Review article

A formative perspective from a systematic review on police education in Colombia

MENDIVE
REVISTA DE EDUCACIÓN

Una perspectiva formativa desde una revisión sistemática sobre la educación policial en Colombia

Uma perspectiva formativa a partir de uma revisão sistemática da educação policial na Colômbia

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ABSTRACT

Given the social demands associated with an effective police service that guarantees the satisfaction of one of the basic needs of human beings, the field of study of education in police forces is a topic of common interest for some researchers, who seek to solve a research idea oriented to police education through a disciplinary and methodological process. Thus, this study aimed to identify and analyze the literature oriented to epistemic, curricular and pedagogical components that involve police education in Colombia. A qualitative research approach was proposed, from a systematic

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review, which would allow compiling the research and, subsequently, analyzing it from seven variables: pedagogical model, competencies, strategies, curriculum, special regime, epistemology and differential approach. It was found that external research focused on the analysis of the pedagogical model, competencies, pedagogical strategies, curriculum, special regime, epistemological support and differential approach. It was also found that this is a topic of great interest, given the volume of research carried out; even so, it is important to delve deeper into the proposed topics. Likewise, it was detected that there are limitations in the results, due to the complexity of collecting information in an open manner, as well as research trends and knowledge gaps.

Keywords: education; strategies; teaching; police; competencies.

RESUMEN

Ante las exigencias sociales asociadas a un efectivo servicio de policía que garantice la satisfacción de una de las necesidades básicas del ser humano, el campo de estudio de la educación en los cuerpos de policía es un tema de interés común para algunos investigadores, que buscan a partir de un proceso disciplinar y metodológico resolver una idea de investigación orientada a la educación policial. De esta manera, este estudio tuvo como objetivo la identificación y análisis de la literatura orientada a componentes epistémicos, curriculares y pedagógicos, que involucran la educación policial en Colombia. Se planteó una investigación con enfoque cualitativo, desde una revisión sistemática, que permitiera compilar las investigaciones y, posteriormente, analizarlas desde siete variables: modelo pedagógico, competencias, estrategias, currículo, régimen especial, epistemología y enfoque diferencial. Se encontró que predominan las investigaciones externas enfocadas al análisis del modelo pedagógico, competencias, estrategias pedagógicas, currículo, régimen especial, sustento epistemológico y enfoque diferencial. Se evidenció, además, que es un tema de alto interés, dado el volumen de investigaciones desarrolladas; aun así, es importante ahondar en los temas propuestos. Del mismo modo, se detectó que existen limitantes en los resultados, producto de la complejidad para realizar recolección de información de manera abierta, así mismo tendencias en investigación, y brechas del conocimiento.

Palabras clave: educación; estrategias; enseñanza; policía; competencias.

RESUMO

Dadas as demandas sociais associadas a um serviço policial eficaz que garanta a satisfação de uma das necessidades básicas do ser humano, o campo de estudo da educação nas forças policiais é um tema de interesse comum para alguns pesquisadores, que buscam, por meio de um processo disciplinar e metodológico, resolver uma ideia de pesquisa orientada para a educação policial. Assim, o objetivo deste estudo foi identificar e analisar a literatura sobre os componentes epistêmicos, curriculares e pedagógicos que envolvem a educação policial na Colômbia. Foi utilizada uma abordagem de pesquisa qualitativa, com base em uma revisão sistemática, para compilar a pesquisa e, posteriormente, analisá-la em termos de sete variáveis: modelo pedagógico, competências, estratégias, currículo, regime especial, epistemologia e abordagem diferencial. Constatou-se que a pesquisa externa se concentrou na análise do modelo pedagógico, das competências, das estratégias pedagógicas, do currículo, do regime especial, do apoio epistemológico e da abordagem diferenciada. Constatou-se também que esse é um tema de grande interesse, dado o volume de pesquisas realizadas; mesmo assim, é importante aprofundar os tópicos propostos. Da mesma forma, foi detectada a existência de limitações nos resultados, devido à complexidade da coleta de informações de forma aberta, bem como às tendências de pesquisa e às lacunas de conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: educação; estratégias; ensino; polícia; competências.

INTRODUCTION

Society, which changes in its social, economic and political processes, also implies the updating of the educational processes that are developed for professionals' training, who, from their object of study, will address the needs or problems that arise. Police education is not alien to these changes, both from a global perspective and in relation to the updating of strategies by criminal groups to achieve their criminal objectives. In this sense, it requires constant verification of its methods, subjects, evaluations and forms of education. As in other professions, police officers need to specialize, update themselves and respond to the new demands of their environment, as well as to the particularities of the territory.

Reyes (2023) states how systematic reviews in education allow us to demonstrate, based on existing scientific data, answers to a research question. Initially, these reviews emerged in the field of health

and progressively spread to other disciplines. He also indicates that the systematic review is one of the research methods in education, but not the only one. In fact, it could be said that it is complementary, since it offers valuable information for decision-making and seeks to generate the greatest scientific evidence on a topic based on trends. In the proposed case, it allows us to reference trends in the global field on police education, as well as to identify knowledge gaps in this regard.

Cardona *et al.* (2015) state that systematic reviews and meta-analyses are relatively recent trends in research, associated with the Cartesian research paradigm, which fragments real-life phenomena and enables the construction of analytical models. These investigations are considered exhaustive and conclusive, since they allow the analysis of scientific reality based on previous research and provide a broader view of the topic under investigation.

In addition to the above, and in accordance with what Garth (2022) has stated, the training and updating of medical professionals must be based on evidence; that is, not limited to individual experiences, but also based on scientific research. In this sense, in the case of the police service, Sherman (1998) proposed it in the Police Foundation, from where it has been used especially in the United States. This approach has allowed police institutions to have empirical evidence in accountability as State entities, backed by scientific rigor and documented methods that facilitate the understanding of phenomena from a multidimensional perspective. It also enables the construction of international references in the efficient execution of procedures, the identification of lessons learned and the design of intervention strategies in specific contexts.

Police education, synergistic with the police service, requires that its processes be based on scientific research for decision-making. In this sense, the proposal of this article presents a systematic review of police education in Colombia, allowing for the generation of an overview of the topic, based on diploma papers and other research processes, including the results of research from Higher Education institutions in the country. These inputs are essential to establish a reference regarding the internal and external perspective generated from research and its application in police education.

These inputs are crucial for updating the curriculum, with regard to weaknesses, strengths, teaching-learning strategies, as well as evaluation. Within the scope of police education, this covers both programs that grant academic degrees and those for updating and training, considering particularities previously identified in related research. Therefore, this document constitutes a guide in the documentary review, focused on the verification of research on police education in the Colombian

context. It is, thus, proposed as a fundamental reference to identify trends in the study topics, approaches and methodological research designs, participating populations and knowledge gaps in relation to police education.

A qualitative research approach was proposed, based on a systematic review, which would allow the compilation of research and subsequent analysis from seven variables: pedagogical model, competencies, strategies, curriculum, special regime, epistemology and differential approach.

Thus, this study aimed to identify and analyze the literature oriented to epistemic, curricular and pedagogical components that involve police education in Colombia.

DEVELOPMENT

The proposal for the development of the research was raised from a qualitative approach. In this sense, a systematic review was started, initially with a general search under the police education in Colombia criterion. From this, exclusion criteria were defined; among them, that the documents were open access. Within these, the following aspects were considered:

a) Type of documents: scientific articles, book chapters and books.
b) Type of study, approach and design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed; descriptive, phenomenological, comparative, grounded theory and correlational designs.
c) Unit of analysis: police education in Colombia.
d) Databases used: Redalyc, SciELO, Google Scholar and La Referencia.
e) Keywords: police education in Colombia.
f) Time period: documents produced between 2005 and 2024.

The articles were initially recorded according to the following items: year of publication, title, university that produced it, city where the study was conducted, central theme of the document, type of document (article, book or chapter), keywords, abstract, methodology, instruments, sample, research questions, conclusions, results and limitations of the research. Not all of these categories were present in all of the documents, but those that did contain them were analyzed.

The documents were entered into an analysis matrix, where they were classified according to the categories defined in the study. Subsequently, common and differential elements were identified in

each of them. In addition, the *Elicit tool was used* for the analysis of the articles; these ranged between 20 and 25 pages.

Based on the search, approximately 67,100 documents were collected in Google Scholar, 5,268 in Redalyc, seven in SciELO and 367 in La Referencia. In the repository of police education degree works, 92 documents were found from all academic programs offered by the Police Education Department, which were subsequently excluded from the search. Below, the data is presented grouped by categories, according to the title, the university that developed it, the focus of the research, the city where the study was carried out and the topic addressed.

The following exclusion criteria were defined:

- Period of publication of the document, establishing an observation range between 2005 and 2024.
- Relevance of research on police education in Colombia, given that the initial volume of documents was even greater. By limiting it specifically to research on police education in Colombia, it was verified that the title was associated with the proposed topic and, subsequently, the document was read. It was found that, although some texts mentioned education in their title, their development did not focus on this, but on the police service.
- Structure of the document, requiring that it present a clear research route, that is, that it has an introduction, development, research methodology and results.
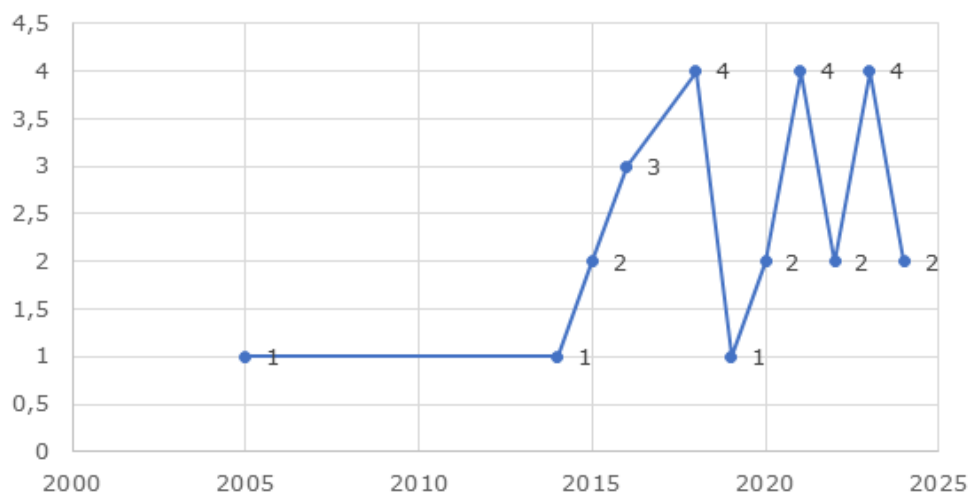
This is evident in figure 1.

Figure 1. Year of publication of the document

As can be seen in figure 1, the largest volume of documents is concentrated in the years 2018 (four documents) and 2021-2023 (four documents each year) on the proposed topic. It is important to note that the process of transforming police education began in 2021, which possibly explains the increase in research in 2022.

Furthermore, after the preliminary search with the above criteria, some documents were eliminated and others were incorporated. Among the discarded documents, the following exclusion criteria were applied:

- Although some documents mentioned the educational institutions of the National Police (PONAL) in their wording, when reviewing their content, it was evident that they were referring to the PONAL schools, where primary and secondary education levels are taught for children of police officers, instead of addressing police education itself.
- Other documents dealt with police mediation and communication, but did not focus on education, so they were discarded.
- One document analyzed masculinity in police education, but its development focused on other spaces and not on police training processes.
- Some texts presented proposals for incorporating topics such as philosophy and other subjects into police education; however, they were not based on a review of police education itself, but on other references.
- Master's and doctoral degree theses, as well as documents produced by the researchers of this work themselves, were discarded due to editorial requirements.

Once the documents were classified, it was identified that 46 investigations were developed by private Higher Education institutions, while 20 documents were produced by members of the Police Education Directorate and its schools, some of them in collaboration with teachers from other institutions.
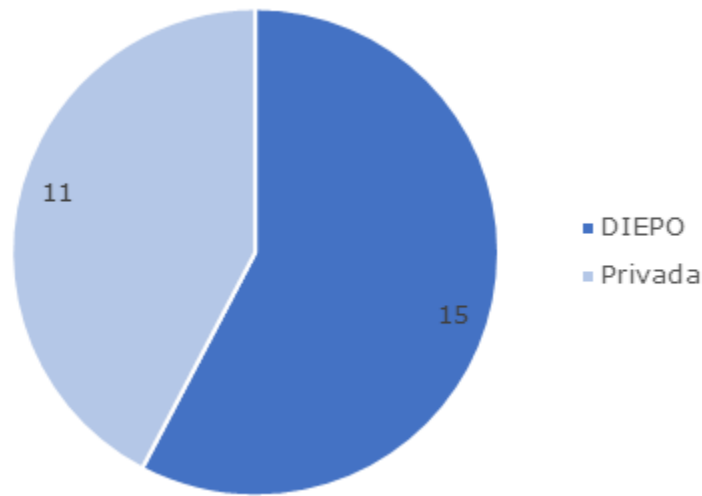
Figure 2. Institution that develop the research

As shown in figure 2, 11 investigations have been developed by Higher Education institutions, both public and private, while 15 investigations were carried out by members of the research groups of the Police Education Directorate. It should be noted that, within the first group, some researchers are also part of the Police Education Directorate, but participated in studies linked to universities.

Figure 3. Central theme of the research

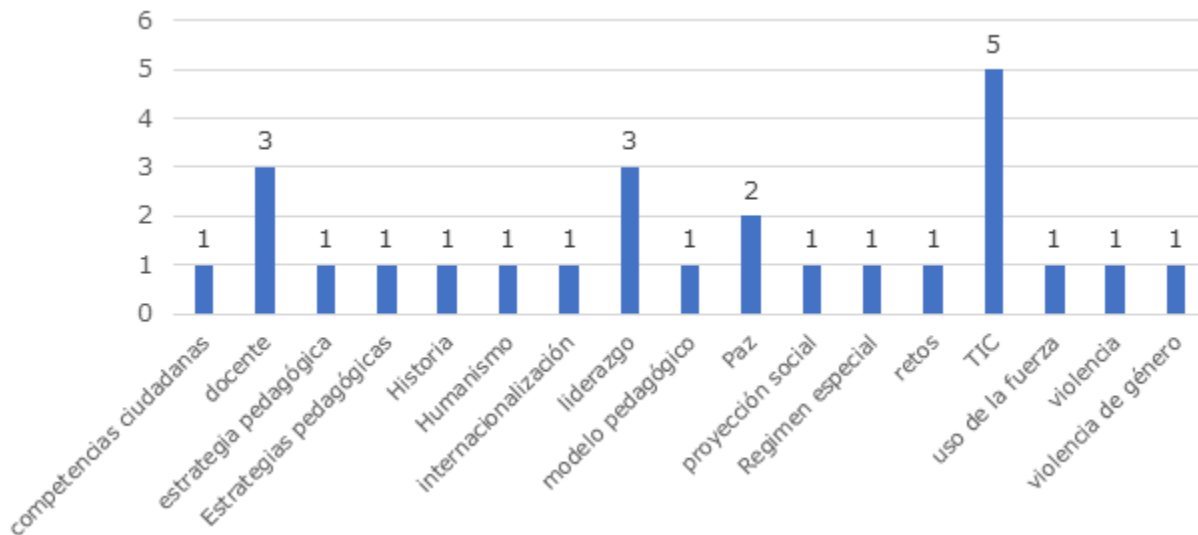Figure 3 shows the number of research projects by recurrence in the main theme. Among them, the following order predominated: use of Information and Communication Technologies in first place; in second place, the theme of teacher and instructor, as well as leadership; and, in third place, in terms of recurrence, peace. In first place among the themes investigated in police education, there are competencies, evaluation by competencies, training by competencies, competencies such as critical thinking and leadership. The documents, in order, present the pedagogical model, both the one that was planned until 2023, as well as proposals to incorporate a new model from referencing exercises or pilot tests regarding some theories. Finally, the process of transformation of police education was found with the targets established for this purpose, as well as other changes considered necessary to modernize police education. There are also research studies carried out on police teachers, in relation to their training, profile, use of ICT, teaching methods, among other aspects. Among the analyses carried out, and once the data was processed by artificial intelligence, it was identified that the predominant theme by word frequency is training in civic skills, critical thinking, education in human rights, crime prevention, professional ethics and the impact of peace training (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Methodological approach of the research
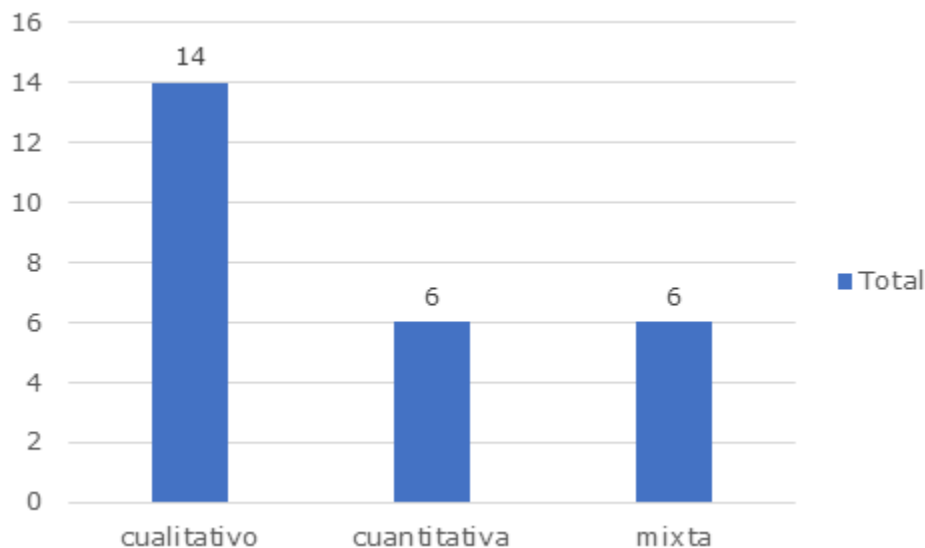
Regarding the approach defined by the research, it was found that 14 were developed from the qualitative approach, six from the mixed approach and the rest from the quantitative approach. Among the methodological proposals, descriptive design research predominates, followed by the hermeneutic-interpretive approach. Regarding the most used information collection instruments,

surveys, in-depth interviews, questionnaires and documentary review stand out. Regarding the populations and samples of the research, it was identified that the collection of information focused mainly on students and teachers, with samples of up to 1,348 recent graduates of the programs and 829 students. Finally, among the predominant research questions, topics such as ethical training, training in civic competencies and the challenges of police education were addressed.
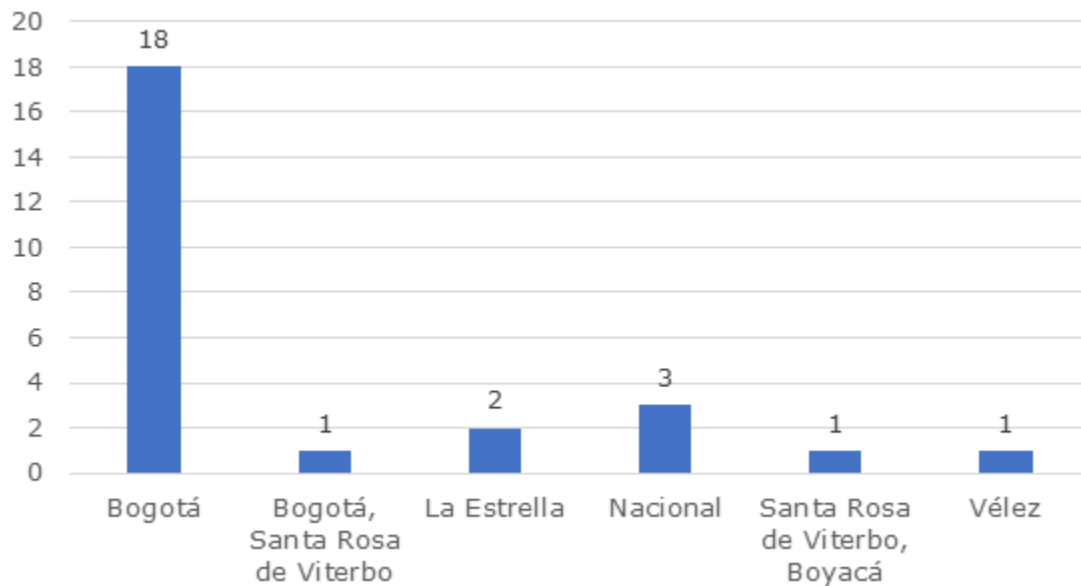

Figure 5. Cities where samples were taken for the development of the research

Figure 5 shows that the studies have been developed mainly using the police academic community of the city of Bogotá as a sample. It is important to note that the headquarters of the Police Education Directorate is located in this city, from where guidelines are generated at a national level. In addition, Bogotá is home to 10 of the 11 specialty schools, the only officer training school (management level of the PONAL) and a patrol training school. These factors may have influenced the predominance of studies on the population of this city.

Secondly, there are national investigations; that is, those that address the policies or guidelines given at a national level regarding police education. Thirdly, there is the city of Manizales, where one of the initial training schools is located, followed by the school in Vélez (Santander), La Estrella (Antioquia), Santa Rosa de Viterbo and a research that was developed in several municipalities. In all these cities, the undergraduate university course for the Professional Technician in Police Service is carried out, as well as the initial training program for patrol officers of the PONAL.

Regarding the most researched topics, the following word cloud was created with the most recurrent and least explored topics.

Figure 6. Word cloud of concepts repeated in the bibliographic review

In turn, according to the analysis carried out using the word cloud (Figure 6), some premises of greater significance were found, which were classified into three aspects of attention. The first is associated with competency-based training, learning and the pedagogical model. The least developed topics in the research correspond to criminalistics research and guidance.

In the second item, some opportunities and challenges were raised based on the review of the research. Among these, the need to strengthen topics such as plurality and multiculturalism was highlighted, with emphasis on ethnic differences, respect for diversity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, thought and expression.

In the third line of analysis, the possible impact on the service suggested by the reviewed research was correlated. Among the findings are: the illegitimate use of police violence as a frequent phenomenon, unequal treatment, some unfavorable conditions for graduates, failures in operational security, lack of autonomy, little critical and reflective thinking, as well as deficits in reading and writing.

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In light of the identified categories, which were predominant in the study and considered to be of importance for police training, the following were proposed: pedagogical models, competencies, pedagogical strategies, curriculum, special regime, epistemological support and differential approach. These are considered to have the greatest impact on police training and, therefore, on the police service. In the selected documents, articles were prioritized, with a total of 20, followed by five chapters and a book.

Substantive processes of police education in Colombia

In this component, the research found highlights how the substantive processes of Higher Education contribute to strengthening competencies in police training. According to Dueñas (2014), social outreach activities are an essential element in police training, as they foster the ability of students to relate to the community and promote the common good in these spaces.

Regarding training, Juárez *et al.* (2006) identify patterns that generate violent behavior in the police training process, presenting the results of a study conducted in a management training school and in a patrol training school, located in the department of Boyacá.

Research also seeks to understand how curricula are structured in police education in Colombia, including training objectives, the graduate profile, and the skills that police officers must acquire. Sánchez *et al.* (2016) propose pedagogical strategies to improve police response in cases of intolerance by citizens. They identify that, in the face of these situations, factors such as the police officers' culture of origin, limited training in emotional management, and bidirectional intolerance play a role. As a result, the need for training in tolerance, understanding of the subculture, and the development of empathy is raised, in addition to recognizing the role of police officers as mediators and promoters of change.

Álvarez (2018) conducts an analysis of the fundamental competencies for police officers in Colombia, including civic competencies, conflict management, training in human rights, ethics and values. He highlights the importance of the role of teachers in the development of competencies such as self-knowledge, training in civic competencies, and coherence with the institutional mission; in addition to highlighting the importance of humanistic training and knowledge of the Colombian Political Constitution. Álvarez *et al.* (2018) propose the creation of instruction manuals for police teachers, adapted to their particularities and highlighting their teaching methods.

On the other hand, Cipagauta *et al.* (2022) highlight the need to strengthen digital skills in teachers, promoting the use of technological tools and defining a teaching profile that involves these skills, requiring them in the selection process. Fajardo *et al.* (2020) present an analysis of humanistic training at the management level of the National Police, highlighting as the main benefits of this approach the strengthening of the service and the closeness of the police with the citizens, as well as the improvement of the conditions for the personnel in charge and their discipline. This approach also makes it possible to strengthen the human dimensions of the police officers, their vocation for service and ethics in acting, increasing the positive perception of citizens regarding the police service.

Puche *et al.* (2021a) point out in their study on the teaching practices of police teachers the importance of constant innovation to adapt to social changes. They underline the need for trained police teachers who develop skills and recognize the realities of security and coexistence. They highlight the crucial role of the teacher in achieving the objectives of training and incorporate innovations in the teaching-learning process.

Vega and Paniagua (2023) present a study on the training and evaluation of the use of force in the police, highlighting the limitations in the vision of this aspect. They identify weaknesses in initial training, such as the number of credits assigned to training in this competence, the scarcity of hours dedicated to practice and the weaknesses in the didactics proposed by teachers, which focus on traditional models. As recommendations, they suggest teacher training in pedagogical competencies, the promotion of research in teaching-learning processes, the adaptation of education to global trends and the continuous evaluation of teaching management.

Finally, Cervantes and Hernández (2024) present a study on the importance of using digital tools to achieve the transformation of police education, considering them essential for its updating. They highlight the need to train both teachers and students in the use of simulators, programming software and other tools, identifying the benefits of these resources such as promoting learning, diversifying and enriching educational processes, and preparing students for a globalized and digital world.

Other topics addressed

In the context of Colombian police education, some researches focused on the topic of police leadership were found. Among them, the proposals developed by Molina (2020) raise teacher leadership and the need to strengthen it. The most significant results indicate that the inspirational motivation of teachers was the one that achieved the highest score, while intellectual stimulation

was the one that obtained the lowest score. The teachers evaluated exercise transformational leadership.

Sacristán *et al.* (2016), associating leadership with training, indicate that the beneficiaries expressed feeling completely satisfied with the training received and with the applicability of what they learned. As recommendations, they suggest verifying the hourly intensity of the training, monitoring the performance of graduates, and designing instruments to measure the impact on the development of social projection.

Regarding leadership, Villamizar *et al.* (2019) propose the design of a teaching strategy for the application of the Holistic Model of Police Leadership (MHLP) in an initial training school. They establish that teachers implement activities for the development of the leadership style in their classes, although it is evident that this topic is not included in the formal curriculum. In addition, teachers use various teaching strategies. Among the conclusions, the need to implement strategies to integrate the MHLP stands out, such as its inclusion in the curriculum and the use of specific pedagogical tools, as well as evaluation strategies. They also suggest continuing to delve into scientific research on this topic.

Álvarez and Cadavid (2015) address autonomy and the special regime in the context of Colombian regulations, referring to those institutions that, being within a macrostructure, are not classified as other Higher Education institutions. González *et al.* (2018) mention that one of the methods that characterizes police education corresponds to police instruction, as well as the design of its programs from the instructional design. In addition, Barrera (2023) presents an account of the targets that marked the evolution of police education.

Betancur (2021) conducted research on gender violence, which she identified during a police training process. The study points out the need to intervene to prevent this violence from being reflected in the service, observing cases of psychological and emotional violence, particularly exerted by other women.

Baracaldo (2018), Betancurt (2018) and Céspedes *et al.* (2018) highlight the importance of education for peace and social relations in police training. They underline the need to strengthen skills for peace, reconciliation and the recovery of trust in the territory. They also express how the National Police has modified its roles due to the saturation of functions and the needs in the territory. They

consider training in police mediation to be crucial, as a permanent requirement of the police service, demanded by society.

Rodríguez *et al.* (2016) emphasize the importance of having clear criteria for the development of internationalization, a powerful tool for the development of substantive processes in Higher Education. This approach is essential for university recognition and national and international quality certifications.

Cuervo *et al.* (2016) highlight the importance of internationalization in police education, as it allows for a global vision of the educational context. The study concludes that an internationalization policy associated with curricular flexibility and academic mobility must be generated, as well as promoting double degree processes with other similar institutions. Internationalization is considered an essential requirement for being a police university.

Hernández *et al. (2023) propose a dialogic* interstructuring approach for the development of students' generic competencies (general, relational, personal, community, cognitive, and institutional), through an experimental design. The study indicates that the dialogic interstructuring pedagogical model is effective for human rights training in police education, since it promotes the comprehensive development of generic competencies for the police service. The authors suggest developing research that compares similar models and the development of pedagogical strategies for comprehensive training.

Police education outlook

In turn, and in contrast to the above, Quintero *et al.* (2015) state how the use of ICT, TAC, TEP, as well as the importance of pedagogical mediations that involve this type of resources, promote student learning. In this same line on the use of technologies for teaching, the research by Cervantes and Hernández (2024) highlights the importance of digital transformation to achieve substantial changes in teaching-learning processes. The study also shows that some teachers are resistant to change, due to fear of implementing the use of technology in their classrooms, which implies the need for a training process for teachers in digital didactics. The possibility of using simulators is also highlighted, as controlled contexts with respect to the reality of the police service, avoiding risks to the students' integrity, an aspect that requires special emphasis in teacher training.

Similarly, Puche *et al.* (2021b) emphasize the importance of police education adapting to social and technological changes, incorporating the development of digital skills in its training processes. Multimodal police education models are suggested, so the educational ecosystem proposal aims to involve the protagonists of police education, including teachers, researchers, managers, advisors and students. This ecosystem underlines the need for personal training, the teachers' quality, educational innovation, the use of flexible strategies and interaction with the environment.

Rivera *et al.* (2022) present how the training process in police education was experienced during the pandemic period, in the national and international context. They indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic forced the adoption of virtual pedagogical mediations to give continuity to the programs, which represented a challenge for police education, which is developed in 16 municipalities in Colombian territory. Among the obstacles found, they highlighted difficulties with Internet access in some departments of the country, as well as the modification of daily activities, both for students and teachers; in addition to the need to acquire digital skills by the entire academic community.

Ávila and Rincón (2023) propose that topics associated with cybercrime be included in the police training process. They present an exercise carried out in one of the initial training schools and the impact of incorporating these skills. Similarly, Santofimio (2024) reflects on the transformation of police education, raising a discussion on the changes proposed by the regulatory change, presenting the modernization actions in the National Directorate of Police Schools to train better human beings at the service of the institution and the country. Camacho *et al.* (2021) point out how the learning of the new generations occurs through the active participation of students, the construction of meanings and the interaction with technology. They suggest that the pedagogical practices of police education must be critical, reflective and innovative, proposing immersive models that promote an approach to the reality of the service and adapt to the needs of the new generations. They also stress the need for teachers to continually update their skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Police education in Colombia plays a fundamental role in maintaining social order and public safety, given the historical and social context of the country, characterized by problems such as corruption, violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict, among others. In this context, the Police Education Directorate understands the need to adapt and modernize in a changing order, with the mission of preparing future police officers through education that has an interdisciplinary approach. This

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approach must integrate epistemic, curricular and pedagogical components that contribute to the development of critical, ethical and operational skills necessary to respond to the security challenges in a country in constant transformation.

To this end, the identification and detailed analysis of research related to police education in Colombia seeks to understand the epistemic, curricular and pedagogical components, addressing each of these aspects and supporting the analysis with relevant examples and references from previous studies and research.

Some topics are evident that could be considered unexplored, including: communication in police education, accreditation processes for high-quality programs and institutions, the evolution of academic programs, institutional inclusion processes, the prevalence of extracurricular activities over academic ones, and the scarce in-depth analysis of training content. Likewise, emphasis is placed on regulations and history, leaving aside practical training issues, as well as the practical impact of police education in service. This last aspect could pose gaps in knowledge regarding police education research, which is also evident in the review of research in degree works at different levels.

From the analysis of the documents, the importance of developing critical thinking for the performance of the police professional was found. The relevance of a comprehensive training that not only focuses on the technical component of the police service, but also on the doctrinal and humanistic aspects of the service itself is underlined. Regarding pedagogical models, the documents raise the importance of a changing and flexible pedagogical approach, in accordance with the dynamic needs of society and the institution. This approach must contribute both to the educational quality and to the response capacity of the professionals who graduate from the training processes, with respect to real situations experienced during the service. Therefore, another essential characteristic is practical training.

The consolidated documents highlight the importance of training in skills such as leadership, teamwork, and ethical and moral development. Regarding the analysis of the consolidated recommendations, the need to strengthen the study plans in technical skills and human rights was found. The implementation of active methodologies in the training process is also suggested, which encourage critical thinking and continuous reflection for acting in different contexts of the territory. Likewise, the incorporation of simulators and practical exercises that prepare for the reality of the

service is considered relevant, together with the continuous evaluation of academic programs to strengthen police education.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.

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