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University Professor: A Profession With Diverse Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Research is currently considered the key element of social development. A society that does research and generates new knowledge acquires greater development and well-being; in contrast, a society that does not do so is condemned to backwardness and underdevelopment. In this sense, universities become engines that drive the search for and construction of new knowledge capable of generating social transformations, so university professors must have an adequate scientific attitude. The objective of this research is to analyze the scientific performance of Colombian public university professors and to propose theoretical lines to consolidate intellectual production. The methodology used is deductive rationalist, ethnomethodological approach and explanatory level, with the participation of academic-scientific actors (key informants) in five public universities in the country. The main results show that the operational core of the research system in universities is complex and involves diverse processes, resources and actors that require policies and leaders capable of guaranteeing adequate cohesion and collaboration for maximum performance. Full-time professors have the greatest responsibility for research since they generally have a master's or doctoral degree and are linked to the institution on a full-time basis, although most of them are engaged in academic and administrative tasks that absorb their time and affect their scientific performance.

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It was also observed that there are still full-time professors with doctoral or master's degrees who have never conducted research with published results and are therefore unknown to society. The main conclusions indicate that various factors facilitate and inhibit the scientific performance of teachers, which can be strengthened or counteracted with policies and strategies of the science, technology and innovation system and at the institutional level, which promote adequate scientific performance at the personal, organizational and social levels.

Keywords: Scientific Attitude, Intellectual Production, Scientific Performance.

1. Introduction

The current trends of society seek to generate solutions to the problems of the regional, national and international context through the scientific and technological capabilities that are developed in the university context, through science, technology and innovation activities, which generates a greater responsibility for university teachers, who must contribute from their area of knowledge to the fulfillment of the mission processes of the Colombian public institution of teaching, research, and extension.

According to the dynamics and variety of the axes or lines of research trend, it is important to reflect on the attitude of teachers and their role in the dynamics of scientific production as a result of the research process, since universities, as indicated by Narváez & Burgos (2011), is conceived as centers of intellectual productivity, taking into account that in the academic field it is research that generates knowledge. Therefore, it should be considered a production process. In this way, research activity has transcendental importance, but in the social composition called knowledge society, the generation of new knowledge is indispensable, and it is the university professor who is called to produce and review them.

The purpose of the Colombian public university is to train future professionals capable of taking on social challenges and changes, who are constantly learning and updating their knowledge, which requires motivated teachers to meet the demands of training and quality of education. This requires higher education institutions to link teachers with master's and doctoral degrees to strengthen academic and scientific productivity and establish cooperation links with the productive sector to generate social impact.

This research allows an analysis of the scientific performance of Colombian public university teachers through the definition of Emerging Categories (EC) such as teaching performance and scientific attitude, supported by testimonies, observations and documentation.

1. Methodology

This research was carried out with a deductive rationalist methodology, in which knowledge is conceived as a plausible and provisional explanation of a world accessed through intersubjective references. The paradigm used is ethnomethodological, according to Martínez (2004) definitions of this method. The paradigm used is ethnomethodological, which, according to ethnomethodology, aims at specifying the essence or the what of social practices within highly circumscribed or specialized domains of knowledge and action. The heart of ethnomethodology consists in the

interpretation of reality from the different perspectives it may have, and for this, it is necessary to know the interests, beliefs, values, attitudes and culture of the people who make it up and give it its meaning.

According to Flick (2004), this approach analyzes the problem of how people produce social reality through interactive processes. Its central concern is the study of the methods that members use to produce reality in everyday life (...). The focus of interest is not the subjective meaning for the participants of interaction and its content, but how this interaction is organized. Its purpose is to understand the "how", it is not so much in the meanings of the participants, but in the construction that the interaction produces among them and for them.

The research has a descriptive character since it points out how scientific knowledge is produced inside the Colombian public university, which are its inhibitors and which are its facilitators. For the collection of information, ten in-depth interviews were conducted in the main public universities of Colombia in 2018.

To process the information, an initial categorization was proposed based on the literature review, as shown in Table 1. Then a structuring process was developed through a descriptive synthesis of premises, criteria and indicators based on the findings and the contrast with theoretical and conceptual references, supported by Grounded Theory or Rooted Theory Strauss & Corbin (2002). For this theory, in qualitative research, various data are collected that can later be converted into information, after a process of categorization or grouping according to their properties. Once the data were categorized, they were described and interpreted according to their characteristics, properties, dimensions and interrelationships.

Table 1. Initial Categories

Category
Teaching Performance
Scientific Attitude

For the development of the category, Teaching Performance, the general theory of systems is taken as the central axis of discussion (Bertalanffy, 1979; Parsons, 1968). This theory has been used in several studies since it allows to easily analyze social phenomena, organizational processes, organizational behavior, organizational dynamics and relationship with the environment, as is the case of the object of this research.

The university is considered as an open social system, where individuals interact with common aims and goals, in the function of society, which orients its actions according to its needs and these become the input that the institution transforms and returns to it in the form of a product (knowledge). In other words, the university is a system with an elaborating and transforming element, based on inputs, which it converts into a product that it delivers to society.

For the second category, scientific attitude, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is used (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972), which considers behavioral intention as the best indicator or predictor of behavior and contemplates two types of determining variables, the attitude toward behavior and the individual's subjective norm.

The attitude toward the behavior refers to the predisposition, favorable or unfavorable, to develop a certain behavior and is the result of the beliefs that the individual has about the behavior and the evaluation that this one makes of this belief, whereas the subjective norm is the result of the feelings that the individual has, that the opinion that other people have about his behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972).

For each of the emerging categories, data triangulation is performed, consisting of the verification and comparison of the information obtained at different times through the instruments used in the collection of information, which are direct observation, interview and documentary analysis.

According to Okuda & Gómez-Restrepo (2005), Triangulation refers to the use of various methods, data sources, theories, researchers or environments in the study of a phenomenon, to corroborate the findings or allow the data found to be analyzed from a broader perspective.

2. Results

From the analysis and codification of the interviews and documentation collected, five (5) categories with eighteen (18) subcategories emerge that support the findings of the research and allowed describing the scientific performance of university teachers. Based on these findings, the analysis and description of the information are performed (Rodríguez et al., 1998). It refers to the "treatment of data that is generally carried out preserving its textual nature, implementing categorization tasks and without resorting to statistical techniques" (p. 201).

The results of the Emerging Categories (EC), supported by testimonies, observations and documentation, are presented below. The information is supported by the general characteristics, that is, the contextual relationship, some representative indicators and the phenomenological implications, through which the researcher theorizes on time to define and explain the circumstances that characterize the problem investigated.

3.1 Research as a system

Social needs as a source of research. The responsibility of the university is changing as social needs change, in which scientific and technological advances are also affected. The university as an influential actor in society and a leader in the generation of knowledge has based its actions mainly on the need to solve social problems that allow it to transform in a real and positive way the conditions of its inhabitants. Considering Bojalil & Luis (2008), "If we do not take a course of change, we fall into a self-destructive routine, the university stagnates in time, it remains outside the advances that society demands, whether scientific, technical, humanistic" (p.18).

In this sense, the informants are aware of the university's responsibility to society and consider that social problems and dynamics are the main sources of research. Some researchers do not perceive the policy of social cohesion, therefore, their search for sources of research and interaction with society is given more by their initiative than by institutional frameworks.

The University, as an open system, must have an interaction with the environment, receiving from it the social needs that become sources of research, although this interaction is more at the mercy of the researcher, than a policy, a process or an institutional mechanism.

The Operational core. Systems theory considers that a system is a set of elements that are part of a system, with relationships of a greater or lesser degree of dependence, collaboration and complementarity among them. The core of the system is formed by a series of elements that work in a coordinated way to transform needs and inputs into products or services (Buckley, 1973).

As stated by the General Theory of Systems, a system is a set of elements related to each other in a logical and orderly way in the function of a purpose or objective to obtain satisfactory results. In this research, five key elements were found, which are part of the operational core of the system and have a direct impact on the scientific performance of the teacher: Power Circles, Organizational Development, Infrastructure, Human Resources and availability of teacher's time for research.

As for the circles of power defined by Gregori (2015), the play of forces within an organization that are generally made up of three well-defined poles: the Officials who hold power, the Opponents who play a role of control and observation and the Oscillators who, according to the conditions, can join one of the two previous forces. According to this theory, Social Cybernetics, all organizations have this connotation and therefore are divided into three power groups.

These groups exist in the University, with defined behaviors and differences that deepen in times of appointment of directors and that may remain over time. These circles or power groups have a great influence on the development of the research process, for better or for worse. Those who are on the side of the government or officialism naturally find favorable conditions for its development, while those who are in the opposition believe they have a hostile environment and unfavorable conditions that do not allow them to fully carry out their task.

The second identified component of the system refers to organizational development, which is defined as "a planned organization-wide effort to (Beckhard, 1969), defined as "a planned organization-wide effort to increase the effectiveness and health of the organization through planned interventions in organizational processes, using knowledge from behavioral science". This planned change based on university policies has been seen positively, and scientific productivity has been improving; every day there is greater productivity in the universities observed.

The other factors identified are infrastructure, human resources and availability of the teacher's time, which can be grouped as resources available for planning and establishing strategies to achieve the objectives and which are necessary and fundamental for the normal development of the activities. These factors show that, although the physical infrastructure of the university has improved substantially in recent years, it seems that it is not sufficient to achieve the objectives.

For human resources, it is the permanent professors who are responsible for carrying out the research functions, since they generally have a master's or doctoral degree and their relationship with the institution is indefinite; therefore, the management of resources for research projects falls on this group of professionals. In addition to their academic, research and outreach work, the permanent professors also perform administrative tasks, some of them with two or three positions, which necessarily make it difficult for them to fully comply with all these responsibilities.

On the other hand, the main function of full-time professors is teaching, and although some of them have the spirit and desire to do research, their contractual nature does not allow them to do so,

mainly because a research project lasts at least two or three academic semesters and their contract is only for one.

In conclusion, it can be said that both in the norms, theoretical support and information gathered from informants, the University has every intention of orienting the university towards modernization, both in its infrastructure and resources in order to achieve greater productivity and scientific positioning, but in practice the evidence shows that there are "bottlenecks" that have not yet been overcome.

Interaction with the Environment. Social systems, including the University, do not operate in a vacuum, completely isolated from other phenomena; on the contrary, the system has an environment, that is, it is surrounded by other phenomena or systems with which it interacts, receives matter, and energy, and delivers products. The evolutionary capacity of a system depends on the ability to move towards more complex forms of differentiation and integration and on the ability to deal with the setbacks and opportunities that characterize the environment.

According to the normative observations and the information provided by the interviewees, it can be concluded that the channels of communication between university and society depend to a great extent on the expertise, availability and experience of the researcher, rather than on an institutional policy or process.

The informants consider that there is a need for greater cohesion between the University, Society, the State and Economic Associations to work together, research the real problems of society and generate knowledge capable of bringing about social transformations.

The knowledge generated (products of the system). The purpose of any system is to receive raw materials and through processes called elaborating elements, convert them into useful products for society. In the case of the university, social needs are received, and through the processes of research and innovation, technological proposals, models, theories, recommendations, studies or strategies that should solve social problems and improve their living conditions are generated.

Research in Colombia generates new knowledge and technological development that is reflected in scientific publications, software development, patents, cartographies, industrial designs, circuit design, artistic works, etc. Different entities present the ranking of this production, and this has allowed universities to share and adjust their systems to create the culture and scientific and technological productivity.

Retro-feeding circuit (evaluation of the action, feedback and adjustments). Systems theory takes into account the logical nature of the processes, which generally constitute stages such as identifying the problem, determining the solution alternatives, putting it into practice, and determining its efficiency through continuous review and feedback, at whatever stage is necessary. Bertalanffy (1986) defines feedback as "The homeostatic maintenance of a characteristic state or the pursuit of a goal, based on circular causal chains and mechanisms that return information about deviations from the state to be maintained or the goal to be achieved" (p.46).

The information gathered indicates that research for Colombian public university professors is not mandatory, but rather corresponds to the response of each individual to personal, economic and

social recognition incentives. Research is done on the initiative of each researcher, but if it is not done, nothing happens; in fact, some teachers with master's and doctoral degrees have never carried out a research project.

Some universities in Colombia are already measuring scientific productivity, establishing goals and indicators by department and even by person, which must necessarily be reflected in the scientific performance of the institution. Of course, if there is a responsibility to achieve goals, there must also be the necessary resources to achieve them, such as time, financial resources, means of dissemination, and all the conditions inherent to the process of knowledge production.

Another type of evaluation necessary in research is that of impact on society so that it can be observed whether social problems are improving as a consequence of the proposals or products of the research, in addition to establishing who is benefiting from this new knowledge and what other research has arisen as a consequence of the results obtained.

The follow-up of the impact caused by the research practically depends on its nature and whether it has been co-financed with other entities, otherwise it practically remains in the presentation of articles and papers, which can be followed up through bibliometric mechanisms, but it is left more to the author's initiative.

3.2 Facilitating and inhibiting factors of scientific production

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972) considers behavioral intention as the best indicator or predictor of behavior, and contemplates two types of determining variables: the attitude towards behavior and the subjective norm of the individual.

In this sense, Fishbein & Ajzen (1972) state that the attitude toward behavior refers to the predisposition, favorable or unfavorable, to develop a certain behavior and is the result of the beliefs that the individual has about the behavior and the evaluation that he makes of this belief, while the subjective norm is the result of the feelings that the individual has, that the opinion that other people have about his behavior, which in turn is derived from two basic underlying factors: the normative beliefs that the individual attributes to the persons of reference and the motivation to behave following the wishes of these people.

Facilitating elements. Under this perspective, the factors or elements can facilitate or inhibit the teacher's attitude towards research. For this purpose, two categories emerging from the study will be taken: Facilitating elements and Inhibiting elements. In a very general way, it can be considered that human behavior can be predicted based on psychological and social factors, for example, affective factors (moods and emotions), cognitive factors (beliefs and expectations), or social networks and norms that will act facilitating or inhibiting the behavior of the individual.

The main motivator observed in this research is related to personal and social growth achieved through the publication of papers in scientific journals and the presentation of results in national or international congresses. These events provide spaces to create new ideas, research alliances or the formation of research networks that strengthen the research capacity and spirit and at the same time generate the necessary synergy to tackle new projects.

The economic factor is an important motivator for the realization of work and in this case of research. Institutional norms create mechanisms to reward those who generate research, through the recognition of salary points. A teacher with a high capacity and attitude towards research can ostensibly improve his or her salary by publishing books or scientific articles.

Notwithstanding the existing mechanisms, research shows that it is not a definitive element when it comes to generating scientific attitude, and informants believe that the reward is not enough for the immense effort made to achieve the necessary results and access the economic benefits, as journal publishers become increasingly demanding and the learning curve is quite wasteful.

The formative aspect of the individual is always definitive in attitude. The more academic training and experience one has, the easier it is to face challenges and produce better results; this applies to any human activity. As it has been said, research in Colombia is mainly in the hands of universities and turn in the hands of professors, so universities tend to hire professionals with master's or doctoral degrees who have the greatest capacity for scientific production.

There are also those who, being career university professors, feel privileged by society and believe they have a debt that must be paid to those who did not have the same opportunity and find in research a way to give something back to society through the creation of novel ideas that help generate employment and social development.

Inhibiting factors. Several elements inhibit scientific production at the university, among which are academic training, power circles, research culture, excessive paperwork to access research resources, lack of commitment and experience of professors, the comfort that professors feel when performing an administrative position and at the same time the difficulty of time due to the multiplicity of tasks and finally the lack of productivity indicators per teacher.

The task of research has its complexities and to be able to perform it successfully requires adequate training such as a master's degree, doctorate or at least research seminars. In addition, it requires many hours of work to understand the problem to be addressed and the methodology to achieve it, which can have a rather long and delayed learning curve. Some teachers have never carried out a research project other than the one required by the university to graduate, so it is difficult to approach this task and present satisfactory results.

Some permanent professors, with master's or doctorate degrees, perform administrative tasks that inhibit their intellectual production capacity, due to the multiplicity of tasks and therefore the availability of time for research is very limited or almost non-existent. Some professors prefer to perform administrative positions since there they find a comfort zone and achieve some salary points.

Another element that inhibits scientific production is related to the circles of power since many teachers believe that to access institutional resources it is necessary to be in the circle of friends of those who administer them. Those who believe they are outside the circle of power of those in power believe they are at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues who are, arguing that the procedure for accessing resources and benefits is greater and that they always encounter barriers that prevent them from doing so.

One of the biggest barriers to research is related to the rules for professors to access resources and carry out research projects. The rules are not kind to teachers who have this type of contract and although not all of them have the time and the will to carry out projects, some have the training and the impetus, but they cannot do it because the rules prevent them from doing so.

Finally, and under the perspective of the theory of reasoned action, which argues that for the individual to act with decision and commitment in the face of a phenomenon, society must validate or at least not censure his or her actions. In this case, the Institution does not demand and therefore does not validate that some teachers, having the required time and training, do not develop research activities, because the teacher may or may not perform them, since there are no binding norms or indicators that require the teacher's scientific performance.

It can be concluded then that there are not only psychological and social factors that inhibit the attitude and behavior towards research, but that it is the system itself, in its daily performance, that establishes unfavorable barriers to scientific production in the university, but that is correctable and can be intervened in favor of the teacher, the institution and society.

Conclusions

Since the German university model devised by Wilhelm von Humboldt at the beginning of the 19th century, it has been established that the production of new knowledge is the essential function of the university, leaving the teaching function in second place. This concept has only recently been included in the mission of universities, but at the same time it has been a phenomenon of a great explosion, that is, all higher education institutions have adopted this model, starting with those in the United States.

The Colombian university adopts this model and assumes the research function as its mission through the 1991 Constitution and Law 30 of 1992. These norms allow modernizing the university in its structure, organization and educational models to meet the demands of scientific and technological development and the professional market. According to Soto (2005) “Research is introduced as a basic element for the quality of university education” (p. 120).

One perspective from which the scientific production of the Colombian University can be understood is from the Systems Theory, which considers that every organization is an open social system in which, through procedures, social needs, called inputs, are converted into products or services that are useful to society. The system is in continuous interaction with the environment in which it operates, receives and returns information that defines the nature of its actions and must be a generator of social transformation.

The sources of university research are the observation of social problems, although some researchers do not perceive the policy of cohesion of the university with society, therefore, their search for sources of research and interaction is more on their initiative, rather than by institutional frameworks.

In the operative nucleus of the research system, five key elements were found, which have a direct impact on the scientific performance of the teacher: Power Circles, Organizational Development, Infrastructure, Human Resources and availability of teacher's time for research. The

circles of power have a great influence on the development of the research process, for better or for worse. Those who are on the side of the government or officialdom naturally find favorable conditions for its development, while those who are in the opposition believe they have a hostile environment and unfavorable conditions that do not allow them to fully carry out their task.

The factors of infrastructure, human resources, financial resources and availability of time are sufficient in the light of the informants, especially because teachers must perform multiple functions of research, teaching, extension and management, which prevent them from developing an adequate scientific production.

Research for Colombian public university professors is not mandatory, but rather corresponds to the response of each individual to personal, economic and social recognition incentives. Research is done on the initiative of each researcher, but if it is not done, nothing happens; in fact, some professors with master's and doctoral degrees have never carried out a research project.

The main facilitators in the scientific attitude of teachers are those related to personal and social growth achieved through the publication of papers in scientific journals and the presentation of results in national or international congresses. The economic factor is an important motivator, but it is not definitive. The formative aspect of the individual is always definitive in the attitude towards research.

The main inhibitors refer to the multiplicity of tasks that teachers have, and the circles of power existing in the institutions since many teachers believe that to access institutional resources it is necessary to be in the circle of friends of those who administer them.

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