


Mistreatment of the thesis adviser in a Peruvian pedagogical higher education institution: An exploratory study


Maltrato al asesoramiento de tesis en una institución de educación superior pedagógica peruana: Un estudio exploratorio

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to analyze the perception of mistreatment of undergraduate thesis advisers from a Peruvian pedagogical higher education institution. The approach was quantitative, the design was non-experimental and the type was descriptive transectional. The sample consisted of 102 thesis students to whom the Thesis Advisor Mistreatment Scale was applied, an instrument with adequate metric properties (validity based on content and reliability). According to the perception of the students, 44.1% consider that the abuse occurs at a moderate level, 30.4% indicate that it occurs at a low level and 25.4% indicate that it occurs at a moderate level. high level. Likewise, it was determined that the advisers were the ones who showed the most inappropriate treatment, characterized mainly by the fact that they did not allow them to contradict them, they underestimated the ideas of their advisees and when they tried to communicate with them, they took a long time to respond.

KeyWords: Mistreatment advised, thesis, undergraduate, pedagogical higher education.

Resumen

El objetivo de la presente investigación fue analizar la percepción del maltrato a los asesorados de tesis de pregrado de una institución de educación superior pedagógica peruana. El enfoque fue cuantitativo, el diseño fue no experimental y el tipo, descriptivo transeccional. La muestra estuvo conformada por 102 estudiantes tesisistas a quienes se les aplicó la Escala de Maltrato al Asesorado de Tesis, instrumento con adecuadas propiedades métricas (validez basada en el contenido y confiabilidad). De acuerdo a la percepción de los estudiantes, el 44,1% considera que el maltrato se da en un nivel moderado, el 30,4% indica que se da en un nivel bajo y el 25,4% señala que se da en un nivel alto. Asimismo, se determinó que eran los asesores quienes mostraban un trato más inadecuado, caracterizado principalmente porque no permitían que les contradigan, menospreciaban las ideas de sus asesorados y cuando intentaban comunicarse con ellos, tardaban mucho en responderles.

Palabras clave: Maltrato, asesoramiento, tesis, pregrado, educación superior pedagógica.

In recent years, Peruvian higher education institutions have been promoting the development of scientific research, since it plays a leading role in the progress of a country through the promotion of the generation of new knowledge for problem solving¹. This also goes hand in hand with the promulgation of the Law of Institutes and Schools of Higher Education and of the Public Career of its teachers - 30512 enacted in 2016, which specifies that research is one of the main axes and in turn one of the basic conditions of quality that must be demonstrated when evaluated so that these institutions are licensed, that is, continue to provide the educational service².

Currently, in higher education they continue the process of institutionalizing research, trying to make it a daily activity between the teaching staff and the student body³. For this reason, in the case of higher pedagogical education institutes, they have established as one of the most relevant requirements for obtaining the professional degree the development of a research project (thesis) and its subsequent support and academic defense.

The thesis is defined as an academic work characterized by its high scientific rigor, which allows students to develop skills such as critical thinking, as well as problem solving through the scientific method⁴. Its elaboration process turns out to be very complex and stressful, since it is necessary that they execute a series of investigative, informative and time management skills, since there are deadlines for the presentation of the project as well as the final report. In order for the thesis students to successfully complete their theses, they are accompanied by an advisor, who is assigned by the institution based on their suitability and investigative skills with the purpose of supporting them during the development of the thesis until its academic defense, therefore, is considered a key piece during this process⁵.

However, during the development of the theses, negative practices tend to occur on the part of the people involved (advisors and jurors) who, due to their powers, can mistreat the thesis students. Said mistreatment is mainly characterized by intentional manifestations of power and imposition of criteria (in many cases, without foundation), including verbal offenses, intimidation, abuse, contempt, indifference and rejecting the advances presented by the thesis students⁶.

Although this problem has been arising in recent years, there are very few investigations that have addressed the problem of mistreatment of thesis advisers, one of them being carried out in public and private Peruvian universities, where they sought to analyze the perception of mistreatment towards the thesis students by their advisers, juries and administrative staff in the area of health sciences and determined that there were intentional manifestations of power and imposition of criteria by the previously mentioned personnel towards the thesis students, which evidenced that this phenomenon is recurrent in Peruvian higher education⁷.

Based on the foregoing, the objective of this research was to analyze the perception of mistreatment of undergraduate

thesis advisers from a Peruvian pedagogical higher education institution.

Materials and methods

The research was characterized by having a quantitative approach, since it was based on numerical measurement to establish behavior patterns in the study sample. Regarding the design, it was non-experimental, since the study variable was not intentionally manipulated, but was observed as it occurred in its environment. As for the type, it was descriptive - cross-sectional, since the characteristics and properties of the variable mistreatment of the thesis adviser were analyzed and the data collection was carried out in a single moment, respectively⁸.

The study population was made up of 138 students who were enrolled in the eighth and tenth cycle of a pedagogical higher education institute in the city of Puerto Maldonado, Peru. Regarding the sample, it was made up of 102 students, an amount that was determined through probabilistic sampling with a confidence level of 95% and a significance level of 5%. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample and it can be seen that more female students participated, who were between 16 and 20 years old, belonged to the specialty of Initial Education and were in the eighth cycle.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

Sociodemographic characteristics		n= 102	%
Gender	Male	41	40.2
	Female	61	59.8
Age group	Between 16 to 20 years old	54	52.9
	Between 21 to 25 years old	25	24.5
	Between 26 to 30 years old	16	15.7
	Over 30 years old	7	6.9
Field of study	Initial education	44	43.1
	Primary education	20	19.6
	Physical education	33	32.4
	Intercultural Bilingual Primary Education	5	4.9
Academic cycle	Eighth	62	60.8
	Tenth	40	39.2

The technique used for data collection was the survey and the instrument were the Thesis Advisor Mistreatment Scale (EMAT)⁶. This scale evaluates the perception that the advisees have regarding the unfair treatment they receive during the process of preparing their research work leading to obtaining their professional title, it consists of 20 Likert-type items (Never or rarely, sometimes, often and almost all the time) and is structured in 3 dimensions: advisor (items 1 to 7), jury (items 8 to 14) and administrative (items 15 to 20). Its metric properties were obtained through the content-based validity and reliability process. In this sense, it was established through the expert judgment technique that the scale had an adequate level of validity (Aiken's V= 0.819). On the

other hand, the reliability was found through a pilot test carried out on 15 students and through it was determined that said scale had an adequate level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.875$).

Table 2. Content-based validity and reliability of the Thesis Advisor Mistreatment Scale (EMAT)

Variable and dimensions	Number of elements	Aiken's V	Cronbach's alpha
Mistreatment of the thesis adviser	20	0.819	0.875
Advisor	7	0.827	0.903
Jury	7	0.823	0.856
Administrative	6	0.808	0.865

The data collection was carried out in the month of October 2021. For this reason, a meeting was established with the management team of the institute focused on the present investigation with the objective of informing them about the purpose of the investigation and requesting the respective authorization. Afterwards, the students were contacted through the Whatsapp messaging application, the purpose of the research was also explained to them and they were sent the link to access the Google Form, give their consent and respond to the scale, which had a duration of approximately 10 minutes. Finally, the information obtained was exported to a Microsoft Excel file, where the qualification process was carried out considering the respective assessment scale.

SPSS® V.25 software was used to perform the statistical analysis. The descriptive results were summarized in a table and figures with the purpose of systematizing the information and presenting it in an understandable way, both by variable and by dimensions.

Results

According to Table 3, 44.1% of the students perceived that mistreatment by their thesis advisors occurred at a moderate level, 30.4% indicated that it was low, and 25.4% maintained that he was tall. As can be seen, there is a common perception that, with some frequency, people linked to the research process, both academically and administratively, intentionally manifest their power and imposition of criteria, intimidate them, ignore or underestimate the advances that students carry out with the purpose of obtaining their professional degree.

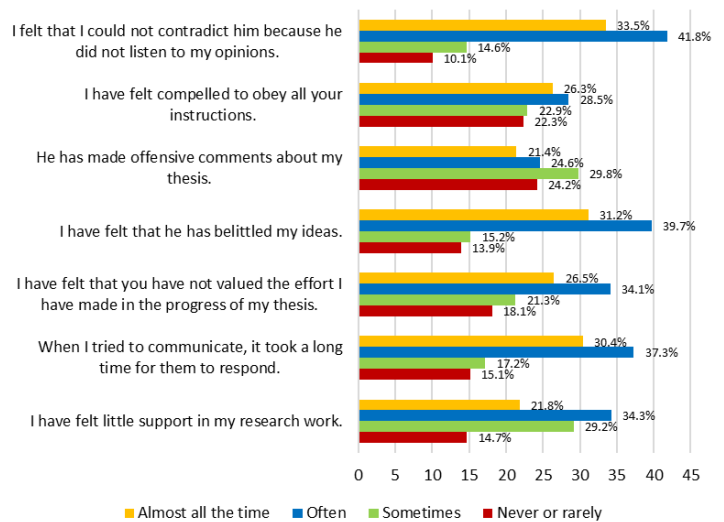
Similarly, Table 3 also shows that the mistreatment that the thesis students received most frequently was from their advisors. Thus, 51% of the students stated that the abuse occurred at a moderate level, 29.4% indicated that it was high, while 19.6% indicated that it was low. As for the jurors, 46.1% maintained that the level of mistreatment received by them was moderate, 27.4% specified that it was high and 26.5% indicated that it was low. In relation to administrative staff, 41.1% indicated that the level of abuse was low, 35.3% specified that it was moderate, and 19.6% indicated that it was high.

Table 3. Descriptive results of the variable mistreatment of the thesis adviser and its dimensions

Levels	Mistreatment of the thesis adviser		Advisor		Jury		Administrative	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	31	30.4	20	19.6	27	26.5	46	45.1
Moderate	45	44.1	52	51.0	47	46.1	36	35.3
High	26	25.4	30	29.4	28	27.4	20	19.6
Total	102	100.0	102	100.0	102	100.0	102	100.0

Figure 1 performed the descriptive analysis by item of the advisor dimension. In this sense, the actions associated with mistreatment by the thesis advisors that the students perceived to occur more frequently were feeling that they could not contradict them because they did not usually listen to their opinions, feeling that their ideas and contributions to the research work were slighted or underestimated and when they tried to communicate with them, they took a long time to respond.

Figure 1. Descriptive results per item of the advisor dimension



In figure 2, the descriptive analysis was carried out by item of the jury dimension. Then, the actions associated with mistreatment by the thesis juries that the students perceived to be more frequent were feeling obliged to pay attention to the observations given by them, even though they were not coherent, feeling that they could not claim or disagree with them for the fear of receiving reprisals on the day of the support and feeling afraid just thinking that they still had to approach them.

In Figure 3, the descriptive analysis was performed by item of the administrative dimension. Even when there is a more favorable perception compared to advisors and juries, the actions associated with mistreatment by administrators that students perceived as occurring more frequently were feeling that the research coordinator did not care about the situation of their students works and perceive little empathy on the part of those in charge of the investigation process to be able to advance with the respective procedures.

Figure 2. Descriptive results by item of the jury dimension

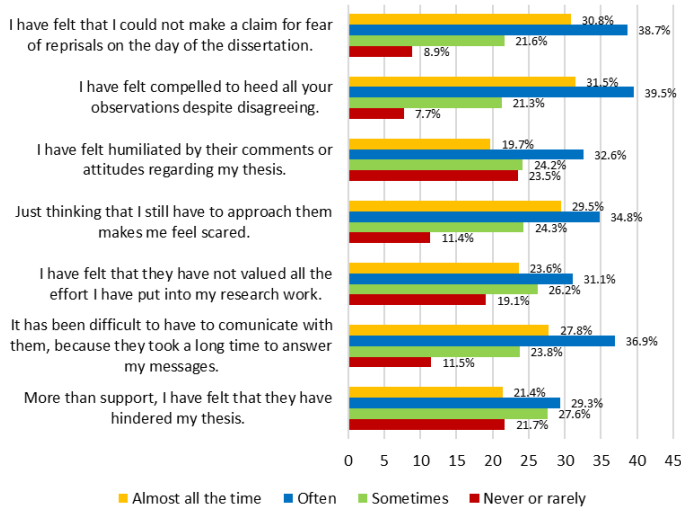
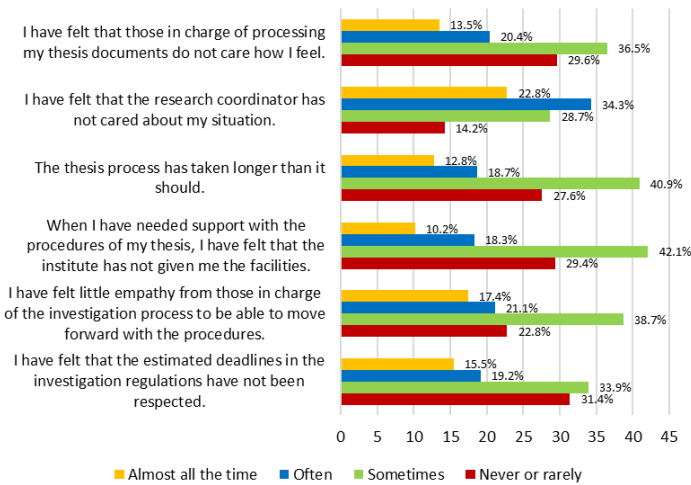


Figure 3. Descriptive results per item of the administrative dimension



Discussion

Thesis advisors and juries often have a considerable influence on the life and development of students during the development of their research work, therefore, they must be careful not to abuse their authority and mistreat them, a situation that unfortunately is recurrent in today in higher education institutions. By virtue of the above, in the present investigation the perception of mistreatment of the undergraduate thesis advisers of a Peruvian pedagogical higher education institution was analyzed.

A first finding indicates that the students were characterized by perceiving that the level of mistreatment they received as thesis students was moderate, which indicated that the people linked to the research process, both academically and administratively, intentionally manifested their power and imposition of criteria, they were intimidated, ignored or belittled the progress that students make in order to obtain their professional degree.

A similar result was reported in an investigation carried out in Peru with the objective of determining the factors that were associated with the perception of mistreatment towards Peruvian thesis students by advisors, juries and administrative personnel belonging to the area of health sciences. Among their main conclusions, they highlight that the presence of mistreatment by advisors (8.5%) and jurors (9.9%), who always forced them to do what they wanted, even when it was not correct or coherent⁷. In the same way, it is related to a study also carried out in Peru, where they sought to establish the characteristics of mistreatment towards students in the professional career of Medicine at a public university in Ica. They concluded that there was a high prevalence of abuse, the most frequent type being psychological, followed by academic, physical and sexual abuse⁹.

Thesis advisors and juries play a fundamental role in the development of the research skills of the students, however, their role not only includes theoretical aspects, but also motivational so that they can successfully complete their theses¹⁰. Despite this, many abuse their authority, which is evidenced when their treatment of students is not constructive or warm, generating fear, discouraging them from doing a good job and developing an attitude of speeding up the preparation of the theses to get rid of the process as soon as possible¹¹.

When carrying out the analysis by dimensions, it was possible to corroborate that the mistreatment towards the thesis students occurred mainly on the part of the advisors, who did not allow them to contradict them, underestimated the ideas of their advisees; and the thesis juries, by whom they felt obliged to pay attention to the observations given by them, despite the fact that they did not agree because they were incoherent. However, the mistreatment occurred to a lesser extent by the administrative personnel in charge of carrying out the procedures, characterized above all by the feeling that the research coordinator did not care about the situation of her work.

A similar result to the above was found in a study carried out in Finland, where they evaluated the occurrence of various forms of abuse by the teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine and the other four faculties of the University of Oulu, Finland. In this investigation they concluded that approximately half of the students had experienced some type of mistreatment by the teaching staff during their university studies, among which humiliation and contempt, negative or derogatory comments, shouting and even sexual harassment stood out¹².

When there is an abuse of power by the people directly involved in the development of the thesis (advisors and juries), the levels of stress and anxiety in students¹³ can increase, which would negatively affect their psychological well-being and confidence that they have on their investigative skills and abilities¹⁴. Thus, given that this problem is very recurrent in higher education, it is imperative to redirect the training and tutorial role that advisors have so that, together with the thesis juries, they can generate the basic conditions in the development of research work.

In the present investigation, relevant and novel findings were made, since the topic addressed has not yet been studied in depth, both nationally and internationally, however, it was not without limitations, due to the limited number of participants, as well as to the characteristics of the instrument (being self-completed), which does not allow for significant generalizations and could generate social desirability biases. In this sense, it is suggested that in the next studies the sample be increased, considering students from the university context and other data collection techniques and instruments are used that allow giving more objectivity to the aforementioned process.

Conclusion

In Peru, the preparation of a thesis is the main requirement for higher pedagogical education students to obtain their professional degree. This process is considered stressful and implies the mobilization of a series of investigative, informative and time management skills. In order for the thesis students to effectively face this process, they have the support of a thesis advisor assigned by the institution, who must be highly competent and must provide personalized guidance, both theoretical, methodological and analytical, so that the research work is successfully completed. In the same way, the thesis juries must objectively and rigorously evaluate the partial and final thesis reports, giving recommendations so that the mentioned work is enriched. On the other hand, the administrators play an important role because they are in charge of speeding up the documentary procedures so that the support is given in a reasonable time.

However, there are usually negative practices by the people involved in the degree process mentioned in advance (advisors, juries and administrators) who, due to their powers, can mistreat the thesis students. In this sense, according to the perception of the students of a Peruvian pedagogical higher education institution, the mistreatment they received during the preparation of their theses was moderate. The mentioned mistreatment occurred mainly on the part of the advisors (characterized mainly because they did not allow themselves to be contradicted, they underestimated the ideas of their advisees) and thesis juries (characterized because they felt obliged to pay attention to the observations given by them, despite who did not agree because they were incoherent), and to a lesser extent by the administrative staff in charge of carrying out the procedures (characterized above all by the feeling that the research coordinator did not care about the status of their jobs).

For this reason, it is recommended that advisors and thesis juries, considered as a fundamental part of the training of researchers, be made aware of the role they perform and adopt behaviors of openness, support, dialogue and understanding towards thesis students without leave aside the objectivity and rigor that must always characterize them.

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