

TRANSFORMING LEGAL EDUCATION: EVALUATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE LAW PROGRAM AT UNICESMAG.

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Resumen.

Decree 1330 of 2019 introduced a new perspective to higher education in Colombia by including learning outcomes as a crucial element in the self-evaluation culture of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These outcomes are defined as the specific competencies expected of graduates from a professional program, aligned with the entry and exit profiles established by each institution and program. The regulations aim to strengthen the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education by evaluating students' academic and formative progress, thus reflecting the comprehensiveness and diversity of institutional activities. In the specific context of the Law program at Cesmag University in Pasto, this incorporation implies a curricular update to integrate learning outcomes, adapting to the new demands of educational quality and institutional assurance. This research article analyzes the evaluation mechanisms for these outcomes in three key dimensions: regulations, perceptions of stakeholders, and practices implemented in the Law program at this university.

Palabras clave: valuation, evaluation mechanisms, evaluation practices, learning outcomes.

Abstract.

El Decreto 1330 de 2019 introdujo en Colombia una nueva perspectiva en la educación de carácter superior al incluir los resultados de aprendizaje como elemento crucial en la cultura de autoevaluación de las Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES). Estos resultados se definen como las competencias específicas, esperadas de quienes egresan de un programa profesional y en concordancia con el perfil de ingreso y egreso propuestos por cada institución y programa. La normativa busca fortalecer el Sistema de Aseguramiento de la Calidad en la Educación Superior mediante la evaluación de los avances académicos y formativos de los estudiantes, reflejando así la integralidad y diversidad de las actividades institucionales. En el escenario específico del programa de Derecho de la Universidad Cesmag en Pasto, esta incorporación implica la actualización curricular para integrar los resultados de aprendizaje, adaptándose a las nuevas exigencias de calidad educativa y aseguramiento institucional. Este artículo de investigación analiza los mecanismos de evaluación de dichos resultados en tres dimensiones clave: normativa, percepciones de

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los actores involucrados y prácticas implementadas en el programa de Derecho de dicha universidad.

Palabras clave: Evaluación, mecanismos de evaluación, practicas evaluativas, resultados de aprendizaje.

I. INTRODUCTION.

The high-quality assurance system for higher education in Colombia emphasizes the need to strengthen and integrate academic outcomes, especially the learning outcomes achieved by students. This integration is articulated with various essential curricular aspects, as established by current regulations. Among these aspects, the structuring of the educational program's learning outcomes stands out. These outcomes must be coherently aligned with both the curriculum and the graduate profile defined for the program, regardless of its level of education (undergraduate or graduate). Learning outcome assessment mechanisms emerge as a significant innovation within this regulatory framework. These mechanisms must be properly integrated into the academic training process, complying with the guidelines established by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) in Resolution 021795 of 2020. This resolution specifies the criteria and procedures for self-assessment, verification, and evaluation of program quality conditions for obtaining, modifying, and renewing qualified registrations.

This paper presents the results of a research project entitled "Learning Outcome Assessment Mechanisms for the Law Program at Cesmag University in the Municipality of Pasto," submitted as a requirement for obtaining a Master's degree in University Teaching.

The study focused on analyzing the learning outcome assessment mechanisms developed within the Law Program. The specific objectives of this research are to

identify the regulatory framework for learning outcome assessment mechanisms at the national, institutional, and program levels; to characterize the conceptions of learning outcome assessment; and finally, to describe the assessment practices of faculty, students, graduates, and employers of graduates from said program.

The interest in conducting this study lies in advancing the identification of Learning Outcome Assessment Mechanisms (LOAMs) in accordance with the guidelines established by Decree 1330 of 2019 and Resolution 021795 of 2020, and their importance in the culture of quality accreditation for undergraduate and graduate programs, aligned with national public education policy. This undoubtedly contributes to the implementation and development of new practices for learning and outcome assessment proposed by Cesmag University, making it a benchmark for Law Programs in other local and national faculties. This study contributes to the generation of

II. METODOLOGÍA.

The interest in conducting this study lies in advancing the methodological approach that guided the process, framed within a qualitative paradigm that aims to delve deeper into the phenomenon of learning outcome assessment in the context of legal education at Cesmag University, based on the regulations imposed by the Ministry of National Education for higher education academic programs.

The approach implemented in this research is hermeneutic, which, as explained by Pérez et al. (2019), focuses on the in-depth interpretation of social and educational phenomena. It allows for exploring how faculty, students, graduates, and administrative staff of the undergraduate program studied perceive and practice learning outcome assessment. Furthermore, it facilitates the understanding of new practices emerging in response to the recent regulations of the Ministry of National Education and their impact on educational quality.

The descriptive-interpretive method, based on Flores (2018) and Guevara et al. (2020), has guided the development of this research, as it allows for a detailed description of the characteristics of the studied population and the evaluation mechanisms used. It also interprets how these practices intertwine with the educational objectives and professional expectations of law students.

Regarding the techniques used, the research began with a comprehensive document review to establish the national and institutional regulatory framework governing the assessment of learning outcomes in higher education. This review provided the necessary context for understanding the evaluation practices within the undergraduate program under study.

In addition, five focus groups were conducted as the primary technique to obtain detailed perceptions from administrators, faculty, students, graduates, and employers of graduates regarding the evaluation of learning outcomes. These structured interviews allowed for the identification and characterization of current conceptions and practices in the law program, providing an in-depth understanding of the techniques implemented to assess student learning.

The instruments used included document analysis forms to explore regulatory aspects and a structured interview specifically designed for each focus group, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of perceptions and evaluative practices within the Law program. These instruments were crucial for collecting data consistent with the research objectives and for reaching meaningful conclusions on the topic studied.

III. RESULTADOS.

Legal Framework for Learning Outcome Assessment Mechanisms.

The legal framework related to learning outcome assessment mechanisms at the national and institutional levels for the Law Program under study is based on various Colombian laws and regulations governing higher education. This begins with the 1991 Colombian Constitution, which recognizes education as a fundamental right and a public service with a social function. This state responsibility includes regulating and supervising educational quality to ensure the comprehensive development of students. Likewise, various legal norms that regulate higher education in Colombia are mentioned, such as Law 30/1992, Law 115/1994, Decree 2566/2003, and Law 1188/2008. These regulations establish the procedures for promoting, inspecting, and monitoring the educational process, as well as the quality standards that universities and their

undergraduate and graduate programs must meet to obtain the license granted by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) to offer their programs to the public. This license certifies compliance with the required quality standards.

Regarding the regulations identified in relation to Law programs, Decree 1295 of 2010 and Resolution 2768/2003 establish the specific quality requirements for undergraduate Law programs, ensuring they meet the standards established for higher education in the country. Decree 1330/2019 and Resolution No. 021795/2020 introduce new parameters for obtaining and renewing the qualified registration of undergraduate and graduate programs, including Law. These regulations emphasize the importance of learning outcomes and establish clear evaluation mechanisms consistent with the educational objectives, pedagogical strategies, and required competencies. The National Council for Higher Education (CESU), through Agreement 02/2020, also renewed the high-quality accreditation model for academic programs and institutions. This model includes the evaluation of academic characteristics and learning outcomes as a fundamental part of guaranteeing quality education. Thus, the factors evaluated for high-quality accreditation include: the program's educational project, students, faculty, graduates, academic specificities, and learning outcomes, among others. Specifically, the need for transparent and coherent student evaluation systems, aligned with the level of training and undergraduate modality, is emphasized, as is the continuous assessment of learning outcomes to adjust the curriculum and teaching methodologies.

In this context, Cesmag University, as a higher education institution with a defined regulatory track record, is included. Initially recognized as a legal entity by Resolution No. 10735 of June 23, 1982, issued by the Ministry of National Education (MEN), it was transformed into a University Institution by Resolution No. 1853 of July 31, 2002, and subsequently into a University by Resolution No. 004012 of April 12, 2019. These provisions reflect its evolution under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education and its main campus in Pasto (Universidad Cesmag, 2021).

In its Institutional Educational Project (PEI), the higher education institution under study structures its educational activities through fifteen objectives, among which the following points of interest for this research stand out: promoting comprehensive education in

accordance with its organizational identity and the Personalizing and Humanizing Philosophy, as well as offering quality academic programs that satisfy the values, knowledge, and needs of society (Universidad Cesmag, Management Team, 2020, p. 18).

In accordance with the Personalizing and Humanizing Philosophy inspired by Father Guillermo de Castellana, the University's founder, its educational and academic goals are geared towards consolidating the cognitive, evaluative, and practical dimensions (Cesmag University, 2020). This approach is reflected in the profiles of students and graduates, focused on "Forming new men for new times." The university adopts the competency-based education model proposed by Tobón (2019), highlighting that this methodology integrates theory and practice, fosters autonomous learning, and seeks to develop an entrepreneurial and ethical spirit, thus grounding its curriculum in interdisciplinary projects and problems.

Furthermore, it promotes the development and evaluation of competencies according to Law 1188 of 2008 and Decrees 1075 of 2015 and 1330 of 2019, classifying these competencies as basic, specific, and generic or transversal, which are fundamental for the comprehensive education of students and their preparation for the workforce (Cesmag University, 2020). In accordance with Decree 1330 of 2019, it adopts learning outcomes as verifiable statements of what students are expected to achieve upon completion of their learning processes, thus ensuring educational quality through the coordination of all institutional bodies involved in education (Cesmag University, 2020).

Regarding the Law Program, it offers a curriculum of 170 academic credits distributed across socio-humanistic, basic, and legal areas. This program awards the title of lawyer and, according to its vision, aspires to be recognized at various levels for its academic and research quality, contributing to sustainable socio-legal and economic development in globalized environments.

The main regulatory framework identified related to the object of study is the master document for the renewal of the qualified registration, endorsed by the University's Governing Board through Agreement 001 of 2021. This document, prepared for submission to the Ministry of National Education (MEN), guarantees the continuity and quality of the undergraduate program at the institution for the next seven years. Regarding the phenomenon under investigation, the following can be highlighted:

- The document details the program's learning outcomes, which are coherently integrated with the proposed curriculum and the graduate profile. This alignment ensures that students acquire the appropriate competencies for the professional practice of law.
- The results of implementing evaluation systems that facilitate systematic monitoring of the educational process and the achievement of learning outcomes are evident. These mechanisms are aligned with the program's pedagogical model, promoting quality education and continuous improvement.

In this context, the program has structured its training process around the development of specific competencies in its students, aligned with the philosophy of the higher education institution under study and based on Franciscan-Capuchin principles (Management Team, 2020, p. 75). To this end, they have defined learning outcomes based on the values of the institution's philosophy so that students are able to adapt to new legal environments, grounded in solid ethical principles. They also aim to develop interpretive, argumentative, and investigative skills, fostering a critical and proactive stance in defending legal interests. Furthermore, they aim to prepare students to defend rights in judicial and extrajudicial actions, enabling them to manage conflicts in accordance with current regulations. The program also seeks to cultivate a healthy relationship with the environment through the application of substantive and procedural regulations to promote social and environmental justice. Finally, it aims to prepare leaders capable of strengthening both public and private organizations.

To this end, they have implemented various evaluation strategies within the program curriculum, such as: Socratic method of alternative participation, synthesis sheet and jurisprudential summary, continuous, procedural, formative and summative evaluation, legal doctrine and thought, Saber Pro type tests, Role Playing and case study, critical and constructive debate through open forums, use of film and reading quizzes, critical evaluation and creative inquiry.

These strategies are designed to assess not only acquired knowledge but also students' practical skills and analytical abilities in diverse legal and social contexts. Complementing these is the monitoring and

meta-evaluation process, which ensures alignment with the pedagogical objectives and graduate profile: periodic evaluation by faculty and academic coordinators, meta-evaluation in semester and weekly

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The program also includes four practical academic spaces called Legal Clinic and Business Practice I, II, III, and IV. These are under the direction of the "San Juan de Capistrano" Legal Clinic and Conciliation Center, established by Agreement 057 of November 4, 2009, of the Board of Directors (Cesmag University, 2009). This agreement establishes organizational and administrative guidelines, but does not specify aspects related to the evaluation of these practical spaces.

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Additionally, the legal monograph is an indispensable requirement for obtaining a law degree at the University (Universidad Cesmag, 2010). The thesis process takes place in the Thesis Seminar during the final semesters of the program and consists of four evaluative stages: proposal, research project, final report, and defense.

regulations establish qualitative criteria for the first two stages and a combination of qualitative and quantitative criteria for the last two. Successive passing grades are required in each stage to advance to the next, with specific scores required to pass each evaluative.

Regarding the preparatory examination regulations for the Law Program, approved by Agreement 003 of 2015, they establish academic evaluations in four main areas of law: Public, Private, Criminal, and Labor. These assessments can be administered verbally, in writing, or through a special course, and are graded on a scale of 0.00 to 5.00. To pass, students must obtain a minimum grade of 3.5 on each preparatory exam. This regulation aims to evaluate the level of training and legal judgment of students and graduates who have not yet received their degrees, thus providing a comprehensive assessment of the knowledge acquired.

Conceptions of Learning Outcome Assessment in the Cesmag University Law Program

Research conducted in the Cesmag University Law Program has revealed diverse perceptions and fundamental conceptions regarding learning outcome assessment among administrators, faculty, students, graduates, and employers of graduates. Through focus groups and structured interviews, the following key aspects were explored:

All groups agree that academic or curricular assessment is primarily a process for measuring the knowledge acquired during training. However, administrators and faculty broaden this definition to include curriculum assessment and consider it a tool for continuously improving the educational process. In contrast, students and graduates tend to limit their understanding to the assignment of numerical grades, without delving into their connection to actual learning.

Administrators and faculty have a clear conceptual understanding of learning outcomes as verifiable statements of what students are expected to know, understand, and be able to do upon completion of their studies. This is aligned with the Institutional Educational Project (PEI) and the Program's Educational Project. On the other hand, students and graduates show a lower level of familiarity with these concepts, although they are able to relate them to the practical application of knowledge in real-world situations.

For administrators, the evaluation of learning outcomes verifies the fulfillment of the objectives established in specific periods of the program. Faculty members see it as a tool to determine whether the proposed results were achieved, using rating scales. Students primarily associate it with academic evaluation, while graduates perceive it as a mechanism that evaluates institutional performance, rather than student performance.

It was evident that administrators and faculty are familiar with regulations such as Decree 1330/2019 and Resolution 021795/2020, which establish guidelines on learning outcomes in higher education. In contrast, students and graduates have limited or no knowledge of these regulations.

Furthermore, administrators and faculty believe that academic or curricular evaluation does value the learning process, as it allows them to identify whether the proposed objectives are being achieved and facilitates the implementation of improvement plans. Students and graduates exhibit a more critical perception, pointing out the subjectivity of grades and the lack of correspondence between grades and actual learning.

Administrators emphasize that academic evaluation focuses on measuring performance within each subject, while the evaluation of learning outcomes verifies the achievement of established competencies. This distinction is not always clear to the other groups, suggesting a need for greater conceptual clarity. Furthermore, administrators propose that learning outcomes be assessed contextually, considering the complexity of each outcome and using different strategies throughout the educational process. Faculty and students agree that assessment should focus on the application of practical knowledge, such as solving legal cases.

Likewise, administrators and faculty are clear about the learning outcomes proposed by the Cesmag University Law Program, emphasizing their integration into the graduate profile and the curriculum. In contrast, students and graduates demonstrate limited or partial knowledge of these outcomes.

Practices Regarding the Evaluation of Learning Outcomes in the Law Program at Cesmag University

According to the results obtained through the focus group technique with administrators, faculty, students, and graduates of the Law Program at Cesmag University,

The regulations practice regarding the evaluation of learning stages were considered from the perspective of the last two Semesters passing grades Law Program is characterized by the use of case studies and advanced technological platforms provided by the TAU platform. These include consultations, questionnaires, surveys, forums, and workshops, facilitating a comprehensive evaluation that encompasses both theoretical and practical aspects. Furthermore, the importance of the institutional regulations governing these processes was highlighted, ensuring coherence and quality in the evaluation.

For their part, faculty members emphasized the use of written tests similar to the Saber PRO exam in theoretical subjects to measure students' academic progress. In contrast, in practical subjects such as the Legal Clinic, the evaluation focuses on case resolution and conflict management, activities that allow for a more applied and contextualized assessment of learning.

Participating students mentioned that they experience a combination of evaluation methods, including workshops and both written and oral exams in the theoretical sessions. They also highlighted the relevance of the business internships at the Legal Clinic as a setting where students put their acquired knowledge into practice in a real-world environment, significantly contributing to their professional development.

Regarding program graduates, various curricular evaluation strategies were identified, including oral and written exams, mock hearings, jurisprudential analysis, and other methods. Continuous assessment and feedback were highlighted as common practices throughout their academic training, facilitating a comprehensive and ongoing learning process. Regarding the evaluation of learning outcomes according to the program's graduate profile, it was observed that administrators and faculty assess students' ability to demonstrate Franciscan-Capuchin philosophical values through surveys, interviews, and evaluations in specific subjects such as institutional philosophy. Students also face this evaluation in similar academic settings, although they acknowledge a certain lack of awareness regarding the specific evaluation criteria in this area.

In terms of interpretive, argumentative, and research skills, it was found that both administrators and faculty evaluate these skills throughout the curriculum through case studies and the analysis of legal texts. Graduates,

for their part, indicated that these skills are evaluated in specific subjects such as legal hermeneutics and in projects such as thesis seminars, also highlighting self-evaluation as an important component of their educational process.

Furthermore, administrators and teachers believe that academic or curricular evaluation does value the learning process, as it allows them to identify whether the proposed objectives are being achieved and facilitates the implementation of improvement plans. Students and graduates, however, express a more critical perception, pointing out the subjectivity of grades and the lack of correspondence between grades and actual learning.

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IV. DISCUSSION.

The evaluation of learning outcomes in the Law Program at Cesmag University represents an essential process that has undergone significant evolution thanks to comprehensive research focused on improving the educational quality and relevance of the program. This essay discusses and analyzes several key aspects based on the findings of this research.

From a normative and regulatory perspective, the study is grounded in the solid foundation provided by Colombian regulations governing higher education, such as the 1991 Political Constitution, Law 30 of 1992, Law 115 of 1994, and Decree 2566 of 2003, among others. These regulations

establish the quality standards and oversight mechanisms necessary to ensure the comprehensive training of students and the proper evaluation of learning outcomes in the Law Program. The influence of these regulations is reflected in the creation and implementation of evaluation processes that guarantee coherence with the educational objectives and the competencies expected of future legal professionals trained at Cesmag University. Regarding assessment practices and strategies, the article offers a detailed analysis of the methods used in the program. It highlights various techniques such as oral and written exams, practical exercises, case studies, role-playing, and debates, all of which assess not only students' theoretical knowledge but also their practical skills and analytical abilities in different legal and social contexts. Continuous and formative assessment plays a crucial role in this process by allowing for adjustments in teaching and learning, thus contributing to improving the quality of education in the Law program.

The implementation of the EVREA (Evaluation of Learning Outcomes) represents a significant advancement in educational assessment within the program. This tool, a self-assessment survey for students, complements traditional academic evaluations by gathering perceptions on the achievement of learning outcomes not only from students but also from other relevant stakeholders such as Legal Clinic coordinators, employers, and users of legal services. This comprehensive approach not only enriches the program's evaluation but also strengthens the relationship between theory and practice in legal and socio-legal training. A crucial aspect addressed in the article is the divergent perceptions among the different stakeholder groups within the program. While administrators and faculty have an understanding more aligned with regulations and educational goals, students and graduates often limit their view of assessment to numerical grades, demonstrating less familiarity with the expected learning outcomes. This discrepancy underscores the need to improve training and communication to better align expectations and enhance the effectiveness of assessment mechanisms in the program.

In terms of reflection on improvements and future research, it is recommended to conceptually clarify the difference between academic assessment and assessment of learning outcomes, as well as to strengthen the training of students and graduates in these concepts from the beginning of the program. Furthermore, it is crucial to continue conducting ongoing analyses

to adapt and improve assessment practices, thereby ensuring educational quality in the Cesmag University Law Program and responding more effectively to the evolving demands of the contemporary legal field.

Finally, the research on learning outcome assessment mechanisms in the Cesmag University Law Program has not only strengthened the institution's evaluative culture but has also set a significant precedent for future research and continuous improvement in educational quality. This reflective and proactive approach not only enhances the program's reputation but also ensures that students graduate with the solid knowledge and skills necessary to meet the ethical and professional challenges of the current and future legal field.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that the national regulatory framework has introduced learning outcomes as an essential criterion for quality in higher education, with the implementation of Decree 1330 of 2019 and other complementary regulations. At the institutional level, Cesmag University has integrated these outcomes into its Institutional Learning Outcomes Policy, formalized through agreement 002 of 2022, encompassing both undergraduate and graduate programs.

A conceptual convergence regarding evaluation is evident among administrators, faculty, students, and alumni, who largely agree in understanding it as a process for measuring the knowledge acquired during academic training. However, differences are observed in the hermeneutic analysis of learning outcomes, particularly between institutional stakeholders and students/alumni, who demonstrate a more basic understanding and are less aligned with the formal definitions established by national and institutional regulations.

A significant concern is the lack of clear mechanisms for evaluating the achievement of learning outcomes in the Law Program, which is being addressed through pilot programs to establish effective monitoring throughout the curriculum. Despite faculty awareness of the institutional policy, some confusion persists regarding the difference between academic or curricular evaluation and the specific evaluation of learning outcomes.

In terms of teaching and learning, it is recommended that faculty facilitate peer assessment processes between themselves and students, promoting self-assessment and collaborative work. It is essential to clarify and effectively disseminate the concept of learning outcomes within the academic community, especially within the UNICESMAG Law Program. The use of tools such as concept maps and portfolios is suggested, leveraging virtual platforms to support continuous assessment and reflection on learning progress.

Finally, the need for a dynamic and holistic approach to the teaching and learning process in the Law program is emphasized, adapting it to contemporary demands and fostering an interdisciplinary education that promotes creativity and constructive criticism. The goal is to prepare students not only for professional practice but also to actively contribute to society and respond to its challenges.

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