

## EDITORIAL

### Strengthening Educational Quality through Teaching with Research: Universidad Libre – Cartagena Campus

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The Universidad Libre has stood out in recent years for strengthening its **teaching with research** model, recognizing this approach as a key factor for quality in higher education. Aligned with the Comprehensive Institutional Development Plan (PIDI) 2014-2024, the Cartagena Campus has implemented strategic projects that consolidate research as a fundamental pillar in the training of competent professionals committed to social development, thus fulfilling its institutional mission and its social function of being a socially responsible university.

#### Integration of Teaching and Research: A Quality Model

The teaching with research model implies the integration of knowledge generation with pedagogical practice, promoting active and critical learning in students. Although higher education institutions, and especially universities, must incorporate research into their daily work, in many cases this responsibility falls mainly on teachers, who through their projects generate knowledge that later impacts classroom practice.

At the Universidad Libre, Cartagena Campus, research has been promoted as a structural part of the educational process, encouraging the active participation of students in the classroom through the application of the scientific method. This approach allows teaching to not be limited to the transmission of existing knowledge, but to involve students in research processes that contribute to the advancement of the various disciplines.

This vision has materialized through two essential PIDI projects:

- **Project 11:** Focused on strengthening and consolidating the research structure at all levels of the institution, guaranteeing its operation and positioning in local, regional, national and international contexts.
- **Project 12:** Aimed at promoting high-quality scientific and academic production by teachers and researchers, promoting the socialization and visibility of research results.

These projects reflect the institution's commitment to educational quality, understanding that research is an essential component for the comprehensive

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training of students and for contributing to the social and economic development of the country.

## **Strengthening Research Groups**

The consolidation of research groups has been a significant achievement of the Universidad Libre and, in particular, of its Cartagena Campus. Thanks to a management focused on enhancing research activity, in 2015 the campus had five groups classified in categories C and D according to Colciencias. By 2019, it had advanced to having one group in category A, one in B and four in C. This progress is the result of the joint effort of teachers and students, and of the improvements implemented in the research and training processes.

A prominent example is the Law, Society and International Studies Group, led in collaboration with the Bogotá Branch. This joint initiative is especially significant, as it promotes the transfer of knowledge and joint work between campuses, strengthening the institution as a whole. The collaboration with the Bogotá campus not only strengthens the academic offering in programs such as the Specialization and Master's Degree in Administrative Law, but also fosters an institutional culture of cooperation and excellence. This joint effort in research and academic training demonstrates how teamwork between different campuses enriches university work and contributes to the fulfillment of the institutional mission.

## **Boosting Research Seedbeds**

Aware of the need to promote the scientific and pedagogical training of teaching and student staff, the Universidad Libre issued Agreement No. 1 of 2019, which contains a special section for the training strategy in research and formative research. This strengthens, stimulates and supports seedbeds and research groups to obtain better results and encourage participation in them. This regulation has allowed us to improve daily activities in research and, in particular, the classification of groups in the last Colciencias call for applications.

Research seedbeds have become fundamental spaces for the training of new researchers. By integrating students into research projects from the early stages of their training, the development of research skills is promoted and the link between theory and practice is strengthened. This strategy has been key in the growth and strengthening of the research culture at the Cartagena Campus, promoting the quality of education and contributing to the advancement of knowledge.

## **Increase in Researchers and Academic Excellence**

The number of researchers recognized by Colciencias at the Cartagena Campus has increased significantly. Under a leadership committed to academic excellence, the number of researchers went from having three in

2015 to having eight in the last call, classified from Senior Researcher to Junior Researcher. In addition, the number of teachers with a doctorate degree increased from one in 2014 to five in 2021, with two more in the process of obtaining a doctorate. This increase reflects the institutional commitment to high-level training, determining factors in educational quality.

## **Relevant Research Projects**

The active participation in the **First Unilibrista Internal National Call**, carried out by the National Research Directorate, allowed the Cartagena Campus to approve several research projects of high social and legal relevance. Topics such as the impact of water culture on local communities and sustainable development in areas surrounding the Juan Angola canal, an important body of water in the city of Cartagena, demonstrate the connection between research and the needs of the environment.

Research groups categorized by Colciencias in our Cartagena Campus, such as **Ciencia Libre** and **GISEMA**, have led research in university environmental culture and innovative pedagogical strategies, integrating students and research groups in processes that enrich their training and provide solutions to current problems.

## **Social Outreach and Community Commitment**

Social outreach is a natural extension of the teaching-research model. Through management that promotes community commitment, the **“Cartagena for Coexistence”** agreement, carried out in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Interior and Citizen Coexistence of Cartagena, is an example of institutional commitment to society. This project sought to reduce the rates of violence and promote a culture of respect and coexistence, results that were captured in the book *“Coexistence and Citizen Culture: Perspectives from the Heroic City”* (DIGITAL ISBN: 978-958-8621-57-9), available at the following link: [Coexistence and Citizen Culture](#).

Participation in the **Opt-In Project** (Erasmus-European Union) has allowed research leaders to access international training, enriching research lines and providing a global perspective to local projects. These experiences strengthen the university’s focus on training professionals with an international vision and committed to sustainable development. See more about Opt-In.

## **Publications and Scientific Visibility**

The production of scientific publications is a key indicator of quality in higher education. Thanks to the boost given to research activity, the Universidad Libre at its Cartagena Campus has increased its visibility in high-impact journals, going on to have ten publications indexed in Scopus and maintaining a presence in journals recognized by Publindex. The institutional journal

published by the Cartagena Campus *Saber Ciencia y Libertad*, category B, has established itself as an essential medium for the dissemination of research and academic results, reflecting the commitment to quality and excellence.

## Challenges and Future Perspectives

Despite the progress, there are challenges that must be addressed to continue raising the quality of education:

- **Increase publications** in journals with greater international visibility (Q1 and Q2).
- **Obtain external funding** for high-impact research.
- **Expand the visibility** of academic production at national and international events.
- **Strengthen the training in foreign languages** of teachers to facilitate their participation in global research networks.

## Conclusion

The Universidad Libre, Cartagena Campus, demonstrates that the model of **teaching with research** is a determining factor of quality in education. Integrating research into teaching practice enriches the training of students and contributes to the development of innovative solutions to social and economic challenges.

The institutional commitment to research, high-level training and social projection positions the campus as a relevant player in higher education in Colombia. By continuing to strengthen this model and facing future challenges, the Universidad Libre, Cartagena Campus, will continue to be a reference in the training of competent professionals committed to society, in harmony with the conservation of the environment and natural resources.