

Educational model and research levels in the professional training of lawyers

Modelo educacional e níveis de pesquisa na formação profissional de advogados

Modelo educativo y niveles de investigación en la formación profesional de los abogados

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 02-05-2023

Revised Version: 30-08-2024

Accepted: 17-09-2024

Published: 04-10-2024

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Manuscript type: Article

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Science-Metrix Classification (Domain):

Economic & Social Sciences

Main topic:

Lawyer education and training

Main practical implications:

This research highlights the need for policy reforms in legal education, emphasizing stronger integration between academic training and real-world challenges to enhance societal impact in emerging countries comparable to Ecuador.

Originality/value:

The study examines the disconnect between legal education and practical societal needs in Ecuador, offering insights for restructuring educational models to align with constitutional and developmental priorities in emerging economies.

ABSTRACT

The professional training of lawyers in a globalized context, where knowledge, social, and natural phenomena significantly impact people's quality of life and the environment, is a complex process. Fundamental changes in the educational model and teaching-learning processes are required to address the future challenges of a constantly changing world. This manuscript aims to analyze the research levels proposed in the educational models of Higher Education Institutions and their relationship with the professional training of lawyers in Ecuador. The researchers used a mixed approach, applying inductive, analytical, and descriptive methods. The research is descriptive and has a non-experimental design. The study included 50 eighth-semester students and 20 research professors of the Law career from public universities in Zone 3 of Ecuador. A Likert model questionnaire with 6 questions was administered. The results indicate that the educational model and the levels of research applied in the professional training of lawyers are not aligned with constitutional and legal provisions. Therefore, it is concluded that the research results do not address the needs and problems of social environments and contexts, and do not have a significant positive impact on the quality of life of citizens.

Keywords: Law education, pedagogical research, law training, skills development, learning, prevocational education, scientific research, Ecuador.

RESUMO

A formação profissional de advogados em um contexto globalizado, em que o conhecimento e os fenômenos sociais e naturais afetam significativamente a qualidade de vida das pessoas e o meio ambiente, é um processo complexo. Ele exige mudanças fundamentais no modelo educacional e nos processos de ensino-aprendizagem para enfrentar os desafios futuros de um mundo em constante mudança. Este manuscrito tem como objetivo analisar os níveis de pesquisa propostos nos modelos educacionais das instituições de ensino superior e sua relação com a formação profissional de advogados no Equador. Os pesquisadores utilizaram uma abordagem mista, aplicando métodos indutivos, analíticos e descritivos. A pesquisa é descritiva e de desenho não experimental. O estudo incluiu 50 alunos do oitavo semestre e 20 professores pesquisadores da carreira de Direito de universidades públicas da Zona 3 do Equador. Foi aplicado um questionário do modelo Likert com 6 perguntas. Os resultados indicam que o modelo educacional e os níveis de pesquisa aplicados na formação profissional dos advogados não estão alinhados com as disposições constitucionais e legais. Portanto, conclui-se que os resultados da pesquisa não atendem às necessidades e aos problemas dos ambientes e contextos sociais e não têm um impacto positivo significativo na qualidade de vida dos cidadãos.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de direito, pesquisa pedagógica, treinamento em direito, desenvolvimento de habilidades, aprendizagem, educação pré-profissional, pesquisa científica, Equador.

RESUMEN

La formación profesional de los abogados en un contexto globalizado, en el que los conocimientos y los fenómenos sociales y naturales inciden significativamente en la calidad de vida de las personas y en el medio ambiente, es un proceso complejo. Requiere cambios fundamentales en el modelo educativo y en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje para enfrentar los retos futuros de un mundo en constante transformación. Este manuscrito tiene como objetivo analizar los niveles de investigación propuestos en los modelos educativos de las Instituciones de Educación Superior y su relación con la formación profesional de los abogados en Ecuador. Los investigadores utilizaron un enfoque mixto, aplicando métodos inductivos, analíticos y descriptivos. La investigación es descriptiva y de diseño no experimental. En el estudio participaron 50 estudiantes de octavo semestre y 20 profesores investigadores de la carrera de Derecho de universidades públicas de la Zona 3 del Ecuador. Se administró un cuestionario modelo Likert con 6 preguntas. Los resultados indican que el modelo educativo y los niveles de investigación aplicados en la formación profesional de los abogados no están alineados con las disposiciones constitucionales y legales. Por lo tanto, se concluye que los resultados de la investigación no responden a las necesidades y problemas de los entornos y contextos sociales, y no tienen un impacto positivo significativo en la calidad de vida de los ciudadanos.

Palabras clave: Educación en derecho, investigación pedagógica, formación en derecho, desarrollo de habilidades, aprendizaje, educación prevocacional, investigación científica, Ecuador.

INTRODUCTION

Research is an important task in both academic and scientific fields, as it is an essential pillar for the production of knowledge, the understanding of the world and the drive for progress. Research produces hypotheses, theories and solutions to specific problems by systematizing and analyzing data. According to Art. 350 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), "the purpose of the Higher Education System is academic and professional training with a scientific and humanistic vision", academic and professional training with a scientific vision, seeks to train students to understand and participate in the world of science, this approach is not only limited to the training of professional scientists, but also seeks to prepare all citizens to make informed decisions on scientific and technological issues; Academic and professional training with a humanistic vision focuses on the integral development of the individual, promoting not only the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills, but also the development of values, attitudes and competencies that allow people to develop with empathy, social responsibility and ethics in a complex and constantly changing world.

According to Art. 13 of the Organic Law of Higher Education (2010), "are functions of the Higher Education System, guarantee the right to higher education through teaching, research and its link with society", in this sense, the educational model based on research, is an approach that is based on a set of activities aimed at creating new knowledge, advancing existing knowledge and solving problems in a variety of fields of knowledge is known as. Universities, research centers and other institutions dedicated to intellectual production perform this function. The substantive function of research refers to the fundamental role that research plays in society, but it also has an impact on the formation of human capital, since it fosters the training and development of researchers and scientists who contribute to the generation of new knowledge and the advancement of society.

The substantive function of research is a fundamental pillar for the advancement of knowledge, scientific and technological progress, the solution of problems and the improvement of the quality of life. Universities, research centers and other institutions dedicated to intellectual production have the responsibility to promote and strengthen this function, ensuring the creation of new knowledge and its application for the benefit of society. The research model suggested for the Law program is based on the following levels: formative research; academic and scientific research; research for development and innovation; research for the development of social environments and contexts; and scientific ethics and honesty.

The inquiry-centered educational model is an innovative way of teaching that emphasizes students to develop critical thinking skills, creativity and autonomy, this method encourages inquiry and discovery through active research and problem solving rather than just transmitting information. Students become researchers and actively participate in developing questions, collecting data, analyzing information and presenting results, through this activity, students will develop important skills for holistic development.

Aldana, et al., (2021), say, education cannot be seen as an isolated or dichotomous entity; it is a transversal factor that plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of achieving the sustainable development goals, in this sense, it is necessary to move to an integrative model where educational actors have the opportunity to build holistic and interrelated knowledge with the global world and the multiple needs to be overcome to achieve a peaceful society based on productive progress. In this regard, Moreira & Gámez (2019), point out that, in education, research is a crucial component of knowledge generation, not only within the classroom, but also in the daily life of students, this allows conjugating the generation of an active subject from the perspective of a student who seeks to cooperate in the generation of his own knowledge, being the teacher an advisor who accompanies the educational process.

In this context, the research-centered educational model encourages students to work together and learn together, students participate in research projects, exchange ideas and points of view, and learn to work collaboratively to solve problems, this way of teaching improves their social and emotional skills and their ability to work in a team. Students not only acquire theoretical information, but also have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in real situations. This practice allows them to experience the concepts and theories learned in class firsthand, which helps them improve their understanding and retention of information.

Guillén et al. (2024) point out that in a rapidly changing information society, it will not be possible to achieve strategic objectives in both the public and private university sector without the support of teacher-researchers in the directional development and improvement of digital competencies (focused on research, teaching, use of modern electronic services). In this sense, the research-centered educational model emerges as a proposal that transforms the student into an active agent of learning, fostering critical thinking and the ability to solve problems, which, together with technological development, represents an opportunity to transform education and prepare new generations for success in an increasingly complex and changing world; for their part, teachers must be trained to integrate research and technology in their pedagogical practices, and to guide students in the process of autonomous learning.

The need for reform in legal education and professional training of lawyers

The professional training of lawyers faces significant challenges that necessitate urgent reforms in educational models across various contexts. In Ecuador, the current legal education framework shows a notable deficiency in developing research skills among law students, as identified by Purizaga-Sorroza et al. (2022). This issue mirrors global concerns, such as in Ukraine, where the need for a comprehensive overhaul of legal education is critical to ensuring that law graduates are equipped to address complex legal and societal challenges (Antoshkina et al., 2024). These findings suggest a broader international trend, with legal education systems struggling to align curricula with contemporary demands. In response, Dagilyte and Coe (2014) emphasize the importance of incorporating professionalism training—an early introduction to the skills, values, and attitudes required for legal practice. Addressing such gaps is crucial for preparing future lawyers who can contribute effectively to legal practice and public service.

The rapid digitalization of the legal profession requires law schools to modernize their curricula, ensuring that future lawyers are proficient in both digital competencies and soft skills. The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) in legal services, as explored by Davis (2020) and Ajevski et al. (2023), is already reshaping legal education by introducing new technologies for legal research, contract analysis, and decision-making. This shift necessitates a strong foundation in digital literacy, as emphasized by Drapezo et al. (2022) and Ershova et al. (2020), who argue that law students must be equipped with advanced technological skills to navigate the evolving legal landscape. Simultaneously, Tsaoussi (2020) advocates for a humanistic approach to legal education, promoting the development of soft skills such as empathy, integrity, and problem-solving. These competencies are increasingly vital for future legal professionals to adapt to the complexities of modern law and effectively engage with global legal challenges. Additionally, the growing importance of foreign language competence, as highlighted by Balanaieva et al. (2023), further underscores the need for a holistic reform in legal education, enabling future lawyers to operate in increasingly internationalized and digitally-driven environments.

The levels of research in the professional training of lawyers refer to the research activities that are developed or are related to the scientific training of future legal professionals. In this sense, the development and continuous improvement of education depends on the levels of research in professional training, research allows the generation of new knowledge, the improvement of the quality of training processes and the promotion of innovation in the training of professionals, according to Art. 30 of the Academic Regime Regulations (2022), Higher Education Institutions must develop their substantive function of research from different levels, formative research and academic-scientific research; in this sense, the levels of research suggested for the Law program are based on formative research; academic and scientific research; research for development and innovation; research for the development of social environments and contexts; and, ethics and scientific honesty.

Formative research, also known as pedagogical research or classroom research, is an educational approach that uses research as a learning tool; it is an active and participatory process in which students participate in the construction of their own knowledge by researching, analyzing and thinking critically. According to the Academic Regulations (2022), formative research is a fundamental component of the academic training process and is developed in the teacher-student interaction, it is a transversal axis of the transmission and production of knowledge in learning contexts and allows the development of research competencies. In this regard, formative research emphasizes learning by discovery, that is, through this strategy, students learn through direct experience, exploration and experimentation; this research strategy fosters the development of critical thinking, that is, they learn to analyze information, formulate questions, evaluate arguments and reach their own conclusions. Similarly, formative research uses various types of learning, including collaborative learning, which encourages students to work in teams to investigate, discuss and share their findings; it fosters autonomy and responsibility, placing them as the protagonists of their own learning, assuming responsibility for their research process.

The results of formative research allow for reflection on teaching practice and the implementation of changes and improvements in the curriculum to favor the academic development of students. Among its benefits are the development of skills and attitudes essential for learning, for the development of critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, effective communication and teamwork; it promotes active and meaningful learning through direct experience and critical reflection, which allows them to build deeper and more lasting knowledge; formative inquiry is an engaging and stimulating form of learning that can motivate students to learn more; it prepares students for the real world.

Under these considerations, the formative research in the Law program will be: multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, in the different semesters, with different approaches, to investigate aspects related to the rights of people, nature and the proper administration of justice; based on these specific aspects, a macro research project will be designed, which will serve as a reference to develop formative research, which will promote scientific, legal, environmental knowledge and ancestral and intercultural knowledge, generating relevant responses to the needs of the environment.

It is a continuous and dynamic process that drives the progress and improvement of the understanding of the world around us. Art. 34 of the Academic Regulations of the CES, 2022, states that this type of research "is the creative, systematic, rigorous, systemic, epistemological and methodologically grounded work that produces knowledge susceptible of

universality, originally new and oriented to the growth of the theoretical body of one or several scientific fields". It is knowledge that expands the frontiers of scientific knowledge and has a lasting impact on the scientific community, is essential for scientific progress, innovation, to better understand the world around us and develop new solutions to the problems we face.

Likewise, the aforementioned norm states that academic and scientific research "is developed through research programs and projects, framed within the objectives, institutional policies, research lines and available resources of the HEI". The objectives of an institution are the purposes it intends to achieve in the medium or long term, these objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and with a defined time frame (SMART), they must be aligned with the institutional mission and vision and serve as a guide for all activities carried out; these policies must be clear, concise and consistent with the mission, vision and values of the institution, must be known by all members of the institutional community and must be applied consistently. Finally, the lines of research are specific fields in which an institution concentrates its research efforts, these lines of research must be aligned with the objectives of the National Development Plan and the Strategies to achieve territorial development, provide solutions to the needs of society and contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge.

In order for academic and scientific research to contribute effectively to the achievement of the aforementioned objectives, it is necessary to have the human resources, infrastructure and materials necessary for its development. According to Art. 26 of the Constitution of the Republic (2008), "education is a priority area of public policy and state investment", however, budget cuts for public universities and polytechnic schools in Ecuador, in the last 3 governments has been a frequent strategy, an action that according to Gualán (2023), affects the quality of education, increases social injustice, threatens human rights and good living, as well as increases inequality and social exclusion.

One of the objectives of academic and scientific research is "to generate results that can be used in proposals for linkage with society that benefit the quality of life and social development" (CES, 2022). The proposals for linking with society are plans or strategies that seek to strengthen the relationship between HEIs and the community, hence HEIs are the strategic ally of the State and the Government to contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime provided for in the Constitution and the National Development Plan, to achieve national sustainable development in harmony with the rights of nature and to make *Sumak Kawsay* effective.

Research for development and innovation allows the creation of new knowledge and the implementation of innovative solutions to the problems of society, science, culture, politics, etc., whose objective is to improve the socioeconomic situation and the quality of life of the people. Research for development and innovation comprises three important stages, research that allows the generation of new knowledge through the application of participatory methods such as observation, information gathering and experimentation; with the results of the research the strategies or methodologies discovered are applied to seek the development or solution to the problems; finally innovation allows the incorporation of new innovative ideas, new solutions to achieve the proposed goal within the environments and social contexts.

In this sense, according to Art. 277 of the Constitution of the Republic (2008), the Ecuadorian State is obliged to promote and encourage science, technology and creative community initiatives to achieve good living, for which "the State will allocate the necessary resources for scientific research, technological development, innovation, scientific training, recovery and development of traditional knowledge" (Constitution of the Republic, 2008, Art. 388). Despite the fact that the Constitution and the specific law obliges the State to invest in scientific research, technological development and innovation (R+D+i), the budget allocated to HEIs in the last three governments (Moreno, Lasso and Noboa) has had a decreasing variant. On the other hand, considering research in several HEIs as a filler activity or of little importance, has caused the authorities to place professionals without specific professional training and experience in this strategic field, which has led to a decline in scientific production and in research itself, which is not contributing with its results to productivity, to the satisfaction of needs, to the effective exercise of the rights of individuals, peoples, nationalities and nature.

On the other hand, the Academic Regulations of the Higher Education Council (2022), obliges HEIs to formulate and implement institutional applied research projects for the development of prototypical models and adaptation of techniques, technologies and methodologies, according to their strengths or academic domains. According to the provisions of the Organic Law of Higher Education (2010), in Art. 36, HEIs must allocate 6% of the budget to implement research projects, however, the results do not show a significant contribution to productive development, technological needs and improvement of the quality of life, this probably may be due to poor management or in turn to the lack of knowledge and experience when establishing and implementing research projects.

Research as a learning methodology or as a problem-solving activity, according to the results of several investigations and realities of several countries in the world, especially in the East and West, has proven to be the strategy that allows personal, social and economic development, hence the importance that research is linked to the problems and needs of the environments and social contexts.

According to Art. 37 of the Academic Regulations (CES, 2022), "at all educational levels, as appropriate, research in higher education should be designed and implemented considering the social and cultural context of reality" "as a fundamental basis for designing inclusive and sustainable development policies" (Meseguer et al. 2020), challenges for States, especially for countries that have been developing for several decades, seeking to ensure the social, economic and environmental welfare of their citizens. However, the lack of commitment and corruption in Latin America and Ecuador, makes economic development, social justice and environmental protection a chimera, in fact, the poor distribution of natural wealth and poor governance of the last three governments of Ecuador, has led to a significant increase in inequalities and iniquities, which has created an environment of violence, insecurity and crime.

In all human activity the affective part, the values and principles of ethics play a fundamental role, research is no exception, on the contrary, the principles of honesty, integrity and transparency should prevail in the development of scientific knowledge. In fact, scientific ethics is the set of values that must be observed and applied so that the results of research are consistent with truthfulness and transparency, this implies an honest commitment on the part of researchers to present a reliable report in a truthful and accurate manner, avoiding plagiarism and alteration of the results.

To achieve the aforementioned purpose, Art. 38 of the Academic Regulations (CES, 2022), requires HEIs to create policies of ethics and academic honesty to prevent and punish fraud or academic dishonesty". In this sense, Torres (2023), in his research work, reveals the areas in which academic dishonesty prevails, the aforementioned author says that in the citation and referencing of sources the student frequently commits plagiarism, similarly, the results of the study indicate that, In academic evaluations and in group or collaborative work, many dishonesties are committed, which requires "to implement awareness and sensitization actions to reduce the incidence of these practices and promote the value of academic integrity in the university" (Torres,2023).

As per the CES (2022), fraudulent and dishonest behaviors are actions that cause students to ignore the principle of academic transparency, violate copyrights, and fail to adhere to the ethical standards established by the educational institution or the professor. These unethical behaviors include the appropriation of ideas or information, the use of dishonest strategies such as copying or creating "cheat sheets," directly reproducing texts, or using paraphrasing without respecting intellectual property rights, impersonation, engaging in academic activities on behalf of others, including thesis work, and gaining unauthorized access to test materials and/or answers.

The primary objective of this article is to analyze the professional training of law students in public universities within Zone 3 of Ecuador, focusing on the research levels and their impact on improving the quality of life for both students and society at large. By employing an empirical approach through surveys of students and research faculty, this study seeks to determine whether higher education in Ecuador aligns with the principles of *Sumak Kawsay* and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Furthermore, it explores whether significant gaps exist between current academic training and the social and productive needs of the country. The findings aim to provide valuable insights for enhancing legal education and its broader contribution to human and societal development.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Zone 3 of Ecuador, specifically at the National University of Chimborazo, Technical University of Ambato, and Technical University of Cotopaxi. The study rigorously analyzed the educational model and research levels in the training of lawyers. Employing a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach, the researchers applied inductive, analytical, and descriptive methods. The research was distinctly classified as descriptive and of a pure type, legal documentary, field, dogmatic, legal correlational, legal descriptive, and of non-experimental design based on its clearly defined objectives.

The study engaged 50 eighth-semester students and 20 research professors from the law programs of the public universities in Zone 3 of Ecuador. They were subjected to a comprehensive 6-question Likert model questionnaire. The information processing involved three robust phases: tabulation of results using rigorous descriptive statistical techniques, interpretation of results using advanced computer techniques, logical techniques, and discussion of the results through a thorough comparison of the opinions of the participants. All ethical research principles were followed to preserve participant privacy, ensure informed consent, and respect autonomy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Question 1. Does the educational model applied in the Higher Education Institution guarantee humanistic and scientific training?

Table 1. Results regarding the Educational model

EDUCATIONAL MODEL	Students		Professors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Totally agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agreed	3	6%	2	10%
Neutral	30	60%	5	25%
Disagree	10	20%	12	60%
Strongly disagree	7	14%	1	5%
TOTAL	50	100%	20	100%

NOTE: These results determine if the educational model at the Institution of Higher Education guarantees both humanistic and scientific training.

The educational model in Higher Education Institutions is the set of components, dimensions, strategies, methodologies, policies and activities that must be implemented to achieve the mission, vision and objectives of professional training. Universities and Polytechnic Schools have developed their educational models, many of them without taking into account the reality and needs of their environments and social contexts, much less observing what the constitutional norm and specific law of Higher Education indicates, reason why, the humanistic and scientific training of future legal professionals, does not contribute significantly to the purposes of Higher Education established in Art. 8 of the Law of Higher Education LOES (2014).

In this context, 17% of students in their eighth semester and 65% of research professors of the Law program of the public universities of Zone 3 of Ecuador surveyed indicated that the educational model applied in the Higher Education Institution does NOT guarantee humanistic and scientific training. A significant percentage of students and professors prefer not to give their opinion on the matter, probably because they do not want to commit themselves or have institutional conflicts in the future.

In this sense, it is necessary to bring to placement what is stated in Art. 350 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), which says, "the purpose of the higher education system is academic and professional training with a scientific and humanistic vision". This implies that all educational institutions in Ecuador must have a single educational model that guarantees humanistic and scientific professional training.

Similarly, Art. 8 of the LOES (2014), establishes the purposes of Higher Education, among them are, the development of universal thought, personal autonomy, ideological pluralism, scientific production, preservation and enrichment of ancestral knowledge, environmental protection, national sustainable development, in itself, a humanistic and scientific training that contributes to local and national development on a permanent basis, through research, innovation and community work.

Question 2. Are the levels of research developed in the professional training of lawyers contributing to scientific and technological development?

Table 2. Results regarding the contribution of research levels to scientific and technological development

RESEARCH LEVELS (Science and Technology)	Students		Professors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Totally agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agreed	15	30%	7	35%
Neutral	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	22	44%	13	65%
Strongly disagree	13	26%	0	0%
TOTAL	50	100%	20	100%

NOTE: The results help to assess if lawyer training contributes to scientific and technological development..

In professional training in general and in the training of lawyers, it is important to develop research skills and abilities to achieve the development of science and technology. In this sense, research activities, such as research levels, allow students to easily identify and carry out research work.

As students advance in their professional training, the levels of research should be more complex, until they reach a higher level that allows them to know and adequately apply scientific procedures. Developing critical and analytical thinking,

improving communication skills, promoting autonomous, collaborative and cooperative learning, are some of the skills that should be developed in the professional training of lawyers through research. In this sense, Rodriguez et al., (2023), say that technologies such as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and information and communication technologies have transformed the world and have become the most important productive forces of the global system, its most important engine is the critical, innovative and transformative capacity, which implies pointing out that, teachers with research activities, should not only aim to develop research skills, but also technological skills.

Under the aforementioned arguments, 70% of students in the eighth semesters and 65% of research professors of the Law career of the public universities of Zone 3 of Ecuador surveyed, point out that, the levels of research that are developed in the professional training of the lawyer are NOT contributing to scientific and technological development, this can be evidenced in the scientific production that students have published in journals of regional and global impact. Indeed, Castillo & Powell (2019), say, compared to other Latin American countries, Ecuador has had a historically low scientific production, this is mainly due to the lack of a scientific culture and adequate policies that encourage research, as well as the neglect in prioritizing research in universities.

Question 3. Are the levels of research developed in the professional training of lawyers contributing to the solution of problems in social environments and contexts?

Table 3. Results regarding the contribution of research levels to problem solution in the social environment

RESEARCH LEVELS (Social environment)	Students		Professors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Totally agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agreed	2	4%	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	37	74%	14	70%
Strongly disagree	11	22%	6	30%
TOTAL	50	100%	20	100%

NOTE: These results contribute in understating if lawyer training research levels contribute to solving social problems.

According to the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) and the Organic Law of Higher Education, universities and polytechnic schools, including higher technical, technological, pedagogical institutes of arts and higher conservatories are intended to contribute to the development of the institutions of the Republic and contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime provided for in the Constitution and the National Development Plan through research programs and projects of scientific, technological and pedagogical nature. In other words, HEIs, through research, must train professionals who contribute to the solution of problems of social environments and contexts.

In this sense, the solution to the problems of social environments and contexts are the horizon and ultimate goal of the levels of research generated in HEIs, whose purpose is to have a significant impact on improving the quality of life of people and nature, i.e., the results of research should influence the welfare, health, socioeconomic development of social environments and contexts. However, according to the results of the research, 96% of students in the eighth semesters and 100% of research professors of the Law career of the public universities of Zone 3 of Ecuador surveyed indicate that the levels of research that are developed in the professional training of the lawyer are NOT contributing to the solution of problems of the environments and social contexts, probably because the research work is not aligned with the reality, needs and problems of society.

"Ecuadorian public universities, over time have been implementing public policies and tools that have contributed to the increase of scientific production" (Zambrano, et al., 2021), but these scientific works, have served in a significant percentage to meet the indicators required by the Council for Quality Assurance in Higher Education CECES, for the accreditation of Universities and Polytechnic Schools, including professional careers and not to provide solutions to the problems and needs of the environments and social contexts. In this context, the aforementioned author points out that the implementation of public policies such as the Prometeo project contributed to the increase of scientific production in Ecuador, which plays an important role because it contributes to sustainable economic, technological and scientific development, resulting in an increase in employment, the level of welfare of citizens and the progress of science in the country. However, the Ecuadorian reality is different, unemployment has grown as well as migration, poverty, crime and insecurity.

Question 4. Are the levels of research developed in the professional training of lawyers contributing to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime?

Table 4. Results regarding the contribution of research levels to the fulfillment of the development regime objectives

RESEARCH LEVELS (Development regime)	Students		Professors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Totally agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agreed	4	8%	7	35%
Neutral	9	18%	0	0%
Disagree	32	64%	12	60%
Strongly disagree	5	10%	1	5%
TOTAL	50	100%	20	100%

NOTE: These results can determine if lawyers' research levels contribute to the development regime's objectives.

Art. 8 of the Organic Law of Higher Education states that one of the purposes of the HEI is, "To contribute to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime provided for in the Constitution and the National Development Plan, these objectives have an end which is the *Sumak Kawsay*, Andean philosophical that proposes a dignified and harmonious life not only with people but also with the Pachamama. "It is a way of existence and a way of life in balance and harmony of the Ayllu with all the elements of the pacha" (Barragán, 2020), applying ancestral principles such as minka, ama quilla, ama llulla, ama shua. In this context, the indigenous cosmovision invites us to carry out collaborative, friendly, integral and true research to achieve peaceful and harmonious coexistence between living beings and nature.

According to Art. 275 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008), it is "a set of political, socio-cultural and environmental economic systems that guarantee the realization of Good Living, of *Sumak Kawsay*", this new economic model, not only takes as a central axis of development the human being, but also nature, therefore, public policies should prioritize this end. According to the criteria of 74% of students in the eighth semesters and 65% of research professors of the Law career of the public universities of Zone 3 of Ecuador surveyed, the levels of research that are developed in the professional training of the lawyer are NOT contributing to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime, which shows a disconnection between the research that is developed in the professional training process and the objectives of the development regime.

In the perspective of Palacios Morillo (2021), universities currently face an increasingly globalized, interconnected society in an increasingly complex, varied and culturally diverse environment, which requires new training strategies. In this sense, the lawyer trained in HEIs must create research skills that induce them to develop intellectual capacities with a universal approach that allows them to compete in the globalization and internationalization of knowledge, in order to corroborate to achieve the objectives of the development regime, with international support and collaboration.

Question 5. Are the levels of research developed in the professional training of lawyers driving innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer?

Table 5. Results regarding the contribution of research levels to the innovation and technological transfer (TT) process

RESEARCH LEVELS (innovation and TT)	Students		Professors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Totally agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agreed	2	4%	0	0%
Neutral	7	14%	5	25%
Disagree	32	64%	15	75%
Strongly disagree	9	18%	0	0%
TOTAL	50	100%	20	100%

NOTE: The results help to measure if research levels in lawyer training drive innovation and technological transfer.

Innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer are interrelated scientific activities that must be carried out in a systematic cycle to achieve progress and development of States and societies. To execute the systematic cycle of innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer, fundamental resources are required, in which human talent and economic resources play a preponderant role to achieve the proposed objective.

Indeed, through research, new knowledge is generated or produced, which can be used to create new technologies and through them, innovations are born to transform society, productivity and the socioeconomic reality of a State. However, if there is no trained and experienced human talent, programs and projects may fail; likewise, if there are no economic

resources to finance the projects, the proposals may remain written on paper. (2024), point out that the strong increase in the participation of researchers in the private sector in the field of higher education, added to the general tendency for research and innovation to be financed through competitive funds, has made the working conditions of researchers more precarious, especially the younger ones, who do not have job stability, and this can be a negative factor for the development of innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer in Ecuador.

In this regard, 82% of students in their eighth semesters and 75% of research professors of the Law career of the public universities of Zone 3 of Ecuador surveyed, indicate that the levels of research that are developed in the professional training of lawyers are NOT promoting innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer, which implies that HEIs are not complying with the constitutional provisions and achieving the purposes of Higher Education. The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador in reference to the above, in its Art. 350 says, the higher education system aims at academic and professional training with scientific and humanistic vision; scientific and technological research; innovation, promotion, development and dissemination of knowledge and cultures; and the construction of solutions to the problems of the country.

Art. 8 of the Organic Law of Higher Education indicates that one of the purposes of higher education is "To promote and execute scientific, technological and pedagogical research programs that contribute to the improvement and protection of the environment and promote national sustainable development in harmony with the rights of nature". To achieve this goal, HEIs must make strategic alliances with the powers of the State and public and private institutions, as well as with civil society, so that research, technological and innovation proposals respond and provide solutions to the needs and problems of society.

Question 6. Are the levels of research being developed in the professional training of the lawyer improving the quality of life?

Table 6. Results regarding the research levels and its impact on quality of life

RESEARCH LEVELS (Quality of life)	Students		Professors	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Totally agree	0	0%	0	0%
Agreed	0	0%	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%	0	0%
Disagree	38	76%	14	70%
Strongly disagree	12	24%	6	30%
TOTAL	50	100%	20	100%

NOTE: These results will help in understanding if research into lawyer training improves quality of life.

In Ecuador, professional training is developed across public and private higher education institutions (HEIs), which include universities, polytechnic schools, and technical and technological institutes. However, many of these institutions offer academic programs that are not based on a thorough analysis of the strengths, needs, and challenges of the local environment and broader social context, often neglecting both national and global realities. According to the Constitution of the Republic and the Organic Law of Higher Education, professional training should focus on the humanistic and scientific formation of the student. This holistic approach aims to achieve the integral development of students, equipping them with the knowledge needed to attain *Sumak Kawsay*—a concept encapsulating the well-being of all through peaceful and harmonious coexistence between citizens and nature.

Nevertheless, findings from this study show that 100% of eighth-semester law students and research professors from public universities in Zone 3 of Ecuador reported that the research being conducted as part of professional legal training is not improving the quality of life. This outcome contradicts Vallín's (2016) assertion that research in HEIs should be closely linked to educational, scientific, and service quality, fostering strategic alliances between academia, government, and professional sectors. These alliances are essential to enhance the production, dissemination, and application of knowledge, which, in turn, should contribute to improving the quality of life for citizens.

In response to this gap, there is a growing demand for HEIs to prepare "global citizens" who can engage with diverse perspectives and thrive in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world (Magán, 2023). This aligns with Dagilyte and Coe's (2014) call for a shift in legal education towards professionalism, which incorporates soft skills and interdisciplinary knowledge. The rapid globalization of knowledge, as emphasized by Ajevski et al. (2023) and Davis (2020), compels institutions to revise their curricula to include digital and international competencies, ensuring that graduates not only excel in their professions but also contribute to human, economic, and productive growth on a global scale. This transformation is critical for making the goals of sustainable development a reality, rather than an unattainable ideal.

Furthermore, the need for an educational reform extends beyond legal technicalities to include the development of soft skills and foreign language proficiency (Balanaieva et al., 2023; Tsaoussi, 2020). Ecuadorian HEIs must adopt a model that integrates both humanistic values and digital competencies, as supported by Ershova et al. (2020) and Drapezo et al. (2022). Only through this comprehensive approach can legal education respond effectively to the complex challenges of today's world, ultimately enhancing the quality of life of individuals and contributing to the broader societal well-being.

FINAL REMARKS

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) and the Organic Law of Higher Education (2010), the educational model that Universities and Polytechnic Schools, including Technical and Technological Institutes should apply is the one focused on humanism and scientific development to improve the quality of life of citizens; However, the results of the research show that each HEI has created its educational model indifferent to the reality, needs and problems of society, which is why HEIs are not contributing to the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime, a fact that has a negative impact on the *Sumak Kawsay* or citizen welfare.

Research in the IES is an activity that has several levels, at the undergraduate level, according to current regulations, descriptive, exploratory and correlational research must be developed with a propositional approach, while at the graduate level, master's degree students must carry out research at the applied and experimental level. What the research results show is that both undergraduate and graduate students are conducting descriptive level research and in the best of cases, they reach a correlational research; There is no evidence of research of an applicative or experimental nature, which would enable scientific and technological production, which is why the levels of research developed in HEIs and specifically in the professional training of lawyers are not promoting innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer, and are not contributing to the solution of problems in social environments and contexts, much less to improving the quality of life of citizens.

The results of the research allow establishing that the levels of research developed in the professional training of lawyers are not contributing to scientific and technological development, nor are they contributing to the solution of problems of the environments and social contexts, they do not help with the fulfillment of the objectives of the development regime, they do not promote innovation, production and scientific and technological transfer, they are not contributing to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants and of nature. Under these arguments, it can be concluded that there is a negative relationship between the independent and dependent variable, that is, the levels of research proposed in the educational models of the Higher Education Institutions have a significant relationship with the professional training of lawyers in Ecuador; however, the procedures and objectives of research should be changed to achieve a humanistic and scientific training in the students.

Limitations and future research

The main limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size, which is limited to students and research faculty from public universities in a specific region of Ecuador, potentially restricting the generalizability of the findings to other areas or private institutions. Additionally, the study focuses solely on legal education, which may overlook broader systemic issues affecting professional training across other disciplines. In the context of Ecuador and emerging economies, future research should expand to include a comparative analysis across diverse regions, institutions, and professional fields to better understand the intersection of education, research, and societal needs. Further studies could also explore the role of digital literacy, AI integration, and international collaboration in shaping the future of higher education, addressing gaps in professional competencies, and supporting sustainable development in these economies.

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Contribution of each author to the manuscript:

Task	% of contribution of each author			
	A1	A2	A3	A4
A. theoretical and conceptual foundations and problematization:	40%	30%	30%	30%
B. data research and statistical analysis:	40%	30%	30%	30%
C. elaboration of figures and tables:	40%	30%	30%	30%
D. drafting, reviewing and writing of the text:	40%	30%	30%	30%
E. selection of bibliographical references	40%	30%	30%	30%
F. Other (please indicate)	-	-	-	-

Indication of conflict of interest:

There is no conflict of interest

Source of funding

There is no source of funding

Acknowledgments

There is no acknowledgment