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Scientific publication of master's degree theses of a Peruvian graduate school

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Abstract

Introduction: Master's theses are expected to contribute to scientific knowledge; therefore, it is important that they are published in indexed scientific journals. O**bjective:** To determine the frequency of scientific publication of master's theses from a graduate school in Peru. **Method:** Descriptive study of document analysis in 307 theses approved in the period 2010 - 2019, from business sciences, health sciences, psychology, human sciences and education, engineering and architecture, public health and theology. **Results:** There is a predominance of non-experimental design studies (79.5%) and correlational type (64.8), in addition, only 11.07% were published in scientific journals, of which, one is indexed in Scielo and two in Scopus. **Conclusion:** the frequency of publication of master's theses of a Graduate School in Peru is low, and its impact on the international scientific community is even lower.

Keywords: periodical publication; thesis; graduate studies; Peru.

Publicación científica de los trabajos de grado de maestría de una escuela de posgrado en el Perú

Resumen

Introducción: Se espera de los trabajos de grado de maestría un aporte al conocimiento científico, por lo tanto, es importante que lleguen a publicarse en revistas científicas indexadas. **Objetivo:** Determinar la frecuencia de publicación científica de trabajos de grado de maestría de una Escuela de Posgrado en el Perú. **Método:** Estudio descriptivo de análisis documental en 307 trabajos de grado aprobados en el periodo 2010 – 2019, de ciencias empresariales, ciencias de la salud, psicología, ciencias humanas y educación, ingeniería y arquitectura, salud pública y teología. **Resultados:** Existe una predominancia de estudios de diseño no experimental (79.5%) y de tipo correlacional (64.8), además, solo un 11.07% fueron publicadas en revistas científicas, de las cuales, una está indexada en Scielo y dos en Scopus. **Conclusión:** La frecuencia de publicación de trabajos de grado de maestría de una Escuela de Postgrado en el Perú, es baja y, aún más su impacto en la comunidad científica internacional.

Palabras clave: publicación periódica; trabajos de grado; estudios de postgrado; Perú.

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Introduction

Writing a dissertation is an essential requirement for graduate school and its purpose is to develop a spirit of inquiry and expose the candidate to research techniques (Dhaliwal et al., 2010). In this sense, a dissertation is a planned activity that requires time, so it can be carried out over several years and its dissemination should not be restricted only to institutional libraries or digital repositories of graduate work, but should also reach the scientific community through periodical publications (Nour-Eldein et al., 2015).

That is why the publication of the results of a dissertation in a peer-reviewed journal is an indicator of its scientific value and acceptability within the academic community (Nieminen et al., 2007). Furthermore, this type of publication leads to professional improvement and personal satisfaction (Ahern, 2012). However, in some cases, the lack of publication at the master's degree level is due to a number of barriers and non facilitating factors that include the student's motivation to publish, the support and guidance received, and other characteristics, such as the student's age, type of work, and family status (Bullen & Reeve, 2011).

Regarding this issue, the scientific literature reports research such as that conducted by Tremblay-Wragg et al. (2020) in which they show that master's and doctoral students may feel isolated while writing their graduate work, in the period after the completion of their studies, having only their advisor to progress in their work. They also perceive bullying behavior from senior scientists towards young graduate students, perhaps because of the pressure scientists feel to compete for rankings designed to measure their scientific value (Mahmoudi et al., 2020). On the other hand, another study shows interesting data with respect to gender, where males working with female advisors publish 10% more than students working with male advisors (Pezzoni et al., 2016).

In recent decades, the greatest demands for quality and accountability, as well as an increasing global competition in institutional rankings in the higher education sector, have led to increasing pressure on postgraduate scientific output (Cardoso & Cerecedo, 2019; Mamani & Apaza, 2019). As a result, publication in international journals has become increasingly established as an explicit graduation requirement for graduate students, even in non-English-speaking countries (Li, 2019). Likewise, the inclusion in revision courses in graduate schools and the inclusion of scientific ethics subjects show the enormous importance of the completion of academic work in scientific publications (Rodríguez & Avello, 2016; Zúñiga, 2019). In this sense, generating strategies that allow graduate students to have a better understanding of the different processes of scientific publication and the consequent learning of academic writing is a relevant topic in graduate schools today (Márquez & Gómez-Zermeño, 2018).

Like any research, a dissertation cannot be considered complete if the results are not available to the people who could use them, such as the public and scientific community (Sipahi et al., 2012). Therefore, the dissertation should provide the basis for the development of an article published in a high-impact journal. However, writing an article differs from writing a dissertation; still, those students who have completed a master's degree dissertation or equivalent should consider publishing it (Nour-Eldein et al., 2015; Resta et al., 2010). In this regard, previous studies in developing and developed countries have found that the publication rate of undergraduate work is not very high, ranging from 1.2% to 52.3% (Arriola-Quiroz et al., 2010; Dhaliwal et al., 2010; Salbach et al., 2013; Sipahi et al., 2012).

Currently, there are different reports on Peruvian scientific production of undergraduate (De La Cruz-Vargas et al., 2019; Huaraca-Hilario et al., 2017) and faculty in different areas (Mamani et al., 2019; Pullido-Medina & Mejia, 2018); however, there are still scarce reports about the potential for publication of master's degree dissertations in Peru.

Given this gap in the literature, the objective of this study was to investigate the frequency of scientific publication of master's degree dissertations in international and national

journals. Although the graduate school where the analysis was made does not yet have a policy of accepting dissertations in a scientific article format, we consider this research to be an important contribution, given the key role that graduate schools play in increasing Peruvian scientific productivity and that they could improve their indicators in the medium term.

Method

Design

This research corresponds to a descriptive study of document analysis, according to the classification proposed by Montero & León (2007).

Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis were the dissertations approved in the period 2010 - 2019, with which graduates of a postgraduate school obtained their master's degree in a private university in Peru. The universe consists of 319 dissertations in Human Sciences And Education, Theology, Public Health, Psychology, Business Sciences, Health Sciences, and Engineering and Architecture; a number that arose from reviewing the total accessibility in the digital repository of dissertations of the university investigated; however, we managed to work with 307, as 12 were excluded because they did not have access to the full content.

Instruments

To measure the main variable, in this case, the frequency of scientific publication of master's degree dissertations and secondary variables, such as methodological characteristics, an Excel file was created, which consisted of eight items in a checklist format with dichotomous (scientific publication) and multiple (publication type, methodological design, study type, population type, place of execution, and line of research) response options.

This was evaluated by four experts (Renacyt researchers), who assessed the content-based validity through clarity, representativeness, and relevance. The score calculated through Aiken's V coefficient was .89, which indicates an adequate level (Ventura-León, in press).

Procedures

The search for dissertations was carried out between February and March 2020, and the digital repository of the university was used. The following variables were evaluated in each dissertation: graduate unit to which it belongs, year of approval, type of research, design, type of population studied, and sample size.

In order to determine whether the undergraduate works had been published in scientific journals, in the first instance, searches were made by typing the title of the work in Google Scholar, the Scielo database, and the index of bibliographic references and citations of Scopus, both in Spanish and English. In addition to this, in the second instance, we also proceeded to search using the first and last names of the author(s); for this, we used a strategy used in another similar study (Mejía et al., 2018). Finally, the author's ID was traced in Google Scholar and ORCID.

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- «Luz M Mujica».
- «Calderón MMM».
- «Calderón LM».
- «Mujica-Calderón L».
- «Mujica-Calderón LM».
- «Mujica L».

For Scopus:

- Author: Luz Mercedes Mujica Calderón
- Author's last name: Mujica Calderón
- Author's first name: L.M.

Esta investigación fue autofinanciada. Por This research was self-funded. Due to the nature and location of the data, neither informed consent nor any authorization from the ethics committee was required, as the dissertations analyzed are of a public nature; nevertheless, the confidentiality of the authors and advisors involved was kept confidential.

Data Analysis

The data that were collected were tabulated in Excel 2016. A descriptive analysis was made, and the results were presented in frequency tables and absolute percentages.

Results

A total of 307 master's degree dissertations were evaluated. In the highest proportion, the highest percentage of dissertations were from the Human Sciences and Education unit (35.8%), followed by Psychology (14.7%), Public Health (14.7%), and Theology (14.7); and in a lower proportion were Business Sciences (11.7%), Health Sciences (5.2%), and Engineering and Architecture (3.3%). As for the year of approval, a higher percentage of approved dissertations is observed in 2018 (26.1%), followed by 2017 (21.2%), 2014 (18.2%), 2015 (16.6%), and 2016 (15.6%), and in smaller percentage in 2011, 2012, and 2013 (See Table 1).

Regarding the type and design of research, 79.5% are of nonexperimental design, 18.6% experimental, and 2% mixed. Likewise, 64.8% of the studies were relational studies, and in a smaller proportion exploratory studies (12.4%), studies involving the application of an intervention program (8.4%), theoretical studies (3.6%), descriptive studies (3.3%), applied technological studies (2.9%), while less than 2% were case, exploratory, historical, and instrumental studies (see Table 1).

Regarding the type of population and sample size, the highest percentage of research studies had participants from schools and colleges (36.2%), followed by university students (24.8%), and the ecclesiastical population (15.6%); while a smaller proportion worked with companies (7.2%) and state institutions (7.8%). Finally, the majority of studies involved 101 to 200 people (24.4%), less than 50 (21.8%), 51 to 100 (21.8%), 51 to 100 (20.5%), and 201 to 300 (18.6%); and to a lesser extent, there are studies that had a sample size between 401 to 600 participants (9.1%) and more than 601 (5.5%).

Table 2 shows the scientific publication reports of dissertations, according to the graduate unit and year of dissemination. It is observed that between the 2010-2014 period no dissertations results were disseminated in any scientific journal. Instead, it is observed that in 2017 the highest frequency of publication was achieved (13), then in 2019 (6) and 2016 (6); while the frequency is lower in the years 2015 (4) and 2018 (2). Finally, the unit with the highest number of published dissertations is Business Sciences (14), followed by Human Sciences and Education (9), Health Sciences (5), Theology (3), Psychology (2), Public Health (1), and Engineering and Architecture have none.

Figure 1 below shows the frequency of publication of dissertations from a Peruvian graduate school, according to the year of publication. Out of 307 graduate works, 34 (11.07%) were published. The highest publication rate is found in 2017 (13), followed by 2019 (9), it is less frequently in 2016 (6); 2015 (4), and 2018 only had two.

Table 3 reports the methodological characteristics of dissertations that were published in scientific journals. In this case, 33 were published as original scientific articles and one as a theoretical article, clarifying that in all cases these publications represent the results presented in the dissertations.

In this sense, the majority of the published studies followed a nonexperimental design (91.2%), of a correlational type (79.4%), with a population of university students (23.5%), followed by teachers (11.8%), students of regular basic education (11.8%), and health personnel such as nurses (11.8%). The most frequent sample size was between 51 and 200 participants (41.2%). On the other hand, as for the place of execution, a greater proportion of the studies were carried out in provinces and departments of Peru (44.1%), while 38.2% were carried out in the capital city of Lima and 17.6% abroad. Finally, the most frequent line of research corresponds to Educational Leadership and Management (23.5%), followed by Organizational Psychology (20.6%) and Psychological Factors of the Educational Environment (14.7%).

Table 4 shows the characteristics of the journals where the master's degree dissertations were published. In this case, seven are institutional and three are scientific; thus, there is a greater number of publications in the journals *Muro de la investigación, Valor agregado*, and *Revista científica de ciencias de la salud,* all of them national (institutional journals).

On the other hand, in journals indexed in Scopus and Scielo, as is the case of *Espacios* (discontinued in Scopus), R*evista de investigación en ciencias sociales*, and *Revista de Psicología* (Scientific Journals), there are only four publications. Finally, there are three journals (*Muro de la Investigación, Valor Agregado, and Valor Contable*) that are not yet indexed.

Table 1
Characteristics of Master's Degree Dissertations at a Graduate School in Peru

Variable	Category	*f*	%
Postgraduate unit	Business Science	36	11.7
	Health Sciences	16	5.2
	Psychology	45	14.7
	Human Sciences and Education	110	35.8
	Engineering and Architecture	10	3.3
	Public Health	45	14.7
	Theology	45	14.7
Year of approval	2011	1	.3
	2012	2	.7
	2013	4	1.3
	2014	56	18.2
	2015	51	16.6
	2016	48	15.6
	2017	65	21.2
	2018	53	17.2
	2019	27	8.7
Type of study	Descriptive	10	3.3
	Correlational	199	64.8
	Explanatory	38	12.4
	Case study	4	1.3
	Intervention program	25	8.1
	Exploratory	2	.7
	Theoretical	11	3.6
	Historical	5	1.6
	Instrumental	4	1.3
	Technological/Applied	9	2.9
Design	Experimental	57	18.6
	Nonexperimental	244	79.5
	Mixed	6	2.0
Type of population	Company	22	7.2
	Community	17	5.5
	School	111	36.2
	University	76	24.8
	State institutions	24	7.8
	Ecclesiastical	48	15.6
	Other	9	2.9
Sample size	Less than 50	67	21.8
	Between 51 to 100	63	20.5
	Between 101 to 200	75	24.4
	Between 201 to 400	57	18.6
	Between 401 and 600	28	9.1
	More than 600	17	5.5

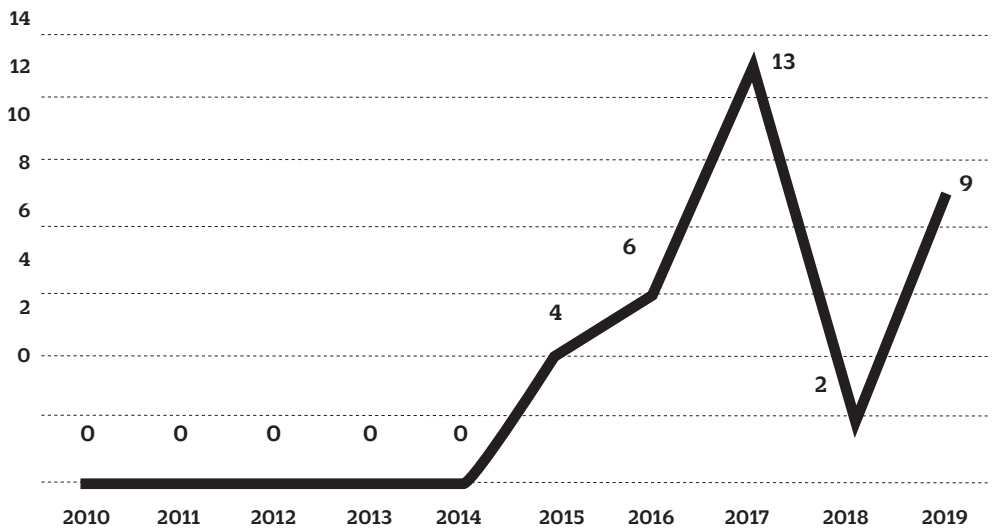
Table 2

Frequency of Publication According to Postgraduate Units: 2010 - 2019 Period

Unidad	Year of publication						Sub Total
	2010 - 2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Business Science	-	1	2	6	2	3	14
Health Sciences	-	2	1	1	-	1	5
Psychology	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
Human Sciences and Education	-	1	1	3	-	4	9
Engineering and Architecture	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Public Health	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Theology	-	-	1	1	-	1	3
Business Science	-	4	6	13	2	9	34

Figure 1

Frequency of Publication of Dissertations by Year of Publication



Discussion

The objective of a master's degree dissertation is to train the master's candidate in research methods and in the development of scientific thinking, so the results obtained deserve to be disseminated (Dhaliwal et al., 2010).

In this sense, it has been suggested that the real value of a scientific work lies in its publication in an indexed journal, where the results of the research are made visible and easily accessible anywhere in the world (Dhaliwal & Kumar, 2008; Nieminen et al., 2007). In addition, it improves the academic and professional credibility of researchers and the

Table 3
Characteristics of Dissertations Published in Scientific Journals (n = 34)

Variable	Category	*f*	%
Published as	Original paper	33	97.06
	Theoretical paper	1	2.94
Design	Nonexperimental	31	91.2
	Preexperimental or quasi-experimental	3	8.8
Type	Correlational	27	79.4
	Explanatory	6	17.6
	Theoretical	1	2.9
Type of population	University students	8	23.5
	Executives and managers	3	8.8
	Teachers	4	11.8
	Basic education students	4	11.8
	Nurses	4	11.8
	Indigenous people	1	2.9
	Religious leaders	2	5.9
	Parishioners	3	8.8
	Company employees	2	5.9
	Outpatients	1	2.9
	Documents	2	5.9
Sample size	Less than 50 participants	9	26.5
	Between 51 and 200	14	41.2
	Between 201 and 600	10	29.4
	More than 600	1	2.9
Place of execution	Lima, Peru	13	38.2
	Province, Peru	15	44.1
	Foreign	6	17.6
	Total	34	100.0
Line of research	Organizational Psychology	7	20.6
	Educational Leadership and Management	8	23.5
	Financial Accounting	2	5.9
	Auditing	1	2.9
	Clinical and Health Psychology	3	8.8
	Positive Psychology	3	8.8
	Psychological Factors in the Educational Environment	5	14.7
	Nursing Administration and Management	1	2.9
	Public Health	1	2.9
	Biblical-Applied Research	2	5.9
	Biblical-Historical Research	1	2.9

Table 4
Characteristics of Scientific Journals

Publication Journal	Country	Type of Journal	Indexing	Quantity
Revista Muro de la Investigación	Peru	Institutional Journal	No	9
Revista de Investigación Valor Agregado	Peru	Institutional Journal	No	8
Revista Científica de Ciencias de la Salud	Peru	Institutional Journal	Latindex	6
Revista de Investigación Universitaria	Peru	Institutional Journal	Latindex	3
Revista de Investigación Valor Contable	Peru	Institutional Journal	No	2
Revista Espacios	Venezuela	Scientific Journal	Scopus	2
Investigación en Ciencias Sociales	Paraguay	Scientific Journal	Scielo	1
Revista de Psicología (PUCP)	Peru	Scientific Journal	Scopus	1
Estrategias para el Cumplimiento de la Misión	Peru	Institutional Journal	Latindex	1
Revista Apuntes Universitarios	Peru	Institutional Journal	WoS (ESCI)	1

institution to which they belong (Abdulmajeed et al., 2014), however, despite its importance, many dissertations remain unpublished. Given this, the present study aimed to investigate the frequency of scientific publication of master's degree dissertations from a Peruvian university in international and national journals, which, as far as is known, is one of the first empirical approaches to the phenomenon of the publication of master's degree scientific products in Peru.

The findings suggest that the publication rate of master's degree dissertations is low and lower than that reported by other research works, varying between 30% and 50% (Arriola-Quiroz et al., 2010; Caan & Cole, 2012; Dhaliwal et al., 2010; Frković et al., 2003; Salbach et al., 2013). However, the low percentage of published papers based on dissertations is not unique to Peru. For example, Yaman & Atay (2007) analyzed 227 Turkish sports science dissertations and reported a publication rate of 1.7% in international journals. Similarly, in France, only 17% of medical doctors'dissertations result in the publication of an article (Salmi et al., 2001). Finally, in Croatia, only between 13% and 14% of dissertations resulted in published articles (Frkovic et al., 2003).

It was also reported that the publication rates of dissertations in international journals were approximately 8% of the publication rates in national journals. This can possibly be explained by the fact that the topics of dissertations could be found as local problems by reviewers of international journals.

Another important finding has to do with some of the predominant methodological characteristics of the master's degree dissertations, since most of them correspond to nonexperimental and correlational designs. This differs from the findings of Rosales et al. (2010) when analyzing master's degree dissertations in Health in Cuba, who found a greater proportion of experimental studies, as did Pacheco et al. (2018) in Venezuela, who analyzed master's degree dissertations in Mathematics Education, finding a predominance of quasi-experimental studies. In contrast, it is similar to what is found in undergraduate dissertations, as shown by a study in Medicine (Castro-Maldonado et al., 2015) and another in Psychology (Mamani, 2018).

In relation to the previous finding, an explanation for the fact that they choose to propose work for the master's degree under a basic research design could involve some factors such as wanting to obtain the academic degree as soon as possible, avoiding cumbersome evaluations by the examining jury and the director of dissertations (Ochoa & Moreno, 2019). Other factors would be not to complicate the statistics (Cardoso & Cerecedo,

2019), deficiencies in research methodology (Reyes-Cruz & Gutiérrez, 2015), and little involvement of the advisor (Hernández et al., 2016).

In relation to the above, it is striking that similar characteristics are also noteworthy in the dissertations that managed to be published in scientific journals; however, it is known that the design and type of research are not the only relevant criteria when evaluating scientific manuscripts, as the editorial board or peer reviewers usually give greater importance to the scientific language, the importance of the topic, the relevance of the results, among other aspects (Rivas, 2017). In this sense, the quality of the research would be another reason for future studies, since judging by the quality of the journals where the master's degree dissertations were published, few are indexed in Scielo and Scopus.

In interpreting the results of the study, some limitations should be considered. First, the results are not automatically comparable with those of other graduate programs, because only one university's dissertations were analyzed; moreover, the emphasis on research and publication may vary among master's degree programs. Second, it is possible that some of the papers derived from the dissertations were not accessible because their titles may have changed based on the recommendations of the reviewers of the journals in which they were published. Third, the information on the publication of the dissertations was updated until March 2020, so it is possible that more dissertations were published after that date. Despite the limited scope of the study, the findings may be valuable for other master's programs—especially in Peru—that are considering interventions in graduate education. Therefore, other studies could assess the strength of the results in other master's programs to allow comparison between them.

It is concluded that the publication rate of master's degree dissertations is low and is mainly in journals that are not indexed in international databases. In view of this situation, solutions must be generated to promote the publication of graduate dissertations. Although the graduate school of the university where the research was done does not yet have a policy of accepting papers instead of undergraduate papers to obtain the academic degree, the obligation to prepare one or more manuscripts ready to be submitted to a journal or placing scientific publications of dissertations as one of the criteria for raises or academic promotions may be appropriate alternatives to increase publication rates (Sipahi et al., 2012). On the other hand, perhaps institutional support, recognition, and reward for published work may help to increase the reported rate. However, these approaches may be insufficient to increase publication rates (Salmi et al., 2001).

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