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## *Internationalization in Sports Universities*

[*La internacionalización en las universidades del deporte*]

[*Internacionalização em universidades esportivas*]

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** The internationalization of professional education in sports universities is a latent need involving every university actor to improve scientific and academic quality.

**Aim:** To suggest implementing a strategy that contributes to professional education in sports universities.

**Materials and methods:** This study relied on materialist dialectics as the philosophy of any given method that will be used, the theory of knowledge and logic. Besides,



theoretical, empirical, and statistical methods were used. The expert opinion and Iadov's techniques were used as well.

**Results:** the actions included in the strategy suggested favored the preparation of the managing body, the teaching staff, and students. The implementation of this strategy contributed to greater academic and scientific quality and broader international expansion of the university. Hence, the control, evaluation, and accreditation processes will provide room for assessment and self-assessment on a systematic basis, concerning the advances and setbacks of the internationalization process.

**Conclusions:** the implementation of the internationalization strategy for professional education has engaged the university community, as part of the international and intercultural dimension of the major roles of the institution, and engaged the academic and scientific community to a broader extent.

**Keywords:** higher education, professional education, internationalization, university processes.

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## **RESUMEN**

**Introducción:** el proceso de internacionalización en la formación del profesional de las universidades del deporte, constituye una necesidad latente en el que cada uno de los actores universitarios se debe implicar para incrementar la calidad científica y académica de una institución del deporte.

**Objetivo:** proponer una estrategia para el proceso de internacionalización en la formación del profesional de las universidades del deporte.

**Materiales y métodos:** el estudio se fundamentó en la dialéctica materialista como filosofía de los métodos particulares a emplear, y como lógica y teoría del conocimiento y se emplearon métodos de investigación de nivel teórico, empírico, estadísticos. Se empleó el método de consulta a expertos y se utilizó la técnica de Iadov.

**Resultados:** las acciones contenidas en la estrategia propuesta favorecieron la preparación de la estructura de dirección, el claustro de profesores y el colectivo estudiantil, la puesta en práctica de la estrategia contribuyó a mejorar la calidad



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académica, científica y la proyección internacional de la universidad, convirtiéndose los procesos de control, evaluación y acreditación, en espacios de valoración y autovaloración sistemática de los avances y limitaciones en proceso de Internacionalización.

**Conclusiones:** la puesta en práctica de la estrategia del proceso de internacionalización en la formación del profesional ha facilitado que se involucre a la comunidad universitaria, integrando la dimensión internacional e intercultural, en las funciones sustantivas lo que ha permitido elevar la calidad académica y científica de la universidad.

**Palabras clave:** educación superior, formación del profesional, internacionalización, procesos universitarios.

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## **RESUMO**

**Introdução:** o processo de internacionalização na formação de profissionais nas universidades desportivas constitui uma necessidade latente em que cada um dos atores universitários deve estar envolvido de forma a aumentar a qualidade científica e académica de uma instituição desportiva.

**Objetivo:** propor uma estratégia para o processo de internacionalização na formação profissional das universidades esportivas.

**Materiais e métodos:** o estudo baseou-se na dialética materialista como filosofia dos métodos particulares a serem utilizados, e como lógica e teoria do conhecimento, e foram utilizados métodos de pesquisa teóricos, empíricos e estatísticos. Foi utilizado o método de consulta a especialistas e a técnica de Iadov.

**Resultados:** as ações contidas na estratégia proposta favoreceram a preparação da estrutura de gestão, corpo docente e discente, a implementação da estratégia contribuiu para melhorar a qualidade académica e científica e a projeção internacional da universidade, tornando os processos de controle, avaliação e acreditação, em espaços de avaliação e autoavaliação sistemática dos avanços e limitações no processo de Internacionalização. a Universidade.



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**Conclusões:** a implementação da estratégia de internacionalização da educação profissional envolveu a comunidade universitária, no âmbito da dimensão internacional e intercultural das grandes funções da instituição, e envolveu de forma mais ampla a comunidade académica e científica.

**Palavras-chave:** ensino superior, formação profissional, internacionalização, processos universitários.

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## *INTRODUCTION*

Knowledge, research, and innovation have led to major growth and prosperity, given their contribution within the frame of a new model for socioeconomic development based on investments in human capital and tangible assets.

Accordingly, the Regional Conference of Higher Education of Latin America and the Caribbean (CRES), recommended the creation of a regional setting that could permit:

Higher levels that lead to essential aspects of regional integration, such as a broader cultural dimension, the development of academic strengths that consolidate the regional perspectives in the face of the most pressing world problems, the utilization of human resources that create regional synergies, the filling of knowledge access gaps also involving professional and technical capacities, the consideration of knowledge with a collective wellbeing perspective, and the creation of competencies for organic connection of academic knowledge, production, labor, and social life, with a humanistic attitude and intellectual responsibility (CRES, 2008, p.9).

One of the main consequences of the process of economic adjustment to the demands of a global society and knowledge is education.

In this new context, universities are expected to play a major role as providers of skilled human capital that generates knowledge and transmits the already-existing knowledge



to the industry and society as a whole. Hence, higher education institutions offer quality education that fosters overall knowledge, skills, and languages to fit the international and multicultural setting professionally and socially.

The growing globalization and the need for knowledge for development have turned education into a priority; in fact, the number of foreign students has increased. In that direction, universities face enormous challenges to respond to the demands for skilled personnel with the capacity to innovate and start up ideas, and to perform global labor for which the talent of students, teachers, and researchers must be mobilized, as part of integrating programs, projects, and networks of international cooperation.

Borrego Dot, Y., González Martínez, M. de la C., & Pérez Lemus, L. (2022), noted that:

The hostile contexts and situations of a post-modern world have been dealt with by the United Nations (UN) in the 2030 Agenda, through goals that call for joint and sustainable changes toward the development, well-being, and social justice of humans (p.2)

The 2030 Agenda has a changing vision toward the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the region. Internationalization must have a favorable effect on Goal 4: Quality Education, some of its targets related to higher education look to "increase the number of world scholarships considerably to assist the developing countries (...), as well as the supply of skilled teachers, through international cooperation to train teachers in the developing countries". (Economic Commission for Latin America, 2016, p. 16).

In that sense, Cuban universities, particularly, the University of Physical Culture and Sports Sciences (UCCFD) are working to achieve internationalization that helps with excellent accreditation standards, maintaining the principles of national sovereignty unchangeable.

Saborido Loidi, in University 2020 Conference said that "the university people of the south, the directors, and managers have the imperative of riding the globalized drives



of university internationalization efficiently, maintaining our principles of political, academic, and scientific sovereignty intact. It is a strategic challenge" (p.2).

Then he added:

The development of universities has an increasing demand for internationalization involvement in higher education, which can take place at three levels: globally, nationally, and institutionally. It will only make sense if it goes beyond the boundaries of an elite, and spreads to the whole university community. Nationally, it must engage every higher education institution. (p.2)

Villavicencio Placencia (2019) said,

The internationalization of higher education has increased considerably in recent years, becoming a key element for university development... Cuba is not aside from this process and has moved through different stages... Universities have managed to achieve an ever-growing engagement in this process, based on the sovereign principles that characterize the Cuban revolution. (p.1)

According to these standpoints on internationalization, several university processes linked to fundamental functions, social pertinence, and educational quality may be arranged consciously. Therefore, it will require top institutional competency, institutional qualities associated with the vision, will, and audacity. It is related to the priority of social interaction with the local, national, and international settings, and performs quality selection and enrollment processes, along with professional education, and values.

However, UCCFD still needs more undergraduate and postgraduate education with formative proposals that ensure creativity, efficiency, and the pertinence of professionals that provide solutions to the problems of contemporary society. The discussions about internationalization in theoretical meetings, methodological workshops, discussions, and the results of research tools helped identify these regularities:



- The educational strategy will be limited if it ensures major university functions from science for conscious and integrated orientation of the transversality of an internationalization process to the rest of the university processes.
- There is no accurate category system (conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal concepts) about the meaning of internationalization of academic services through planning, to raise higher education quality, and be a full part of the international context.
- The internationalization process in professional education is small for academic exchanges (teaching, research), as well as the recognition of the research-production-sales triad to position goods promoted by the UCCFD in the international academic community.
- The scientific activity conducted in basic and specialized education by teachers is insufficient to confront the internationalization process at UCCFD, as a key factor for higher educational quality.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to suggest implementing a strategy that contributes to professional education in the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD.

## *MATERIALS AND METHODS*

This is a retrospective study of the actions and results in terms of internationalization at the UCCFD, to explain the causes through different events, and facilitate functional understanding of these contexts. The methodology was based on a concurrent mixed approach.

This study relied on materialist dialectics as the philosophy of any given method that will be used, and the theory of knowledge and logic. Besides, theoretical, empirical, and statistical methods were used, along with Iadov's technique.

The historical-logical method revealed the historical timeline of the research object, from the description of the political, economic, and social conditions that have influenced the





development of internationalization in the different university processes. It facilitates understanding the social-historical conditions of internationalization to raise the educational quality and its systems of relationships in their areas of influence, along with the current trends and perspectives of professional education processes.

The analytical-synthetic method helped determine each cognitive action performed during the research, assessing previous research on the process of internationalization in professional education, both internationally and nationally, and facilitating understanding, explanations, and generalization of the main trends, and the analysis of the sources consulted and the interpretation of the diagnostic to conceive the strategy recommended.

Combined, the inductive-deductive method was used to make inferences and generalizations to determine the theoretical rationale for this strategy, and the conclusions and recommendations by putting together the singularities and generalities of the object of research objectively.

Modeling enabled the design of a strategy that supports the internationalization of professional education in higher education, at the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD, along with its essential relationships and practice. The implementation provided an objective vision of the system of relationships of the object of study, enabling the determination and design of the components of the proposal.

The subjects of the survey were students, teachers, and specialists of international relations at the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD, to gather and triangulate the reality of the internationalization process and its manifestations, as well as the effects on professional education and teacher performance along with the necessary components to enhance this process.

The interview was conducted with the directors of Manuel Fajardo UCCFD and INDER, who were attending as students. The resulting information was processed for diagnosis



and assessment of aspects associated with internationalization, and the participation of other agents in this process.

Observation was present throughout the investigation; it was useful to check the behavior of the components of the system of activities depending on internationalization and the dynamic of its relationships under natural conditions. It enabled the identification of the elements used for problematization, assessment, and implementation of several procedures to rearrange internationalization, with a developing, dynamic, and flexible conception of science.

The statistical-mathematical methods were used to corroborate the results of the strategy and favor the development of internationalization. Inferential statistics was used for the analysis and design of data as support elements to make generalizations from the interpretation of results. Percentage analysis was used through frequency tabulation of matrix percentages. The Delphi method was used to perform quantitative and qualitative assessments of the results.

Documentary analysis was useful for the critical study of documents that established procedures and indications to develop internationalization in professional education at the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD, as the object of research. Also, the technical and managing bodies of the teaching process at the UCCFD were reviewed to collect information about the object of study. Iadov's technique was used to determine the level of satisfaction among the users (Table 1).

*Table 1. - Population and sample*

Levels	Population	Sample	%
Directors	73	10	13.7
RD specialists at the UCCFD	4	4	100%
Teachers	546	55	10.07
Students	4086	205	5.01

The opinions collected for the selection of the sample were as follows:

- Students: Representation of students from every year and degree.



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- Teachers: Teachers holding categories, with a master's degree or Ph.D., in all the teaching departments
  - Directors: A representation of executives from different deputy rectories, faculties, managing offices, and related departments to the processes studied.
  - Specialists of the International Relations Department: Professors working directly in international relations at the UCCFD.

## *RESULTS AND DISCUSSION*

The results achieved from the application of the tools were as follows:

Institutional document review: reports of visits, minutes of the board of directors, and methodological meetings. The results showed that the several modalities of university internationalization are not properly managed they are insufficient for the international dimension to integrate into the substantive functions of each organization, which means that internationalization still falls short due to the poor use of procedures to operate on substantive processes at the university.

The engagement of the university community in the international and intercultural dimension in the substantive functions is still insufficient. The teaching programs lack global topics with an intercultural perspective. There is little teaching mobility; there are few international scientific projects; while the international dimension is still weak concerning Ph.D. education, with few advances in the international accreditation of programs.

The survey conducted by the specialists of international relations on the topic of internationalization at the UCCFD showed several weaknesses and strengths, such as:

- Some foreign institutions that might be partners of the UCCFD are not interested; the harsh US blockade on Cuba; limited funds to back the efforts to project the UCCFD internationally; visa restrictions imposed on teachers and researchers;



lack of knowledge about the possibilities offered by the UCCFD; administrative and bureaucratic difficulties; insufficient international opportunities; insufficient mastery of a foreign language; poor curricular flexibility to participate in international programs, including student mobility.

- There is excessive emphasis on internationalization, whereas other priorities seem less important; excessive efforts to enroll international students that pay fees; commercialization of international activity; search for internationalization associations to maintain a repute; internationalization does not focus on all the substantive processes of higher education.
- Strengthening of curricular internationalization; higher education internationalization has national priority; it increases the repute/profile of the institution; it improves teaching-learning quality; increases international consciousness and greater student engagement in local and global matters; greater engagement of scholars and researchers in international networks; higher income and greater income sources; opportunities to compare or have a reference to the institutional performance in the context of good international practices; institutional strengthening in research and knowledge production.

The interview of UCCFD directors showed that:

- There have been some attempts to broaden the visibility of some processes and topics. In relation to internationalization, new international courses are being delivered, though they do not show all the activity and potentiality of the institution.
- Since there is no clear internationalization strategy (objectives-actions-expected results-impacts-forms of measuring them), measuring the impacts is difficult.
- The strategy conceived today has failed to be implemented fully since it lacks a theoretical-methodological conception to face this process.
- In the current setting, other actions must be taken to promote its development, first in generating a strategy that involves every potentially developing area, particularly scientific activity at the UCCFD, which has been excluded in



previous attempts. This particular has limited the visibility of the university and its potential in the research area. It would be an action to perform.

- There are also external barriers, sometimes consisting in visiting Cuba due to the negative criteria about the country, along with the language barrier. The internal barriers are particularly bureaucratic; too many procedures to set up relations, infrastructure, diet, and logistics, including little mastery of a foreign language.

In the present context, actions should be taken in internationalization to foster development at the UCCFD, such as:

- Creating conditions for infrastructure, logistics with certain exclusive particularities, greater computer technology access, and the reduction of the language barrier.
- The survey of teachers showed their little use of social media. They said they lack discussion materials for exchanges with the visitors or spread during their visits to other countries, and the lack of systematization of services and goods portfolio.
- They referred to the need of raising the practice of the English language as part of their promotion, including the website, as well as the teachers who must deliver their lessons in that language. The possibilities for sales must be studied for the promotion of their products, finding new markets, including the traditional US market.
- Among the threats, teachers, coordinators, and officials should review certain behavior patterns, since everyday body language cannot be compared to their diplomacy in every situation.
- Insisting that teachers must have several competencies, including proper and quality use of virtual classrooms, which other universities are making better use of. Being more active on social media, where there are usually people requesting information who do not receive their responses.
- Providing technology use training to teachers.
- Renovating the traditional approaches, conferring greater visibility to projects.



In the survey, the students showed that most subjects were unfamiliar with the topics related to internationalization; 100 % of the students pointed out the need to increase opportunities for studies overseas, and participation in international meetings. They also considered an increase in the number of foreign students at the university, internet access, and the creation of academic networks of students from different countries. They said that the Department of International Relations is the one in charge of every internationalization activity. All the students said they had very little knowledge of foreign languages, thus showing the need for curricular or extracurricular actions that permit the development of basic communicative skills in another foreign language.

According to these results, and taking into account the institutional needs, the authors designed an internationalization strategy that contributes to higher professional education in the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD.

The inquiries unveiled that the literature has several definitions of strategies, which have been designed and used in education. The concept of strategy has evolved so, that it has turned into a new managing school and a novel form of managing organizations, called strategic management. The term management strategy means much more than the same term used by the military.

Chandler (2003) said that "strategy is a long-term company's determination of goals and objectives, as well as the actions to take, and allocation of resources needed to achieve such goals" (p. 5).

Carneiro Caneda (2010) noted that "strategy is the future orientation of work, the establishment of an end, a deadline reckoned as acceptable into which the entrepreneurial sector must head" (p. 7).

Moreover, Getz and Lee (2011) claimed that

The true power of a strategy consists in guiding the organization to make different choices, and therefore, making different decisions. Hence, the job of leaders is, among other things, to continue their dialogue with the rest of the



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organization about the thing they would do differently, based on the new strategy. This dialogue elucidates the strategy and encourages the organization to act accordingly (p. 303)

Lukac & Frazier, (2012):

The concept of strategy often begins with a vision of how the company wishes to be seen, or in fact, how it wishes to see itself. In other words, the strategy is what a company intends to do, and perhaps, more importantly, what intends not to do (p. 49).

This paper assumes the concept of strategy given by Valle, A. (2012) who considered that "(...) strategy is a set of sequential and interrelated actions, which stem from an initial status (offered by the diagnostic), permit arriving at an ideal consequent status of planning" (p.157).

Considering the regularities of the conception of a strategy as scientific results, according to different authors characterize it as the set of sequential actions oriented to the achievement of certain goals. Therefore, considering that the object of study and the field of action of this study relies on the rationale that internationalization in professional education is the projection of a system of rigid actions to adjust, optimize, and complete the knowledge and lacking skills in terms of theory, methodology, and attitudes, to achieve internationalization in professional education

The systematization of definitions and strategy types, the latter have theoretical, methodological, and practical components. Depending on the assumption, in the strategy of internationalization designed, the philosophical, sociological, psychological, pedagogic, economic, and legal fundamentals, along with the principles and characteristics that belong to the process of internationalization, make the theoretical components of its structure. The methodological components are made up of diagnostic, sensitization, planning, execution, and control, which coincide with the stages of the strategy presented.



In turn, the maximum level of materialization of influence on subjects to fulfill the desired changes will be seen in the practical components made up of strategy management actions.

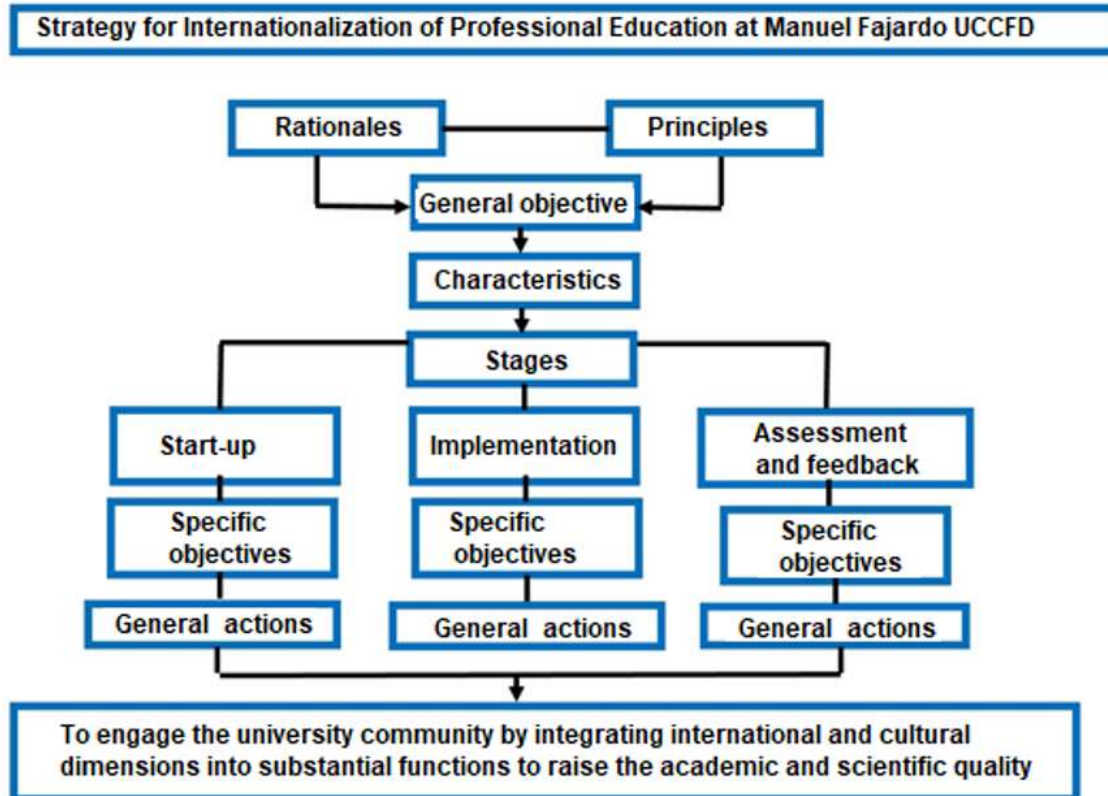
The process of strategy design includes a series of character elements given by Bernaza G. (2013), such as the principles that rule the post-graduate education process, on which the strategy relies, and the characteristics of the process below:

- Theory-practice association.
- Scientific, prospective, and innovative character of the post-graduate pedagogic process.
- Social pertinence principle.
- The unity of affective and cognitive principles.
- The principle of the unity between the activity and communication during the education and development of a professional's personality.
- Flexible character and collaborative principle.
- Inter- and transdisciplinarity principle.

The goal of the strategy consists of increasing the international projection of the university as an institution of higher education, based on the mission and vision expressed in the Strategic Plan. The strategy is objective, participatory, creative, collaborative, personalized, contextualized, developing, and flexible. It was designed in three stages: Beginning, implementation, and evaluation and feedback. Each stage has specific objectives and general actions that engage the university community, as part of the international and inter-cultural dimension of the major roles of the institution, thus enhancing the academic and scientific community.

The strategy recommended is shown in the diagram below (Figure 1).





*Fig. 1.- Strategy proposal*

The evaluation of the results of the strategy at first, was done by consulting experts from a group of 30 subjects; the information was processed using Delphi.

The experts' suggestions were associated with the need to strengthen the internationalization process at the UCCFD, which involves all directors, teachers, and students. They also stated the need to widen culture and academic mobility; capture and retention of researchers; sufficient knowledge of foreign languages, especially English as the international language, and the language used in most teaching and research activities worldwide.

According to the information processed, several categories were established: very appropriate, quite appropriate, appropriate, little appropriate, and inappropriate.



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The questionnaire showed that every point was under the first cut-off, being very appropriate.

There was a coincidence between the importance of the strategy of internationalization in professional education at UCCFD and its implementation, considering it timely and pertinent, which was previously seen through solid and suitable theoretical and methodological rationales.

The assessment of the results of the implementation of the strategy also included user opinions, as direct beneficiaries of the proposal, and the ones responsible for the application of the results.

To achieve that, an anonymous questionnaire was designed, which explained the purposes of the inquiry and the aspects to be evaluated by the beneficiaries. The scientific outcome was assessed depending on the methodological requirements to design such instruments so that they can supply reliable data for further processing.

In keeping with the above, a total of five directors, four specialists in international relations, fifteen teachers, and fifty students.

The questionnaire consisted of nine questions.

The assessment of the responses to three closed interrelated questions looked to determine the level of satisfaction, through Iadov's logical table (Table 2).



**Table 2. - Iadov's logical table**

		P4									Σ
		Are you satisfied with the possibilities offered by the strategy to favor internationalization in professional education at UCCFD?									
		No	I don't know			Yes					74
		(74)									
P 9. Do you like how the strategy for internationalization in professional education at UCCFD is conceived?	P 6. If you could choose freely the specific objectives and actions designed in the strategy to promote internationalization at the university, would you pick anyone similar to the ones in this proposal?										
	Yes (71)	I don't know (0)	No (0)	Yes (2)	I don't know (0)	No (0)	Yes (1)	I don't know (0)	No (0)	(74)	
I like it a lot	1	2	6	2	2	6	6	6	6	67	
	67			0			0				
I like it more than I dislike it	2	2	3	2	3	3	6	3	6	1	
	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
I don't mind	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
I dislike it more than I like it	6	3	6	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	
	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0		
I don't like it	6	6	6	6	4	4	6	4	5	0	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
I can't tell	2	3	6	3	3	3	6	3	4	2	
	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

The individual results showed satisfaction in 70 users, with the internationalization strategy (94.6 %). The group satisfaction index was obtained from the above results, according to the following numerical scale that defines the level of satisfaction (Table 3).

**Table 3. - Satisfaction index scale**

Scale	Meaning	Individual satisfaction	%
+ 1	Clear satisfaction	67 A	94.6
+ 0.5	More satisfied than dissatisfied	1 B	1.35
0	Non-defined and contradictory	0 C	0
- 1	More dissatisfied than satisfied	4 D	5.40
-0.5	Clear dissatisfaction	2 E	2.70
<b>Total</b>		74	100

The group satisfaction index obtained was expressed in Equation 1.



$$67(+1) + 1(+0,5) + 0(0) + 4(-0,5) + 2(-1)$$

$$\text{ISG} = \frac{\quad}{\quad} = +0,91 \% (1)$$

74

The results (+0.91) were interpreted as a positive assessment of the internationalization strategy in professional education at the UCCFD since the resulting value was within the +0.5 and +1 range.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The internationalization strategy in professional education at the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD is, according to this paper, an undeniably valuable response to the problem addressed herein, which was corroborated by the outcome of the user opinion method, which provided a positive assessment of the strategy upon implementation.

The implementation of the internationalization strategy for professional education at the Manuel Fajardo UCCFD has engaged the university community, as part of the international and inter-cultural dimension of the major roles of the institution, thus enhancing the academic and scientific community.

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The authors declare having competing interests.

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