

The Social Role Of University Of Guayaquil

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ABSTRACT

The university of the XXI century in Ecuador has become a fundamental pillar for the development of nations since its inception, in these places a specialized training is granted for the incorporation of graduates to the world of work, being of great demand in Ecuadorian society, but with the problem of not receiving the attention deserved with access to other opportunities that require less academic preparation or by the lack of economic resources of the population. This responds to the demand in the labor market through which, and according to the degree to which the individual advances, will be of greater competition, passing from a mercantilist plane and unnoticed by the rest of the functions of the institution such as social involvement and the importance of research by teachers and students. Therefore, an exploratory study was carried out by surveys of students of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Education Sciences of the University of Guayaquil to know their interests regarding why they study a career and the benefits they expect to obtain from it. Among the responses, the most representative was its strong link between its preparation and the demands of the work, followed by competent training that conforms to the minimum standards, in which there is little interest in research and is not supported by the economic aspect. Ecuador finds it difficult to compete with other countries if there is no minimum control over current professional expectations and needs.

Keywords: education, mercantilism, resources, responsibility, society

1. INTRODUCTION

To understand the daily challenges universities face in becoming part of society as authorities on knowledge, it is essential to first consider their origins. Universities emerged in the 12th century as places or organizations of teachers and students, serving as pathways to specialized training for entry into desired professions in the labor market. This study, which focuses on the role of knowledge, concludes with a university degree aimed at the production, reproduction, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. According to Álvarez (2021) and Rubio et al. (2020), the fundamental role assigned to universities is to impart knowledge through teaching, research, and the extension of knowledge to society.

Regarding the issue at hand, Ecuadorian society is increasingly aware of the benefits of university education. Since the early 21st century, university demand has grown alongside the supply of new degree programs and educational institutions. However, even today, many individuals face barriers to accessing public or private educational options due

to their socioeconomic status, unemployment, or external factors like motherhood (Castillo et al., 2022; Muñoz et al., 2023).

This topic is of great importance in analyzing and interpreting the interests, needs, and demands of society. It helps us understand societal expectations and the development of national productivity with the goal of creating a generation of reflective and motivated students who recognize and value the relevance of university projects. The perception of social actors in relation to the needs of businesses and the successful development of students, educators, and professionals is also crucial (Cárdenas et al., 2020; Tómalá, 2020).

The university plays a critical role in shaping professionals and responding to the need for timely actions to improve quality of life and support society's professional and social development. Universities must evolve to meet global and national changes (Lemoine et al., 2020; Vincent et al., 2021).

To support and understand society, it is important to elevate the social significance of knowledge and its societal role, emphasizing quality and effective actions as a political criterion that reflects the administrative capacity to meet external community demands. According to Orozco et al. (2020), effectiveness is the political criterion of administrative performance that measures the ability to produce solutions or achieve responses that align with the needs expressed by the broader community.

Martínez and Afrizco (2022) expand on this perspective, asserting that relevance is directly linked to society's expectations and perceptions of universities. Institutions must serve society, and their evaluation should not be limited to the quality of their academic, research, and outreach functions.

The mission and functions of universities, the methods of teaching, and the inclusion of topics like equity, responsibility, and funding—paired with academic freedom and institutional autonomy—are fundamental. High-quality training ensures efficiency in an environment that fosters equality, growth, and progress in wisdom. Universities are vital to human development, shaping individuals' economic, social, political, and autonomous positions. Without this foundation, individuals may become vulnerable and subjected to discrimination. Education is essential for empowering humans to think and act freely (Fernández et al., 2020; Llerena, 2021).

Research on this topic is necessary to provide individuals pursuing specific careers with crucial information about universities' functions for both personal and societal benefit (Palomino et al., 2020). In Ecuador, this objective is not clearly defined, leading to challenges in career selection, academic dropout rates, and external issues such as graduates not working in their fields.

This raises the question: **What are the main functions of the university in society?** There is no clear consensus on this matter. However, emphasis is often placed on training competent professionals committed to addressing social and cultural issues; producing knowledge through interdisciplinary research to tackle multifaceted problems; establishing links with the labor market to meet its needs; and fostering personal development among students (Jiménez, 2021).

The general objective is to identify the functions of Ecuadorian universities with the greatest social impact to educate the public on their importance. This requires understanding the expectations and needs society—government agencies, NGOs, political parties, companies, community leaders, and residents—places on universities and assessing how universities respond with quality to their environment. It also involves fostering creative, participatory, and transformative efforts to address social realities both within universities and in their broader context.

The university-society connection demands that universities engage with their context, abandon isolation, integrate into the community with commitment, and work to address and resolve social problems (Dietz and Cortes, 2020; González et al., 2021). This work must be proactive, anticipating social issues with studies, diagnostics, and proposed solutions that address community concerns and improve quality of life.

The commercialization of education reflects a shift from viewing education as a right to treating it as a service. This dynamic exploits the lack of quality standards in universities to create a market with numerous options, reducing universities to mere regulators and participants in the process (Fayos, 2022; Verona, 2022). This approach shifts the focus

away from knowledge as a tool for personal and societal improvement, prioritizing participation in the productive apparatus by offering variables like cost, time requirements, schedule flexibility, and degree attainment. Businesses are viewed as potential clients in a competitive environment.

University administrators often fail to reassess this relationship, and faculty are not adequately supported in engaging in self-initiated research activities. In pedagogy, this behavior is even more pronounced, with teachers primarily focused on fulfilling curriculum requirements. Achieving social relevance in a university requires a change in attitude among its own people (Serrano and López, 2020; Navarrete et al., 2022). It also calls for encouraging many of its actors to engage in socially significant work, without devaluing other forms of socially necessary contributions. Finally, universities must ensure their actions are recognized by society as timely, relevant, and impactful in addressing and improving social issues.

2. METHODOLOGY

An exploratory study was conducted to gather information supporting the analysis through the direct method. For this reason, surveys were conducted among students within the university. To optimize time, only students from the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters, and Education Sciences were considered.

The research design was documentary, aimed at collecting the experiences and knowledge of students regarding the actual functions of the university and those that have the greatest social impact on them when choosing a career and in relation to the job opportunities available in the labor market.

Statistical Analysis

A statistical analysis was performed to identify biases regarding the most relevant topics for students, influencing their decision to attend university. This process was carried out over three days through a simple random sampling method within the faculty using a set of five key questions to draw conclusions.

Population Under Study

The study population consisted of students from the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters, and Education Sciences, which includes approximately 3,000 students. A sample of 66 individuals was surveyed, with a margin of error of 10%. This method was feasible thanks to the support of other faculty members who allocated a few minutes of their class time.

Data Analysis

First, the research design was examined, focusing on collecting the experiences and knowledge of students, faculty, and authorities from the University of Guayaquil regarding the real functions of the university and those with the most significant social impact. This was achieved through the investigation of primary and secondary information sources in a bibliographic-documentary study.

As part of the process, bibliographic records and the reference manager included in Microsoft Word were utilized, enabling the systematic registration and organization of consulted sources, such as scientific articles, books, reports, and official publications.

For the comparative analysis, comparative matrices and data tables were used. This analysis aimed to establish relationships between the experiences and knowledge of students, faculty, and authorities from the University of Guayaquil regarding the real functions of the university and those with the greatest social impact.

3. Results

Once the data collection instruments were applied, the analysis process began. Consequently, the conclusion derived from this process will reflect the perceptions of both students and faculty members of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters, and Education Sciences at the University of Guayaquil regarding their conceptions of the social function of the university (Figure 1)

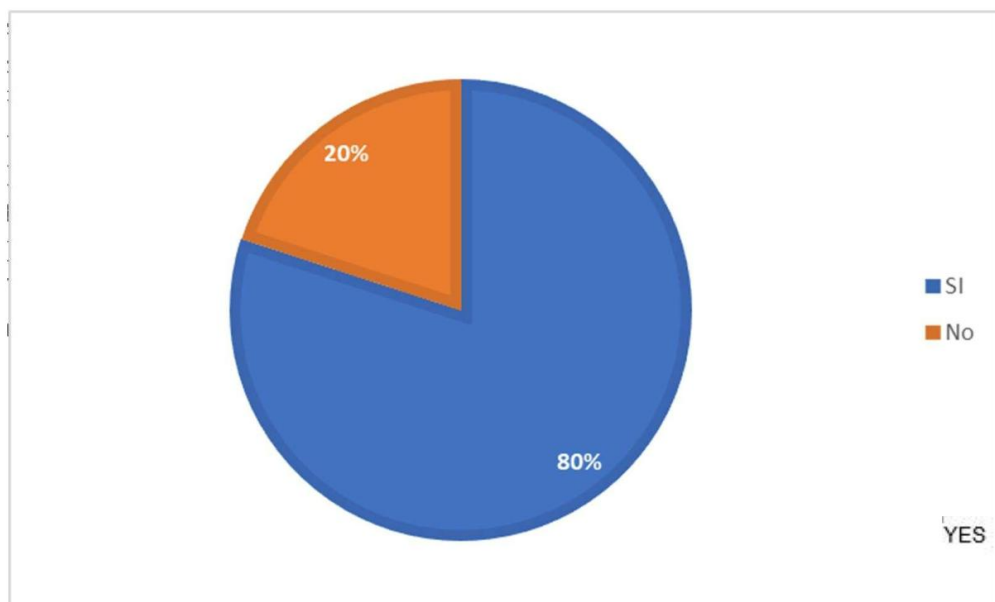


Figure 1. Do you consider that the University of Guayaquil has a proper organization in the academic social function 80% of the respondents believe that the University of Guayaquil has a proper organization in its academic social function, while another 20% disagree with this statement. This is due to the factors that influence these interactions, as the social function of the University of Guayaquil still needs to restore certain aspects of its organization (Figure 2).

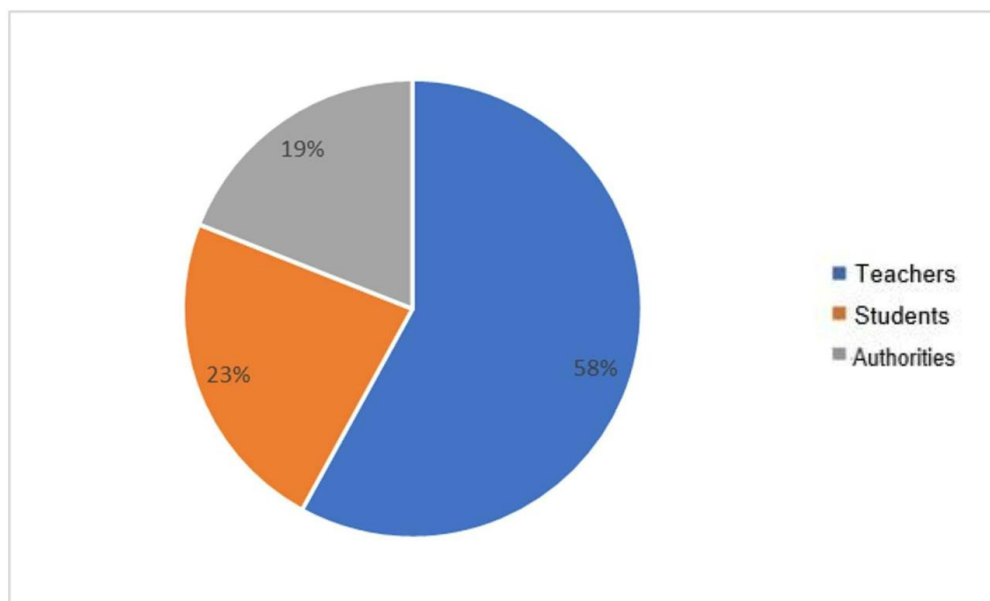


Figure 2: Do you know the social function of the University of Guayaquil

The surveyed teachers revealed that the Social Function at the University of Guayaquil refers to the transfer of knowledge. It is also related to solving the problems that affect the development of society in the different areas of human knowledge and, in turn, helping students with everything related to the educational process (Figure 3). By providing the educational community with comprehensive training, grounded in the national reality, it enables their full professional development and helps them develop the skills necessary to succeed professionally.

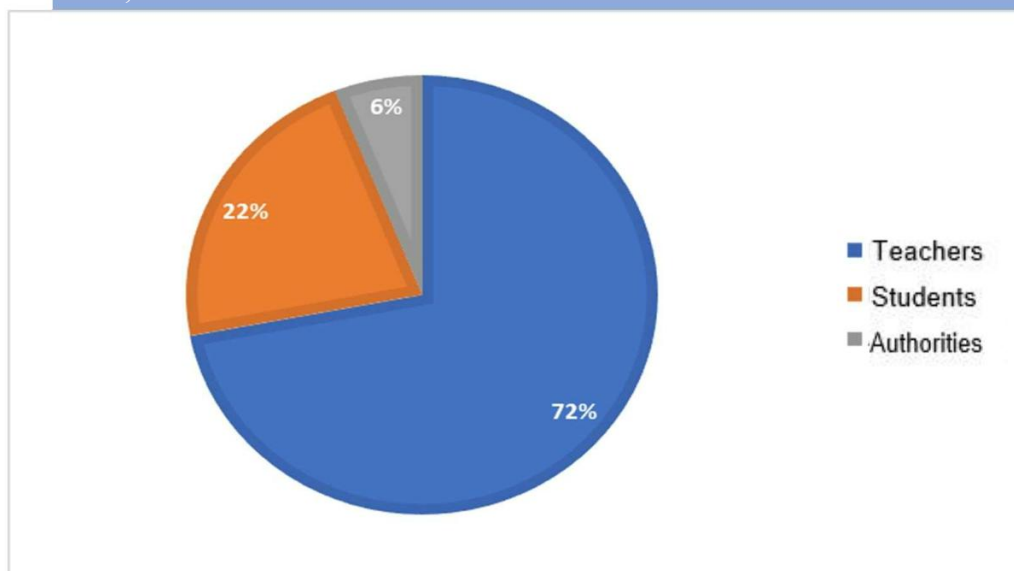


Figure 3. Knows the three main functions of higher education.

The vast majority of respondents are aware of the three main functions of higher education, which are teaching, formative and applied research, and GSC. They also aim to prepare, from a scientific, humanistic, and professional perspective, current and future generations of Ecuadorians to solve the problems that affect the social and economic development of our country, as shown in Figure 4.

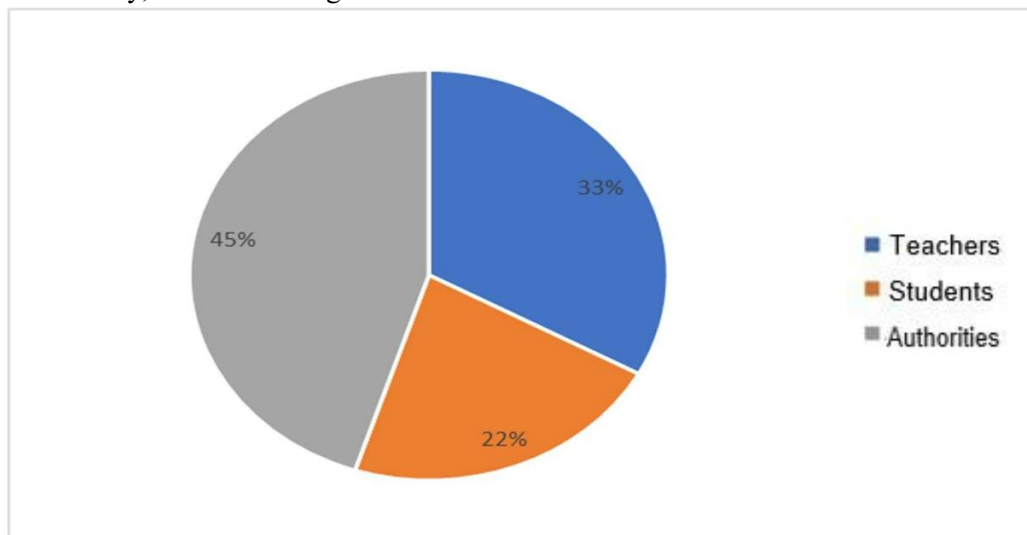


Figure 4. Know the final objective of the change and development process of higher education.

All the respondents (Figure 5) are aware that the final objective of the change and development process of higher education is to continuously improve the teaching-learning processes, as well as to build a critical and proactive emancipated society. Additionally, it aims to train professionals who are equipped to transform the country from an economic and social perspective, in line with the current demands of Ecuadorian society, in order to fulfill the needs of society, the educational community, and students' performance in society.

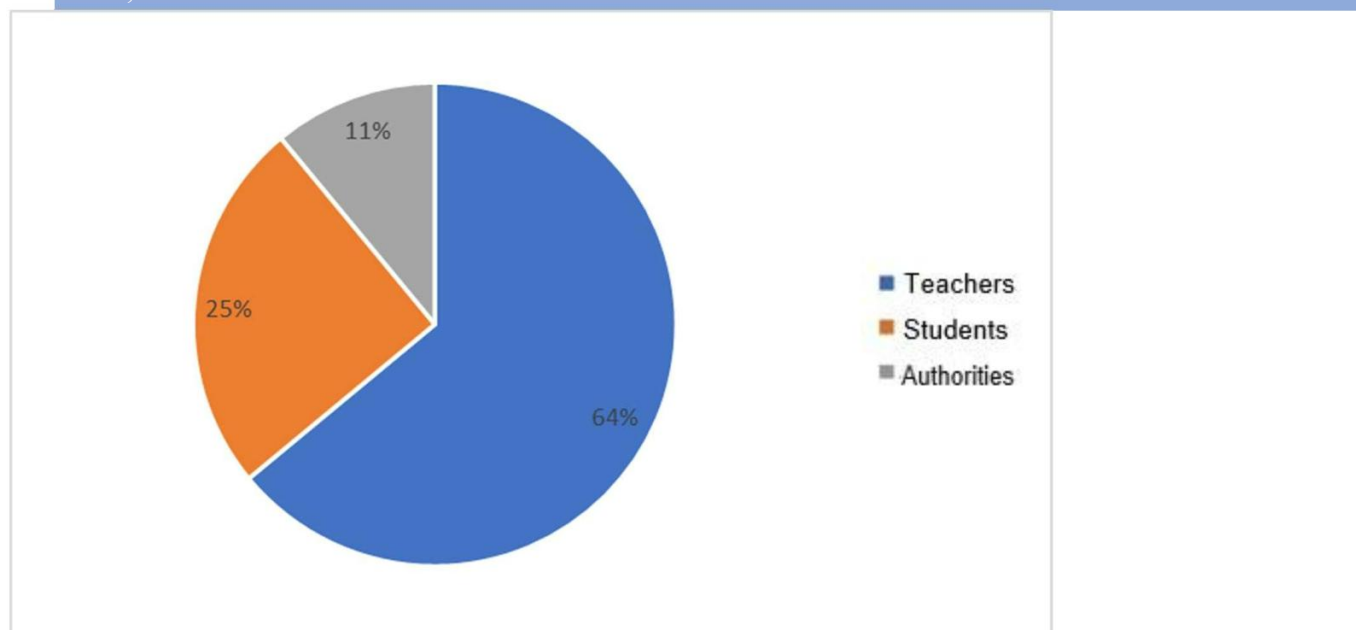


Figure 5. It could be achieved that the University of Guayaquil is recognized nationally and internationally for its academic quality, entrepreneurship, scientific and technological writing with a focus on social responsibility.

The respondents shared some ideas on how the University of Guayaquil could be recognized nationally and internationally for its academic quality, entrepreneurship, scientific and technological writing with a focus on social responsibility. One idea is that, through the social dissemination of high-impact research projects and studies, also by encouraging scientific production, meaning allowing research to flow and making the dissemination of knowledge the cherry on top, but not the cake itself. Another option would be to redesign the curriculum, with a systemic conception between the components: labor, academic, and research.

This could be achieved by establishing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary relationships between the content of the subjects taught in a semester and across semesters of different programs. This will happen when scientific production is institutionalized among both students and faculty. One student expressed that this could be achieved by developing quality academic offerings, promoting science and technology through research and innovation, based on an education with values and social commitment, in such a way that knowledge is transferred through community engagement.

4. DISCUSSION

The results were discussed in light of the perspectives and reflections of the social actors involved at the University of Guayaquil, including faculty, students, and authorities, regarding the importance of social responsibility across all areas of university activity. Additionally, potential actions were explored to enhance this responsibility in alignment with the obligations of the university as an institution serving Ecuadorian society (Barros & Turpo, 2022; Castro, 2022).

Firstly, it is acknowledged that the University of Guayaquil demonstrates proper organization in its academic social function. This indicates that both regulations and, in this case, the curriculum of the programs in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters have been modernized according to societal demands. The university has evolved from being an isolated entity to fulfilling a transformative role within society, oriented toward national growth and improving the quality of life of its citizens (Garbizo et al., 2021; Hoyos & Barrilla, 2021).

Regarding the level of awareness about the social function of the University of Guayaquil, the results show that the university's mission and vision are primarily known to faculty and authorities. However, it is concerning that this knowledge is not widely shared among students, who will be responsible for carrying out transformative processes within their communities based on the knowledge acquired in the various programs offered by the university (López et al., 2022; Romero et al., 2023).

An important aspect to highlight, particularly among faculty and authorities but which should be reinforced among students, is related to the knowledge of the three core functions of higher education: education, research, and technology management. The true social role of the university is not limited to professional training; rather, it must generate ideas to solve societal problems. Innovations emerging from academia should reach and be adopted by Ecuadorian society, becoming agents of transformation (Del Valle et al., 2021; Pacheco, 2022).

For the university's social function to be effective, it is essential to understand the ultimate goal of the process of change and development in higher education. Fortunately, all social actors within the university context agree that this can be achieved in the specific case of the University of Guayaquil. The institution could be nationally and internationally recognized for its academic quality (Muñiz & Loor, 2020; Muñoz et al., 2022), entrepreneurship, and scientific and technological writing with a focus on social responsibility. Achieving this would involve adjusting curricular content, strengthening research institutions, and creating communication channels between the university as a generator of knowledge and innovation and local communities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The majority of students are unaware of purposes beyond engaging with society other than being productive or generating substantial income to maintain or improve their quality of life or merely to survive. There are also cases where students are aware of the university's functions, but these are not relevant to them, except as part of a pool of graduates with diverse skills and levels of preparation.

While universities employ professors committed to their responsibility for societal development, these institutions often lack clear strategies for research programs. Consequently, their evaluations are poor, failing to meet minimum quality standards. Instead, they operate within a system tailored to meet students' basic requirements but rife with errors. This is partly due to limited investment and interest in supporting students and faculty with group or individual research projects that serve society.

Modern universities have adopted a market-driven focus, positioning themselves as a means to improve graduates' quality of life while contributing to society and humanity, turning this mutual interaction into something complementary. However, this market-driven competition generates inequity, exclusion, and inequality for socio-economic groups that struggle to access higher education, even with scholarship programs. This situation underscores the need to establish clear policies regarding institutional identity and values.

Therefore, universities must update themselves in technological advancements across various fields of knowledge. Faculty members play a crucial role as key agents in generating potential solutions to societal problems related to their profession or area of expertise. These solutions should contribute to Ecuador's development and improve its citizens' quality of life.

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