

Review article

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The preparation for the extension work of teachers in Municipal University Centers: systematized review

La preparación para la labor extensionista de los profesores en los Centros Universitarios Municipales: revisión sistematizada

A preparação para o trabalho de extensão dos professores nos Centros Universitários Municipais: revisão sistematizada

Abstract

Introduction: teacher preparation for extension work is vital in Municipal University Centers to effectively integrate university extension and strengthen the bond between academia and the community. **Objective:** to propose a theoretical framework for preparing educators for extension work, tailored to the municipal context in Latin America, particularly in Cuba. **Methodology:** the study employed theoretical methods such as the historical-logical approach and its associated procedures, alongside empirical methods such as document analysis. **Results:** three fundamental regional trends were identified: the integration of extension with teaching and research, the predominance of a critical extension model, and its holistic educational character. **Conclusion:** university extension should be understood as a process involving educators in territorial engagement, fostering innovation in pedagogical practices and contributing to local development. Preparing faculty in this area is essential for strengthening the university as a driver of social.

Keywords: higher education, extension, municipality, educators, university

Resumen

Introducción: la preparación para la labor extensionista de los profesores es crucial en los Centros Universitarios Municipales para integrar la extensión universitaria fortalecer la relación entre la universidad y la comunidad. **Objetivo:** proponer un marco teórico de la preparación para la labor extensionista de los profesores, adaptado a contexto municipal, en Latinoamérica y particularmente, en Cuba.



Metodología: se emplearon métodos teóricos como el histórico-lógico y sus procedimientos, y métodos empíricos tales como el análisis de documentos. **Resultados:** se identificaron tres tendencias fundamentales a nivel regional, la integración de la extensión con la docencia e investigación, la prevalencia de un modelo de extensión crítica, así como su carácter formativo integral. **Conclusión:** la extensión universitaria debe ser vista como un proceso que involucra a los profesores en su integración al territorio, innovando sus prácticas pedagógicas y contribuyendo al desarrollo local. La preparación de los docentes en esta área es esencial para el fortalecimiento de la universidad como agente de cambio social. **Palabras clave:** educación superior, extensión, municipio, profesores, universidad

Resumo

Introdução: a preparação dos docentes para o trabalho extensionista é essencial nos Centros Universitários Municipais para integrar de forma eficaz a extensão universitária e fortalecer a relação entre a universidade e a comunidade. **Objetivo:** propor um marco teórico para a preparação dos professores na atividade extensionista, adaptado ao contexto municipal da América Latina, especialmente em Cuba. **Metodologia:** foram utilizados métodos teóricos como o histórico-lógico e seus procedimentos, além de métodos empíricos como a análise documental. **Resultados:** identificaram-se três tendências fundamentais na região: a integração da extensão com o ensino e a pesquisa, a prevalência de um modelo crítico de extensão e o seu caráter formativo integral. **Conclusão:** a extensão universitária deve ser concebida como um processo que envolve os docentes na integração com o território, promovendo inovação nas práticas pedagógicas e contribuindo para o desenvolvimento local. A capacitação dos professores nessa área é fundamental para o fortalecimento da universidade como agente de transformação social.

Palavras-chave: ensino superior, extensão, município, docentes, universidade



Introduction

University extension constitutes an essential function, not a peripheral task, of higher education in Latin America. In recent decades, a notable heterogeneity of institutional models has emerged that transcend mere assistance, ranging from applied research programs to strategic alliances with social actors and systematic community interventions (Tommasino, 2023; Tommasino y Stevenazzi, 2016; Bracho-Fuenmayor, 2023; Guillén de Romero et al., 2024; Díaz-Romero et al., 2025). This development responds to a dual imperative: to contribute to territorial development while simultaneously fostering critical citizenship engaged with collective issues (Borges Machín y González Bravo, 2022; Cano Menoni y Flores, 2023; Cardeño Portela et al., 2023; López González, 2023).

Such diversity in pedagogical approaches, both within and outside universities, has driven rigorous research on their formative impact. Within this framework, an integral conception prevails today (González Fernández-Larrea et al., 2021), where extension serves as a bridge for educational and, ultimately, social transformations. However, a gap persists: the limited systematization of teacher training for these complex scenarios. Recognized as a pedagogical process in itself (González & González, 2019), extension practice extends beyond the classroom, mobilizing university-society links.

This reciprocal dialogue, as demonstrated by Taborda (2010), enriches knowledge and strengthens ethical commitments in both directions. Tommasino & Cano (2016) emphasize the theoretical and programmatic challenge of creating a unified and transformative pedagogical proposal, highlighting their concept of “integrality,” which has been one of the most influential in the region, establishing them as key figures in the field of university extension.

A particularly fruitful perspective, defended by Lamarti (2023), views university extension as a central axis for socio-educational links between the institution and its environment, thereby catalyzing symbiotic developments. This approach, anchored in principles of relevance, cooperation, and interdisciplinarity, transcends mere assistance to structurally address territorial issues (Ortiz & Morales, 2011). Despite its transformative potential, a paradox remains: numerous institutions still relegate this function to a secondary role compared to teaching and research, hindered by vague planning, scarce resources, and weak evaluation systems (Arzeno, 2018).

The notion of territorialization, a conceptual compass from Ezcurra et al. (2020), offers a decisive interpretive key today. It suggests a horizontal dialogue of knowledge where universities and local actors co-construct sustainable solutions, dismantling traditional epistemic hierarchies. This paradigm receives unprecedented momentum from ICT, whose tools, as demonstrated by González Aportela et al. (2021) and Álvarez et al. (2020), optimize both extension management and genuine community participation throughout the project cycle.

Two regional trends consolidate this shift:

- The rising prominence of the Latin American Union of University Extension, a vital space for collegial reflection and cooperation (Valenzuela Tovar,



2018).

- The synergy between research and extension, which generates applied knowledge on-site while strengthening ethical commitments to territories (González Fernández-Larrea et al., 2021).
- From a qualitative paradigm (Piña Ferrer et al., 2023), this study proposes to equip teachers with conceptual tools who, in their territorial engagement, act as cultural development agents in the global sense advocated by González & González (2019). Against this backdrop, the present article articulates a theoretical-methodological framework for teacher preparation in university extension, specifically in Municipal University Centers

Methodology

To support the research, a critical review of specialized literature was undertaken around four articulating axes: extension work, teacher preparation, university dynamics, and local contexts. The theoretical approach integrated the historical-logical method, with its inherent operations of analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction, which allowed for uncovering the conceptual foundations of teacher preparation for extension work in Municipal University Centers. Additionally, document analysis, as an empirical technique, focused on key outputs from Latin American extension organizations and networks, prioritizing texts that embody foundational debates in the region.

This methodological apparatus, particularly the diachronic approach, facilitated mapping the evolution of extension practices in the subcontinent. Through this lens, it was possible to weave organic connections between current pedagogical models in Municipal University Centers and their historical, cultural, and institutional substrates. The document research explored significant corpuses such as:

- The Proceedings of Congresses of the Latin American Union of University Extension (ULEU), an indisputable reference in the architecture of extension policies, whose records chart foundational debates and structural tensions in the field, offering a living snapshot of its regional evolution.
- The Minutes of the Working Group “Critical Extension: Theory and Methods in Latin America and the Caribbean” (CLACSO), where disruptive approaches and epistemological critiques of traditional practices were tracked, revealing fissures and horizons in contemporary university practice.
- The National University Extension Program for the Cuban University (2004), a pivotal document that synthesizes pedagogical horizons for integrating extension into formative processes, building conceptual bridges between academia and communities.
- Concurrently, the project “Comprehensive Management of Substantive Processes in the Teaching Department,” coordinated by CECEPRI at the University of Pinar del Río, whose extension management line contributed a

solid methodological foundation to operationalize the triad of teaching-research-extension.

This documentary corpus, interrogated through theoretical-empirical lenses, enabled the unraveling of the complex threads of extension preparation in Latin America and the construction of solid methodological foundations for the research.

Results and discussion

The diagnosis of extension preparation in Municipal University Centers (CUM) revealed three predominant vectors in the region:

- The operational fusion of teaching, research, and extension.
- The strengthening of critical models that question assistentialist approaches.
- Its consolidation as a comprehensive formative process capable of developing socio-analytical competencies in teachers.

This triad, as evidenced by Aliaga (2022), energizes the university-territory synergy: by articulating academic and community actors, local transformations are catalyzed through educators who exercise clear, critical, reflective, and empathetic problem-solving perspectives on territorial issues. Far from being mere transmitters, they become weavers of dialogues that activate latent social capital.

The document review unveiled eloquent regional trends. Notably, the ULEU has emerged as a normative beacon for Latin American extension policies over the past decade. A detailed examination of its congress minutes (2014-2024) crystallizes in Table 1, which precisely outlines strategic advances and pending critical knots, thus providing a roadmap for optimizing teacher training in this field.

Table 1

Strategic Advances and Critical Pending Issues

Strengthened Aspects in the Preparation for Extension Work	Aspects to Improve in the Preparation for Extension Work
Systematization of experiences: Workshops and courses promoting critical reflection on extension practice.	Deeper systematization: Lack of a standardized model for analyzing and sharing learnings uniformly.
Development of competencies: Training in community leadership, extension management, and knowledge dialogue.	Continuous support: Need for mentoring to guide educators in the practical application of extension tools.
Emphasis on community impact: Activities oriented towards local needs and the Sustainable Development Goals.	Greater local contextualization: Lack of more specific strategies adapted to the characteristics of the municipalities where CUM operates.
Internationalization of extension: Collaborative seminars and workshops with a regional and international focus.	Interdisciplinary integration: Greater inclusion of knowledge from various disciplines to address problems more holistically.



Strengthened Aspects in the Preparation for Extension Work **Aspects to Improve in the Preparation for Extension Work**

Continuous training initiatives: Diplomas, courses, and master's programs that professionalize educators.

Constant evaluation: Implement mechanisms that to regularly monitor the development of competencies and their impact.

Focus on social transformation: Volunteer projects and activities that strengthen the university's social commitment.

Promotion of research: Encourage studies that analyze the effectiveness of extension strategies.

Use of existing tools: Application of methodologies to evaluate impact and systematize processes.

Use of digital technologies: Leverage technological tools for distance preparation and project management.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The ULEU has consolidated itself as a regional sounding board for rethinking the university-society link. Its key contributions—recognizing extension as a driver of social change and promoting the transversal fusion of teaching, research, and community action—contrast with the barriers documented by Valenzuela (2023): insufficiently prepared teachers, communities relegated to passive roles, and chronic budgetary constraints that hinder transformative projects.

In the face of these challenges, the organization advocates for innovative models where academics, rather than mere executors, become articulators of change capable of catalyzing sustainable local developments (Ruiz & Santos, 2020). This vision resonates with CLACSO, whose Working Group on Critical Extension dismantles traditional approaches through:

- Collaborative dynamics prioritizing community empowerment.
- Interdisciplinary perspectives to address territorial issues.
- Situated practices that transform extension into a tool for social justice (Ferrero de Roqué et al., 2019).

The vitality of this approach was demonstrated during the 111th Session of CLACSO in Havana (2024), where the following were highlighted:

- Experience systematization workshops that equip educators with tools to map local issues.
- Community-focused impact evaluation methods.

Collaboration with working groups and member centers of CLACSO has woven vibrant academic networks, enhancing collaborative approaches in university extension where young researchers and social movements engage as equals. Iconic initiatives, such as the School of Evaluators (FOLEC) and the CLACSO Classroom platform, democratize knowledge tangibly, breaking down geographical barriers through open-access digital resources. Despite these advancements, Municipal University Centers (CUM) encounter persistent obstacles in integrating such innovations into teacher training. A triad of limitations hampers their potential:

- Gaps in training related to extension methodologies.

- Chronic resource constraints for innovative programs.
- Structural rigidities that block curricular integration, despite the mandate to preserve and develop knowledge in line with professional culture (Rojas et al., 2018).

In light of this situation, the strategic role of CUM in local development emerges strongly. As demonstrated by Hernández & Pérez (2017) and Macías (2022), these centers act as catalysts in critical areas, from food security to the training of municipal leaders. Their impact, however, requires synergistic alliances. Norton et al. (2022) emphasize that networked work exponentially multiplies extension actions when culturally situated approaches are adopted, capable of engaging diverse actors and responding to socio-environmental urgencies (Chacón & Cruz, 2017). Additionally, Rodríguez-Mantilla et al. (2025) reveal how extended quality management systems optimize internal communication and community links, essential foundations for effective extension. This vision aligns with Naranjo Crespo (2025), who calls for humanizing the university through social pedagogy. His proposal—an inclusive education that embraces cultural diversity—provides fundamental keys for training educators in CUM: only practices rooted in local realities and woven with community commitment will achieve the expected transformation.

In this constellation of proposals, Mora de Montero (2025) presents a unique model: community interaction as a core for training teachers in productive economics. His approach, anchored in socio-critical and empirical methods, reveals overlooked tensions in university-territory collaboration. Importantly, it demonstrates how rigorous teacher preparation revitalizes community links and deciphers keys to the contemporary economic system, thus opening unexplored paths for extension practice.

This framework finds its necessary counterpoint in the call to professionalize extension management (Álvarez & Breijo, 2020). Not merely as a protocol, but as a systemic architecture that intertwines planning, execution, and monitoring with contextual sensitivity (García & Falcón, 2020; Jiménez et al., 2022). CUM, in particular, must fortify competencies in their teaching and administrative teams to ensure that projects transcend the ephemeral (Álvarez & Breijo, 2020). However, this professionalization would be futile without cultural transversality—the ability to energize creation, dissemination, and collective enjoyment across multiple spheres. As Vento & Ordaz (2019) warn, the extension project crystallizes precisely here: not in unidirectional transmission, but in weaving relationships that cultivate a comprehensive cultural preparation.

Given this horizon, extension preparation demands a radical metamorphosis. It is urgent to dismantle the assistentialist burden—this narrow vision reduced to “service provision”—and embrace root collaborative practices. This involves educators and students working together from the ground up: diagnosing problems and executing initiatives that foster social innovation. Only then will true dialogue of knowledge flourish; only then will co-creation transform from a slogan into a living tool for community transformation.

This professionalization approach allows for a more meaningful connection

between the university and society, where university actors recognize themselves not only as transmitters of knowledge but as committed agents of local development. However, this goal faces significant challenges that must be addressed urgently and contextually. It is essential that extension practices respond to the specific socio-cultural characteristics of each municipality (Guibert et al., 2020), avoiding homogeneous models that overlook territorial diversity. Furthermore, common and coherent evaluation frameworks must be established to enable monitoring and comparison of extension outcomes. Ensuring equitable access to continuous training programs for all educators, regardless of geographical location, is also fundamental, which implies overcoming connectivity gaps, infrastructure limitations, and the availability of training resources.

The preparation for the extension work of teachers and its close link with the territory represents an urgent need in contemporary higher education, especially when conceived as a pathway for socio-cultural transformation in the territory. This training not only demands academic competencies but also capacities for collaborative work, participatory management, and the articulation of knowledge between the university and the community. From a local development perspective, Branch (2021) argues that teachers must assume an active role in constructing knowledge from and with the community, which requires specific preparation that transcends traditional teaching. This approach aligns with the arguments of Corrales-Reyes and Santana-Casiano (2023), indicating that CUM, by directly engaging in local contexts, require teachers capable of leading educational processes that promote relevant social changes.

According to Basirico (2024), this work must be supported by institutional policies that recognize, evaluate, and incentivize extension work. The absence of these mechanisms limits teacher motivation, making institutional cultural transformation essential. In this vein, McNair et al. (2022) highlight that achieving equitable higher education requires integrating extension as a substantive component in academic management systems.

For university teachers to effectively respond to these demands, it is essential to have training that considers cultural diversity and promotes equity. Preece (2021) and Taylor and Luescher (2022) emphasize the need to develop intercultural competencies and strengthen the link between academic knowledge and popular knowledge. This process contributes to reformulating the social mission of universities from a transformative perspective.

Flores (2023a) and Soriano (2022) reinforce this idea by highlighting the importance of creating creative and identity-driven spaces where students, especially from Latin communities, can explore and affirm their sense of belonging to the university. From another angle, Tovar Gálvez (2021) points out that the epistemological bridge facilitates the articulation of diverse knowledge, which is essential for preparing teachers at municipal university centers to develop culturally inclusive and contextualized extension work. In this context, the extension teacher must act as a facilitator of inclusive pedagogical experiences that enhance self-expression, leadership, and community participation.

Guzman (2022) and Perry (2020) propose that teacher preparation should

include knowledge of the experiences of first-generation students, which requires sensitivity, empathy, and specific support strategies. Culturally relevant mentoring programs emerge as an effective means to foster inclusion and reduce educational gaps. Additionally, Proffitt et al. (2021) and López et al. (2021) invite consideration of the experiences of Latina teachers, whose approaches challenge traditional academic power structures. The incorporation of community epistemologies in extension pedagogical practice enriches formative processes from a social justice perspective.

Methodologically, Boyd (2023) argues that critical pedagogy should guide teacher training, allowing for questioning the power relations that permeate education and fostering reflective thinking about the social function of the university. This positioning strengthens extension work as a process of reality transformation. Furthermore, Rusoja (2024) illustrates how practices of organizational literacy in diverse communities constitute legitimate forms of knowledge that should be recognized by educators in their community work. In line with this, Quesada et al. (2021) highlight that professional teacher development, focused on integrated pedagogical models and inquiry-based learning, enhances teachers' self-efficacy and pedagogical beliefs. This transformation aligns with the need for CUM educators to design and implement innovative, contextualized extension practices that meet the needs of their communities.

García Marirrodriga (2024) and González García et al. (2024) emphasize that integration with the socio-professional environment strengthens partnerships with local actors, particularly in rural contexts. This perspective is valuable for preparing educators in municipal university centers, promoting a people-centered education committed to sustainable local development, and offering a valuable model for culturally inclusive and contextualized extension work. This dialogic perspective aligns with the insights of Oh & Mon (2024), who highlight the role of public libraries as strategic allies for developing data literacy projects in community contexts.

Murray & Brennan (2023), based on the study of An Cosán, demonstrate that community-integrated higher education models can revitalize the social function of the university. In this sense, CUM have transformative potential if they are staffed by educators prepared to promote dialogue, active participation, and citizen empowerment. From this perspective, Gutiérrez (2023) underscores the need for educators to include skills in project management, strategic communication, and intersectoral collaboration. This structured, coherent, and contextualized preparation allows extension work to become a transversal axis in the institutional development of CUM.

Conclusions

The analysis of the perspectives of the consulted authors indicates a consensus that preparation for extension work must be comprehensive, critical, professionalized, contextualized, and oriented towards social commitment. Articulating diverse knowledge, fostering community participation, and promoting an institutional culture favorable to extension are challenges that can only be addressed through intentional and systematic teacher preparation.

Despite the existence of a solid theoretical foundation surrounding university extension, CUM still face concrete limitations that hinder effective implementation. The scarcity of resources, insufficient teacher preparation in extension topics, and internal structural barriers require strategic and professional management.

For university extension to fulfill its transformative role, it must be organically integrated into teacher preparation as part of a comprehensive vision that combines teaching, research, and social commitment. Only in this way will it be possible to consolidate a university that not only trains competent professionals but also cultivates citizens committed to the well-being of their communities.

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