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RESEARCH COMPETENCIES IN LAW PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This article determines the research competencies of university teachers belonging to the disciplinary area of law, through the implementation of a non-experimental-descriptive methodological framework, transversal-field non-probabilistic sampling under the technique of voluntary sampling through tools such as the survey and descriptive statistics. As result, the strengths and weaknesses detected in the teachers in the area of research are presented; taking into account the importance of research as an articulating element and generator of knowledge, which allows for strengthening the competencies and the disciplinary work from a responsible and pertinent perspective that responds to the needs of the local, national and international contexts.

Keywords: Research Competencies, Knowledge, Law, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education, in general terms, has undergone significant changes worldwide, taking into account that over time, its system, method and interest have been increasingly focused on the subject (human being) and its relationship with the environment or its habitat. Thus, within Higher Education Institutions the educational process is understood as an integral development, in which students are immersed in teaching-learning processes that prepare them for the generation of a critical stance and the consequent decision-making for their disciplinary work (Rochina *et al*., 2020).

Colombia has not been oblivious to these changes at the educational level, and has been preparing universities and their academic units in the understanding and application of "competencies" that promote the improvement of education, through pedagogical practices where questioning, reflection, reason, action taking and innovation are the epicenter of a new change or development either at the local or national level (Ministry of National Education [Mineducación], 2014).

In addition to this, it should be taken into account that this process has brought about changes related to a renewal of educational paradigms, evaluation models and curricular design; a fact that has strengthened the profile of competencies that should accompany teachers in terms of skills, teaching, learning, conceptualization, knowledge and experiences that are part of their institutional context as well as the classroom (Mas, 2011).

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For the Colombian government, the educational sphere must become an active agent that promotes change and lays the foundations for understanding the territory, society and all the processes involved. In this sense, for the Ministry of National Education, a "quality education" contains and promotes research processes within the classroom, since universities are favorable spaces for the generation, production and transmission of new knowledge. Where the accompaniment of processes such as formative research promotes that future professionals understand, deepen, theorize, argue and propose significant changes in their disciplinary or performance area, a scenario that has been proposed by the central government, since 2016 under the denomination of scientific Colombia (Mineducación, 2016).

From this point of view, the Colombia national government has made an important bet within the National Development Plan 2018-2022: Pact for Colombia, a pact for equity; in terms of science, technology and research by raising it as a system to build the knowledge of the future of Colombia; this by taking into account that within its cross-cutting challenges it raises the need for Colombian society and economy to be founded by knowledge, for this it was proposed to promote research as the means that can generate the answers to the most pressing problems of the country (Departamento de Planeación Nacional [DNP], 2019).

The above responds to and contributes to national compliance with the 2023 agenda following the Sustainable Development Goals, which in this case would be contemplated in commitments aimed at improving goals 4: Quality education, 8: Decent work and economic growth, 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure, 16: Peace, justice and solid institutions and 17: Partnerships to achieve the goals (United Nations, 2015).

Research competencies in university institutions

Competence is understood as the acquisition of information and learning related to a specific disciplinary field, aimed at solving situations or problems from a cognitive (knowledge), procedural (know-how) and attitudinal component (Delgado *et al*., 2006; Pimienta, 2012). In this sense, in Higher Education, education focused on competency-based training becomes relevant, allowing the articulation of knowledge, procedure and attitudes so that students are prepared to respond to the problems of their immediate environment through a technological scientific framework that promotes processes such as abstraction, analysis, synthesis, theoretical conceptualization, among others (Marreno & Pérez, 2014).

Research is a component within the educational process that allows articulating and harmonizing the mission axes of Higher Education since through it aspects and problems of reality can be addressed under categories focused on processes such as interpretation, synthesis, the concretion of ideas and argumentation, which together with the scientific method strengthen proposals, approaches and projects that reinforce academic work and therefore the generation of new knowledge and the development of competencies (Tamayo and Tamayo, 2004).

For authors such as Velázquez and Mena (2020), research competencies allow a curricular deepening from which both students and teachers can generate and renew knowledge, through a constant updating of disciplinary knowledge with teaching-learning processes that favor the development of professional competencies and the realization of significant contributions from educational environments.

Thus, the teaching staff of a Higher Education Institution within its pedagogical work must develop and implement teaching methods based on the understanding and use of didactics, the promotion of educational environments that strengthen reflection, analysis and decision making to generate in the student an ability to adapt to different scenarios and social contexts through which through research processes can generate innovative contributions in the construction and transfer of new knowledge.

To this end, it is important that teachers through their academic work link within their pedagogical practices investigative competencies that allow them to generate through the exemplification of their investigative processes the strengthening of the pedagogical experience and the academic performance of students; promoting actions such as observation, concern, criticism, registration, interpretation, analysis and finally the proposal of solutions to the problems detected (Aular et al., 2009; Ayala & Barrera, 2018).

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In the case of law programs, the aim is for teachers to develop and have research skills, encouraging them and their students to recognize themselves in the political, economic and socio-cultural contexts as active and argumentative agents that promote changes in their realities. The above added to processes associated with the review and constant updating of current legal regulations, within the framework of the construction of a critical argumentative position from the aspects and scenarios associated with the law.

In this sense, for authors such as Palacios and Córdoba (2020), teachers have the possibility of generating and promoting competencies associated (as mentioned above) with knowledge, procedure and attitude. This aspect becomes relevant when taking into account that in law programs an education (teaching-learning/teacher-student process) based on research competencies becomes an interactive process of a practical and constructivist nature, which allows the application of specific knowledge in real contexts; in which critical and argumentative positions and relevant contributions from the disciplinary area are assumed.

Thus, according to Carreño (2011), the promotion of research skills in law programs can strengthen such performances as answers to legal problems, interpretation of current regulations based on the foundations and principles of law, identification of legal gaps or contradictions, and formulation of the legal-scientific investigation of a problem, among others.

METHODOLOGY

This research corresponded to an educational inquiry based on the need to identify the research competencies possessed by the teachers linked to the Law program of the Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander, a public university in northeastern Colombia, under a non-experimental-descriptive, cross-sectional-field process. For this purpose, the questionnaire used by another academic program of this university that pursued the same goal was taken and adapted, as detailed in Table 1, where the sections considered in the questionnaire are described.

Table 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE APPLIED

Section	Aspects considered
General information	Data associated with the demographic, academic and research profile of the informant teachers are collected. Multiple-choice questions with a single answer are proposed.
Identification and organization of information	Aimed at determining the sources of information to which teachers resort, the criteria they consider relevant at the time of selecting them and the way in which they organize the data collected. They are evaluated by means of a Likert scale of five levels of competence.
Scientific generation of knowledge	The aim is to inquire about the ability to identify possible research problems, together with the way of approaching the research processes in each of its stages. They are assessed using a Likert scale of five levels of competence.
Dissemination of knowledge	It is oriented to identify the means of promotion of research results preferred by teachers. This makes it possible to identify the level of knowledge they have on this subject. They are assessed employing a Likert scale of five levels of competence.

The questionnaire was applied via Google Forms. This was shared with all the teachers who worked in this program during the second semester of the year 2022, with prior awareness of the importance of the subject in the process of high-quality accreditation of the academic program and the national context. Despite the voluntary nature of the informants to answer the questionnaire, it was possible to guarantee coverage of approximately 89% of the teachers, which is why it could be affirmed that for the conformation of this sample, non-probabilistic sampling was used under the voluntary sampling technique (Martínez, 2012).

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The data collected were processed through the application of descriptive statistical techniques through which it is expected to characterize the scenario in which an event occurs without any manipulation by the researchers and at a specific moment in time (Arias, 2012). For all the above, it is concluded that this work adopts in its methodology the quantitative approach at a cross-sectional descriptive level following a field design, in the collection of data.

The data were exported from Excel and processed using SPSS v25 software to generate the information reported in this research. As referred to by Finol de Franco & Vera Solórzano (2020):

> *"The quantitative, positivist paradigm follows a linear, systematic sequence, a problem is posed, literature review, formal theories, hypothesis formulation, a method is defined with its respective design, population, sample, techniques and instruments for data collection, instruments that must comply with a technical process of validity and reliability, the results are analyzed through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics among other aspects, based on the hypothetic-deductive and inductive method". (p. 7)*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First Section - General Information

The general information on the teachers surveyed was organized in Table 2, from which it is possible to highlight the predominance of the male gender in the group of teachers, observing that one out of every three respondents is between 25 and 35 years of age, in the group that is around 85%, whose ages are between 25 and 55 years old. Regarding their undergraduate education, approximately 94% are lawyers.

It is recognized as a strength of this teaching group that all of them have advanced postgraduate studies, being the Specialization level the most common in one out of two of them. As for the areas of interest in their postgraduate studies, they are in order of recurrence: Family Law, Human Rights, Administrative Law, Public Law, Civil Procedural Law, Criminal and Criminological Sciences Law, and Sports Law; additionally some have opted for training in other areas mainly at the master's degree level in Pedagogical Practice, Senior Management or Quality in Higher Education.

Table 2
DEMOGRAPHIC AND ACADEMIC PROFILE OF TEACHER INFORMANTS

Feature	Response options	Percentage
Genre	Female	42.4%
	Male	57.6%
	Total	100.0%
Age	Between 25 and 35 years old	33.3%
	Between 36 and 45 years old	24.2%
	Between 46 and 55 years old	27.3%
	Between 56 and 65 years old	12.1%
	66 or more years old	3.0%
	Total	100.0%
Undergraduate degree held	Attorney at Law	93.9%
	Degree in Economics and Social Sciences	6.1%
	Total	100.0%
Postgraduate level achieved	Specialization	51.5%
	Master's Degree	42.4%
	PhD	6.1%
	Total	100.0%

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Have you received research training?	Yes	72.7%
	No	27.3%
	Total	100.0%
Have you participated in research projects?	Yes	66.7%
	No	33.3%
	Total	100.0%
Have you made any presentations in the last five years?	Yes	24.2%
	No	75.8%
	Total	100.0%
Have you published?	Yes	69.7%
	No	30.3%
	Total	100.0%
Do you belong to any research group?	Yes	27.3%
	No	72.7%
	Total	100.0%
Do you have CvLac from Minciencias?	Yes	51.5%
	No	48.5%
	Total	100.0%

Regarding basic research competencies, approximately 73% said that they have been qualified in research processes and 67% of them have participated in research projects, but only 36% have published the results derived from these projects.

This percentage shows a weakness in research competencies, since conducting good research is as important as disseminating its results to the community that might be interested in them (Sánchez & Roque, 2021). In this sense, approximately 24% have presented a paper in the last five years.

Of these, 48% have published articles, 9% have published book chapters and the remaining percentage have published case studies. In addition, one out of every three teachers surveyed has never published an academic paper.

Concerning the process of characterization of teachers, only 27% are actively linked to a research group supported by the academic program, and one out of two respondents have created and updated their CvLac.

Since the items in the following three sections of the questionnaire were evaluated using a Likert scale with five levels, a reduction to three levels was made to facilitate their interpretation. The reduction corresponded to the options “Not at all competent and Not very competent” that were grouped into a single category called “Not very competent” which corresponded to a too basic level of skills; in contrast, the options “Very competent and Fully competent” were grouped into a single category called “Very competent” characterized by exceptional mastery of skills. The intermediate level of this scale remained constant, being identified as “Competent” characterized by an adequate and/or pertinent level of the mentioned skills.

Section Two - Identification and organization of information

In order to simplify the presentation of these results, Table 3 shows that approximately 86% of the teachers surveyed consider themselves very competent or competent in the various aspects mentioned in this category, highlighting that at least one out of every two teachers stated that they make use of specialized platforms available through the Internet to locate valid and reliable information used with a critical attitude.

Likewise, two out of ten teachers surveyed stated that they need to reinforce aspects such as the differentiation of academic publications from non-scientific ones; through access to primary and quality sources, a situation that prevents them from adequately organizing the state of the art of a research topic.

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TABLE 3
DESCRIPTION OF THE ITEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE IDENTIFICATION AND ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION

Aspect evaluated	Competence level		
	Very	Competent	Little
I identify sources of information that facilitate my research processes.	33.3%	57.6%	9.1%
I identify scientific and academic databases to support my research processes.	36.4%	51.5%	12.1%
I can distinguish between prestigious scientific and non-scientific publications.	33.3%	36.4%	30.3%
I easily locate valid and reliable information available on the internet.	51.5%	48.5%	0.0%
I use the information available on the Internet with a critical and reflective attitude.	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
I use specialized platforms to support my research.	51.5%	36.4%	12.1%
I order the search results according to the research interest.	36.4%	48.5%	15.1%
I select sources according to their relevance and affinity for the study.	48.5%	39.4%	12.1%
I avoid concatenating quotes without commentary or relating them to each other.	39.4%	39.4%	21.2%
I can synthetically and orderly expose the previously published knowledge related to the research.	42.4%	39.4%	18.2%
I extract original ideas from other authors and incorporate them appropriately to support my arguments.	48.5%	39.4%	12.1%
I try as much as possible to use only primary sources.	33.3%	45.5%	21.2%
Average	43.4%	42.9%	13.6%

Third Section - Scientific Generation of Knowledge

Table 4 shows that approximately 80% of the teachers surveyed consider themselves very competent or competent in various aspects of this category of analysis, highlighting that at least one out of every two respondents assured that they possess competencies in everything related to the identification of research problems motivated by real situations, recognizing the added value that their work should contribute to the knowledge society.

Three out of ten teachers surveyed stated that they need to become qualified in the use of statistical tools that contribute to the processing of data and at the same time allow them to identify the main findings derived from their research processes.

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Table 4
DESCRIPTION OF THE ITEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SCIENTIFIC GENERATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Aspect evaluated	Competence level		
	Very	Competent	Little
I recognize in the surrounding reality situations or problems that can be the relevant object of an investigation.	39.4%	51.5%	9.1%
I can adequately formulate a real-life situation as a research problem.	45.5%	45.5%	9.0%
It is clear to me that all research must make an original and relevant contribution to a specific area of knowledge.	54.6%	42.4%	3.0%
I can formulate in terms of hypotheses or research questions about a scientific problem.	54.6%	36.4%	9.0%
I know how to base ideas from other authors to build an argument.	45.4%	51.5%	3.1%
I can formulate in clear and precise terms the purpose of an investigation.	48.5%	45.5%	6.0%
I distinguish among research methodologies the one most appropriate to a given problem.	36.4%	42.4%	21.2%
I selected the study participants through procedures consistent with the methodologies employed.	27.3%	48.5%	24.2%
I recognize the type of data collection instrument appropriate to the nature and purpose of the research.	39.4%	42.4%	18.2%
I know the basic tools of statistical analysis for the treatment of the results obtained in research.	18.2%	45.5%	36.3%
I can produce tables or graphs summarizing the product of my research.	24.2%	39.4%	36.4%
I am familiar with methods for analyzing data of a non-numerical nature.	33.3%	24.2%	42.5%
I can contrast the results obtained with those of other research and theoretical positions.	33.3%	36.4%	30.3%
I am aware of the ethical elements that must be followed in research involving human subjects.	39.4%	36.4%	24.2%
Average	38.5%	42.0%	19.5%

Fourth Section - Knowledge Dissemination

Table 5 shows that approximately 59% of the teachers surveyed consider themselves very competent or competent in various aspects of this category of analysis, highlighting that at least one out of two teachers said that they know the various spaces that are conducive to the dissemination of research results such as academic events or through the publication of articles in indexed journals, recognizing the particularities or editorial policies of each dissemination option; likewise, they stated that they are active agents in academic networks or virtual learning communities that contribute to the collective construction of knowledge. In contrast with what was referenced by the other half of the teachers who recognized the need to be active in academic networks while participating as speakers in academic events.

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Table 5
DESCRIPTION OF THE ITEMS ASSOCIATED WITH KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

Aspect evaluated	Competence level		
	Very	Competent	Little
I am familiar with the different scenarios for research dissemination.	30.3%	36.4%	33.3%
I distinguish the need to adapt the format of the research results to the space in which they are presented.	24.3%	36.4%	39.3%
I participate in events to disseminate the results of my research.	21.2%	18.2%	60.6%
I recognize the importance of standardized norms for scientific publications.	24.3%	45.5%	30.2%
I can compose and write a research report properly.	39.4%	48.5%	12.1%
I participate in networks, based on the use of technologies, for the collective construction of knowledge.	21.3%	33.3%	45.4%
I participate in virtual communities for the collective construction of knowledge with the support of ICT.	24.2%	30.3%	45.5%
I participate in collaborative projects, through the use of ICT, for the collective construction of knowledge.	24.2%	24.2%	51.6%
I appropriately select the means of dissemination of research according to the relevance of the results obtained to the editorial line.	18.2%	30.3%	51.5%
Average	25.3%	33.7%	41.1%

By way of synthesis, Figure 1 shows the comparison of the average obtained from the three categories of analysis of the research competencies of the teachers of the Law program, recognizing that the main weaknesses expressed by the respondents are concentrated in the competencies associated with the dissemination of knowledge, which offers an opportunity for improvement in the academic program.

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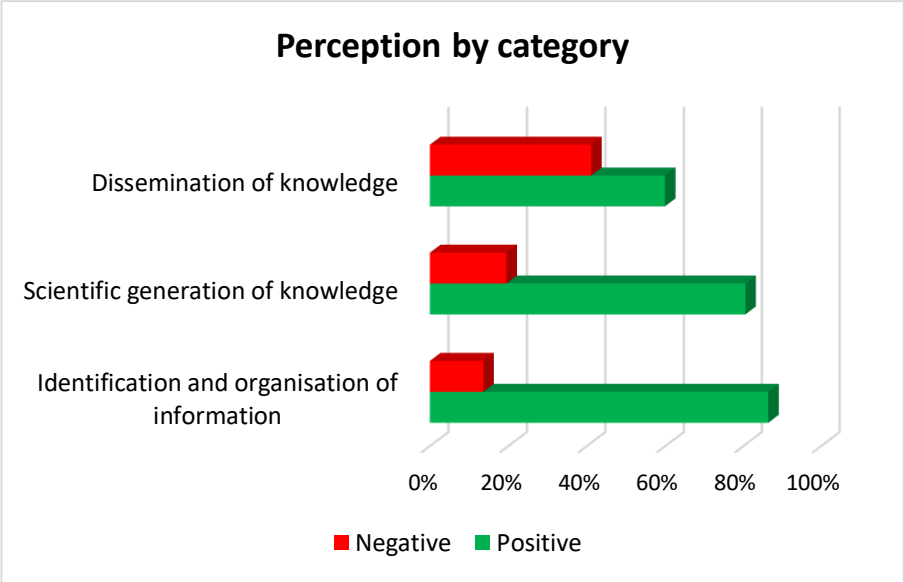
Figure 1. Comparison of teachers' perception of competence according to evaluation categories.



CONCLUSIONS

Within the educational field, the new commitments of the national government and the goals set by the National Education Institutions, outline research as an articulating element and generator of knowledge, which allows strengthening the competencies and disciplinary work from a responsible and relevant perspective that responds to the needs of the local, national and international contexts.

In this sense, university teachers have been qualifying themselves for research competencies, since these have become an important pedagogical tool that allows for strengthening the mission axes of the Higher Education Institutions, the research units (Research Groups-Semilleros), the profiles and performance of teachers, and the formative research in students and the profile of graduate graduates. This is also reflected in the recognition and positioning of the universities and their programs in different contexts or spaces of knowledge exchange.

Based on the survey referenced and adapted for this research, it is highlighted that the professors attached to the Law program of the Universidad Francisco de Paula Santander, show an interest in continuing education that is reflected in graduate studies. This scenario is positive when considering that these studies strengthen research skills and generate bets that lead to the realization of research projects that feed the disciplinary work of the academic program.

It is also concluded that in spite of the interest with respect to the qualification in research processes, it was detected as a weakness: the non-publication of the results derived from the research. It is recommended in this aspect to carry out corrective actions that allow the socialization and visibility of the projects and their results, taking into account the dissemination of knowledge, the social appropriation of knowledge and bibliographic production (research articles, book chapters, books resulting from research) are important elements that contribute to the positioning of research within the academic programs.

In addition to the above, it was detected that teachers should be qualified in associated aspects such as the identification and access to primary sources, basic academic writing standards and the use of statistical tools since this can influence the scientific rigor of research and can also multiply the opportunities for publication in high impact journals or scenarios. Now, for the scientific generation of knowledge, a high level of competence was found in the teachers concerning analysis processes, a fact that is considered relevant for the strengthening of research competencies, as well as per the spirit of the disciplinary area of Law, being highly relevant for the academic work and, favoring compliance in the resolution of conflicts and problems of the contexts, societies

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and territories in the national order, following what is established in the National Development Plan and the international order with the Sustainable Development Goals - Agenda 2030.

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