the case of the University of Costa Rica, which is a public higher education institution that attends to a social and humanist approach from the grounds of its foundation and conceptualization, as well as the community role it exercises in the country's public institutions. Some of the details that characterize this study are the following:

- Number of university professors: 5,297
- Number of university students: 46,519
- Number of administrative people of the university: 1,574
- Teachers surveyed: 169
- Students surveyed: 214
- Administrative staff surveyed: 52

The instrument applied investigated the collection of quantitative information from the questionnaire tool, through which it sought to measure dimensions of equity according to class (teaching, student, administrative population) and according to elements that involved sections such as: a) resources educational learning (A1-A5); b) university learning assessment systems (A6-A10); c) equity in research processes (A11-A15); d) the equity dimension in administrative management processes (C1-C10); among others. That is to say, they consist of dimensions of analysis divided into variables that, grouped together, sought to know the perception of each one of the estates regarding the development and the state of the quality of equity in higher education.

The total sample corresponds to 436 records that were collected during the period from June 28 to July 22, 2021, through direct email distribution lists of the university community and the data collection system corresponded to a LimeSurvey license from the Institute for Research in Education of the University of Costa Rica. The findings obtained after the period of application of the instrument were systematized in a database created for this purpose, from a paid license hosted on institutional servers with a professional LimeSurvey account to guarantee the reliability of the collection and the protection of data. These inputs were segregated by status and sociodemographic details for sample characterization.

Specifically, of the 436 satisfactorily systematized and validated registries, it is important to mention that 309 correspond to people who study or work in an academic area disciplinarily attached to the Social Sciences area of the university, made up of the Faculties of Education, Economic Sciences, Law and Social Sciences. In addition, the correlated distribution by gender and age range of the participating people is indicated in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 | San Pedro, Costa Rica: frequency of participating teachers by gender and age range

Age range	Female	Male	Total
21-30	8	3	11
31-40	34	26	60
41-50	36	18	54
51-60	23	14	37
61-70	5	2	7
Total	106	63	169

Note: Own elaboration based on the Node UCR-ORACLE database (2021)

Table 2 | San Pedro, Costa Rica: frequency of participating administrative staff by gender and age range

Age range	Female	Male	Total
21-30	5	1	6
31-40	9	3	12
41-50	13	3	16
51-60	9	9	18
Total	36	16	52

Note: Own elaboration based on the Node UCR-ORACLE database (2021).

In summary, in the teaching establishment, the participation of women predominated, with an average age range of 30 to 50 years. In the case of the administrative staff, there was a total participation of 52 people, of which 70% were women and the average age range was from 41 to 50 years. When carrying out the analysis on the responses of the population that participated in the study, key findings obtained through the systematization of the data were identified. Each of these findings is outlined and studied in depth in the following lines, however, as a synthesis, it is possible to break them down as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 San Pedro, Costa Rica: synthesis of findings obtained in the study according to estate and correlation of variables

Finding		Variable
Teacher	1. Men rate college as less equitable than women.	A1; A2; A3; A8; A22
	2. Men report having greater access to democratic spaces and funds than women.	A10; A12; A18; A23
	3. The university has made efforts in terms of equity, however, it has not permeated all university instances.	A15; A16; A18
Administrative Staff	1. The services and projects of the UCR raise equity, however, not in its entirety.	C1; C2
	2. There is no high planning in terms of equity, however, university resources for equity are favored.	C3; C4

Note: Own elaboration based on the Node UCR-ORACLE database (2021).

According to the study sample, in relation to the teaching stratum, men rate the university as less equitable than women, which reflects a position for the analysis in question, since different factors can be made visible in relation to the development the university has had in terms of gender equality: firstly, it is important to identify the elements that can provoke such a response, for example, research centers and affirmative actions, such as the Center for Women's Studies, the inclusive language regulations or the regulations against discrimination that seek to make the gender gap visible.

4 | RESULTS

In the teaching stratum, both populations (male and female teachers) rate the aspect of teacher planning in terms of equity in a relatively similar way. However, it is men who slightly establish that there is a low level of articulated planning (57.14%), compared to women (53.77%). However, the difference by gender increases when it comes to planning in relation to the classroom, since men value it in 65.08% as uniform and not differentiating, in relation to women, who mention it in a 41.1%.

Another relevant aspect is that 50.79% of men mention that the academic evaluation system does not contemplate equity in a general way, compared to 38.68% of university teachers. Likewise, it can be compared that 25.47% of the teachers mention that collectively the university reviews and reflects on the evaluation processes around equity, while the same mention is carried out by men in only 11.11%.

Another relevant finding in relation to the teaching body is that men report having greater access to democratic spaces and funds than women. For example, when consulting with the population regarding inputs in research for equity, men mention that there is a larger budget than women overall. In the same token, 54% of women also consider that research is provided by isolated initiatives compared to 47% of men, while 46% of men mention that the institution allocates resources for the development of research. It is essential to question whether men's perspectives are more positive than women's on this issue, given that men generally receive more funding for research. According to data from León and others (2020), there are a total of 5,297 teachers, of which 3,007 are men (56.7 7%) and 2,290 are women (43.23%), which reflects in some way the incidence of a gap of up to 13 % in this university population.

Likewise, it is important to highlight that, in terms of team participation, women reflect lower levels of participation. For example, 56% of female teachers mention that the leadership of the teams takes into account some inputs for equity, while 49% of male teachers indicate the same position. In this way, it is considered that 47% of male teachers indicate that all members of the research teams can participate in projects, while to a lesser extent (10 percentage points less) women indicate the same position. It can be inferred that, to a certain degree, women consider that university spaces in relation to teacher management and participation are less equitable or accessible than men.

This can be understood from various axes, first of all, León et al. (2020) mention that in the UCR there is a disadvantage of women in relation to men in labor aspects, since it is mostly women who are in determined status, that is, teachers who depend on their contract being renewed each school year and do not have a permanent job. In this sense, determined status women are up to 4% more than men, which translates into around 200 determined status women in relation to men.

The entrance to the system and the promotion in it is denoted by different conditions such as the score that the person receives according to the commission of the academic regime in charge of this work. According to Córdoba (2021), based on an analysis carried out by two professors from

the same university, which was delivered to the technical commission for salary reviews, it was possible to identify that women are in a situation of slight salary disadvantage in relation to men: the tendency is for women to earn less than the average salary of male teachers.

Likewise, in terms of interrelationships and participation, women also indicate that they perceive a lower degree of participation by the groups, for example, 52.83% of this population compared to 44.44% of men indicates that there is occasional participation of groups. Likewise, 26.42% of the female population mentions that all members of the community can collaborate in a partnership framework, while men to a greater extent (33.33%) mention the same approach towards participation. However, both populations indicate relatively the same position on the constant review and improvement of the population in relation to equitable measures (18.87% in women and 19.05% in men).

In light of the above, when analyzing the representation by gender in the exercise of representation that is linked to the university authorities, of a total of 237 institutional authorities, contemplating from the chancellor position to those that correspond to academic unit addresses, 60% are occupied by men, while the remaining 40% is the quota that corresponds to women according to official data from the website of the university council. In this sense, it can be inferred that women, due to structural gaps, are limited not only in their participation, but also in the type of social and economic recognition they receive for their participation. In other words, it is easier for a male teacher to earn more than a female teacher solely because of his gender.

Another important finding is that the teaching population considers that the university has made efforts in terms of equity, however, it has not permeated all university instances. For example, 48.5 2% of the total population mentions that the university has promoted projects on the subject of equity, which implies an institutional effort, however, it is the first level of equity on the scale of the item in question, when consulting the nature of equity in projects. Likewise, 43.79% of the population emphasizes that the initiatives are personal in relation to equity. 92.31% of the population is found in these two levels,

Meanwhile, 7.69% of the population is divided into the following levels of equity, constituted by the systematization of the results by the institution and the external link in equity projects. These data make it possible to identify institutional efforts for the development of equity, however, they also reflect the lack of systematization and external collaboration in the development of equity. Likewise, when it comes to linking with external

networks that work on equity, it is essential to identify that 52% of the sample indicates that projects on equity issues are developed randomly. Therefore, although it is true that there is attention to the needs of the community, they are not the result of high strategic planning but from the emergence of requirements and supervening situations. In this sense, 36.09% of the sample indicates the existence of institutional guidelines that favor interrelation with other interest groups on the topic of interest. However, only 10.06% mention that in these cases there is feedback and only 1.78% affirm the existence of platforms that develop external links oriented towards the development of equity.

Another important indicator deals with interpersonal relationships, since around 49.70% of the sample indicates that there is occasional participation of certain groups. Likewise, the second block with the largest sample (28.99%) affirms that all members of the community can collaborate in a framework of equitable relations, however, and to a lesser extent, 18.93% affirm that the institution periodically reviews and improves cooperation in terms of equity, while only 1.78% affirm that cooperation activities are carried out with other instances.

In this sense, it is essential to identify that it is an effort not only by the UCR but also by all public universities to guarantee the effective participation of the different groups. For example, the National Council of Rectors [CONARE] (2020) mentions that, as part of its strategic goals, it must define a series of policies that generate gender equity and affordability for people with disabilities. Likewise, another of the strategic goals is to implement inter-university actions to serve vulnerable populations with low rates of social development in the country. Here it is necessary to analyze the difference between the creation of institutional policies and the execution of affirmative actions. Although it is true that one precedes the other, in terms of gender equity and disability, more structural solutions are proposed to eradicate inequality through policies, while for other types of conditions, such as vulnerability, they are assigned a lower attention rank through affirmative action.

In this sense, as shown in the data collected, there is a certain degree of equity, but it is also true that their levels need to be increased. Therefore, programmatic executions are carried out in order to increase equity. As evidenced, the university has favored equity actions, which allow us to affirm that there is equity; However, in light of the theoretical considerations and the data obtained, it is necessary to specify the quality of equity and look for opportunity spaces that can enhance equity for the benefit of this particular class.

On the other hand, it is important to show the information collected by the administrative establishment, since one of the findings deals with how the university's services and projects raise equity, but not in its entirety. For example, 32.69% of the administrative staff who participated in the study mention that university care services are provided in an isolated manner and are the same for all people. 46.15% of the population mention that the services are structured and that they facilitate equitable care, while only 21.15% mention that equity services generate synergies for improvement. It can be seen then that there are efforts to provide equitable spaces, but the university has not fully achieved it.

In this sense, it is necessary to make a list of the experiences that administrative staff may have. For this, Córdoba (2021) mentions that in the university there is inequality between administrative men and women, and it is men who are at an advantage, mainly because it is men who earn up to a little more than half a minimum wage than women. In this sense, one in four members of the administrative staff (25%) mentions that the initiatives to develop equity projects linked to the environment are personal, while just over two out of four (55.77%) mentions that the institution promotes projects of link on the issue of equity. Likewise, close to one in five people (19.23%) mention that the institution systematizes and uses the results of the experiences in equity projects. As mentioned by Gairín and others (2019), this shows that the existence of projects seeks to solve momentary needs to promote equity, but does not imply a structural change in the organizational culture.

Another important discovery deals with the lack of a high planning in terms of equity, since as mentioned by the administrative laws, the projects in the theme of equity are developed randomly; however, university resources for equity are favored (44.23%). For example, it is necessary to indicate that 32.69% of the sample mentions that there are institutional guidelines that favor interrelations with other interest groups on the issue of equity. The remaining 25% is distributed among people who consider that the interrelationship with interest groups encourages feedback on the priorities linked to equity (7.69%) and people who consider that stable platforms of external linkage aimed at developing equity are formed. (15.38%).

Likewise, it is important to identify the way in which the resources are used, since the majority (84.26%) emphasize that the basic resources are used to provide coverage and sustainability to the projects on equity, while a small part of the sample (9.62%) mentions that the linkage projects work with resources that do not guarantee their sustainability, and an even smaller part of the sample (5.77%) mentions that an integral management is

carried out, favoring an effective cycle of the resources destined to the projects. All this makes it possible to identify that there are still important challenges in relation to the achievement of equity within the institution. In this sense, it is important to understand that the allocation of resources according to CONARE (2020) is based on global and local budgets that prevent use of resources in projects and actions that are not previously planned.

In other words, to supply projects that promote equity and finance affirmative actions, it is necessary to have previously defined budget items. However, it is difficult to have such spaces if there are no institutional policies that allow increasing equity. In other words, the lack of institutional policies that guarantee equity results in the absence of investment and the creation of projects that generate equity.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary theoretical studies on equity in the field of higher education reaffirm the need for its approach to be developed with multidimensional and comprehensive perspectives. This implies, in turn, the recognition that the problems and situations that allow for inequalities are originated in structurally complex factors in society. Considering the analysis of the scientific literature and the inputs collected, it is possible to conclude the following aspects.

The effective materialization of equity practices in higher education for the life of each one of the individuals who are part of its teaching-learning processes requires an integral position in terms of the recognition of the socio-educational diversities that are present in such a process. Such recognition is required so that efforts aimed at improving equity are matched with a necessary vision of quality in the actions that are implemented to reduce inequality gaps in the higher education system. For example, the progressive institutionalization of affirmative practices in the field of educational guidance; On this, Cobos (2007) reports that educational guidance is a «help process inserted in the educational activity, whose objective is to contribute to the integral development of the student, in order to train them for autonomous learning and active, critical and transformative in society" (2007, p. 44).

Certainly, the normative and regulatory frameworks for a university structure focused on the improvement of equity with quality are necessary and fundamental to legitimize the institutional actions carried out in

compliance with this purpose and in the effective materialization of the social role indicated in the former section. However, the assurance of the quality of equity transcends the existence of these institutional regulation frameworks, so that they must be accompanied by university structures that facilitate their implementation in the real life of each member of the university community.

When comparing the results of the study with the institutional contextualization of the university, it is possible to identify in the first place that the University of Costa Rica is a higher education institution with a rank of constitutional autonomy and represents one of the main achievements in terms of social policy of State for the foundation of the Second Republic with the Political Charter of 1949. This house of studies has a five-year framework from which all the work carried out in its three main substantive areas is oriented: teaching, research and social action. In addition to this, there are normative bodies that regulate the transversal functioning of each of these tasks and, in addition, the organizational dynamics between the teaching staff, the student community, the administrative staff and the university authorities. In this way, by making a non-exhaustive reference within all those elements or components of the institution, it was possible to identify the following normative postulates as fundamental bases of the equity approach in higher education of this university, as a contextualization of the institution on which this study is based.

Table 4 | San Pedro, Costa Rica: Guiding Norms of the University of Costa Rica with reference to university equity, November 2021

Norm	Source
Article 3. The University of Costa Rica must contribute to the transformations that society needs to achieve the common good, through a policy aimed at achieving social justice, equity, integral development, full freedom and total independence of our people.	Article 3 of the Organic Statute
3.1. It will strengthen institutional strategies that favor and promote equity in the admission process.	Policy 3.1. of Institutional Policies 2021-2025
3.1.5.. Promote affirmative actions that favor equity in the admission of traditionally excluded and vulnerable populations.	Objective 3.1.5. of Institutional Policies 2021-2025

(Continuation)

Norm	Source
3.2.5. Strengthen the System of Scholarships for Socioeconomic Conditions so that the student population with limited financial resources can achieve permanence and graduation under equitable conditions.	Objective 3.2.5. of Institutional Policies 2021-2025
6.2. The institutional interim will decrease, based on criteria.	Policy 6.2. of Institutional Policies 2021-2025

Note: Own elaboration based on the Organic Statute and Institutional Policies 2021-2025 of the University of Costa Rica; University Council.

As it can be observed, from the information extracted, it is not only possible to determine the absence of a harmonious structuring in the equity component for the objective elements of the university development and the populations that are developed, but also the explicit mentions of orientation of a university equity policy require a structural reinforcement that involves and comprehensively addresses all areas of the institution. As such, the preliminary analysis of the situation of equity at the University of Costa Rica from a strictly normative level can lead to the preamble that it is necessary to prioritize attention to a quality of equity strengthened in its structure.

Note also that in the third article of its Organic Statute there is a mandate to implement equity across the board to fulfill the social role that must be projected to the Costa Rican community. However, despite the fact that previously the paradox of a broad regulation of university norms focused on the regulatory institutionalization of equity had been mentioned, the truth is that, in practice, the possibility of an opposite direction could not be excluded: the absence of Institutional statement provisions regarding a demand for equity does not necessarily imply that the university is not making efforts in this regard. In the specific case of the University of Costa Rica, the data shows a general recognition of the actions that have an impact on improving the quality of equity by the participating university population; however, they also account for the institutional insufficiency in this field. In fact, the data shows a perception of significant lags in terms of gender equity and gaps in socioeconomic inequality, which could establish the development of more effective practices and policies that impact the reality of the members as a need and institutional priority of the university community to improve the quality of equity in areas where there are still pending tasks to meet that objective.

The academic study demonstrates difficulties in having a generalized, structured and comprehensively coordinated policy for the promotion of affirmative policies in the field of equity with quality for Costa Rican higher education. In this sense, the data from the surveyed population is consistent in pointing out or identifying actions and policies related to this issue, particularly on the dimension of gender equity. However, they also show that these are isolated policies or initiatives that are difficult to interconnect with each other, so that the population surveyed does not perceive a structural impulse of intertwined strategies and thought as a whole that can be represented as a policy for a global institutional framework for guaranteeing and promoting equity with quality in higher education. As a proposal, the university should gather, systematize and plan in an organized and orderly way all the policies and actions aimed at strengthening equity in order to avoid possible duplication of intentions and, likewise, have a strategic line for the approach of the quality of equity in higher education, in line with what Mao (2003) pointed out at the time regarding efforts to redesign higher education systems. Another aspect consists of encouraging a global and comprehensive understanding of equity and overcoming conceptions limited solely to policies for gender equity or actions focused on the student body. It could be formulated as a strategy that each of the vice-rectories in charge of approving projects in the university link those initiatives aimed at promoting equity, in order to start the process of organization and ordering in this regard.

Author statement

Achoy-Sánchez, J.M.: methodology, software, validation, formal analysis, research, resources, data curation, writing (original draft), writing, review and editing, visualization, project management.

Jiménez-Segura, F.: conceptualization, methodology, software, validation, formal analysis, research, resources, writing (original draft), writing, review and editing, and supervision

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