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Original article

Doctoral program management bodies: a study based on regulatory documents from eleven countries

Los órganos de gestión de programas de doctorado: estudio desde documentos normativos de once países

Órgãos gestores de programas de doutorado: um estudo com base em documentos normativos de onze países

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ABSTRACT

Improving doctoral training requires optimizing the management of its programs, which justifies the creation of collegiate bodies to facilitate this process. The study aimed to identify trends associated with the missions, structuring, and functional content of doctoral program management bodies by examining regulatory documents from eleven Latin American and European countries. Twenty national, institutional, and doctoral program regulations were reviewed using qualitative content analysis. In addition to descriptive statistical techniques, theoretical analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, and the comparative method were used. Missions that regularly justify the creation of the management bodies under study were identified, as well as trends related to their names, composition, and access methods. The behavior of their functional content was characterized by

considering twelve processes characteristic of doctoral training. The conclusions were: there is a general consensus and the creation of specific collegiate bodies to manage doctoral programs is an established practice; The way in which these bodies are established and structured, as well as their names, vary widely; the functional content of these bodies varies in terms of the number of established functions and the number of doctoral training processes to which they contribute; and there is an imbalance in the priority given, based on their functional content, to key and strategic processes associated with training.

Keywords: doctoral committee; postgraduate education; doctoral training; governing bodies; doctoral program; doctoral training regulations.

RESUMEN

La mejora de la formación doctoral supone optimizar la gestión de sus programas, lo que justifica la creación de órganos colegiados que faciliten dicho proceso. El estudio se planteó el objetivo de identificar tendencias asociadas a las misiones, la estructuración y el contenido funcional de los órganos de gestión de los programas de doctorado, desde el examen de documentos normativos de once países latinoamericanos y europeos. Se revisaron 20 normativas de alcance nacional, institucional y de programas doctorales, con el empleo del análisis de contenido cualitativo. Además de técnicas de la estadística descriptiva, del nivel teórico se utilizaron el análisis-síntesis, la inducción-deducción y el método comparativo. Se identificaron misiones que, como regularidad, justifican la creación de los órganos de gestión objeto de estudio; tendencias relativas a su denominación, composición y el modo de acceso y se caracterizó el comportamiento de su contenido funcional considerando doce procesos característicos de la formación doctoral. Se concluyó que: existe un consenso general y es una práctica instituida la creación de órganos colegiados específicos para gestionar los programas de doctorado; es ampliamente diversa la manera en que se instauran y estructuran dichos órganos y sus denominaciones; el contenido funcional de estos órganos es disímil en cuanto al número de funciones establecidas y la cifra de procesos de la formación doctoral a los que ellas tributan; existe un desequilibrio en la prioridad que, desde su contenido funcional, se ofrece a procesos clave y estratégicos asociados a la formación.

Palabras clave: comité de doctorado; educación de posgrado; formación doctoral; órganos de gestión; programa de doctorado; reglamentos de formación doctoral.

RESUMO

Aprimorar a formação doutoral requer otimizar a gestão dos programas, justificando a criação de colegiados para facilitar esse processo. Este estudo objetivou identificar tendências associadas às missões, estruturação e conteúdo funcional dos colegiados de programas de doutorado, examinando documentos normativos de onze países latino-americanos e europeus. Vinte regulamentações nacionais, institucionais e de programas de doutorado foram revisadas por meio de análise qualitativa de conteúdo. Além de técnicas estatísticas descritivas, foram utilizadas a análise teórica-síntese, a indução-dedução e o método comparativo. Foram identificadas as missões que, por regularidade, justificam a criação dos colegiados em estudo, bem como tendências relacionadas às suas denominações, composição e formas de acesso. O comportamento de seu conteúdo funcional foi caracterizado considerando doze processos característicos da formação doutoral. As conclusões foram: há um consenso geral e a criação de colegiados específicos para a gestão dos programas de doutorado é uma prática estabelecida; a forma como esses colegiados são constituídos e estruturados, bem como suas denominações, varia amplamente; O conteúdo funcional desses órgãos varia em função do número de funções estabelecidas e do número de processos de formação de doutorado para os quais contribuem; há um desequilíbrio na prioridade dada, com base em seu conteúdo funcional, aos processos-chave e estratégicos associados à formação.

Palavras-chave: comissão de doutorado; educação de pós-graduação; formação de doutorado; órgãos de gestão; programa de doutorado; regulamento de formação de doutorado.

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have witnessed a quantitative growth in doctoral studies, reflected in a significant increase in the number of programs offered and the number of students enrolled. This global phenomenon, which has also been evident in Cuba, is linked to another contemporary phenomenon, present worldwide: the growing value of knowledge and the recognition of the transcendent role of science, technology, and innovation as processes responsible for its creation, accumulation, and circulation. As Carvajal *et al.* (2020) point out, as cited in Mendoza *et al.* (2021): "One element to take into account when analyzing the importance of universities, and of doctorates in particular, is the assimilation of the term Knowledge Society. This paradigm includes the training of doctors as a key element for the generation and transfer of new knowledge" (p. 170).

The growing importance of doctoral training in this context has led to the need to recognize and pay attention to the pedagogical nature of this training process. Consequently, a significant research effort has been generated, and the production and systematization of knowledge related to the pedagogy of education or doctoral training has increased, which is no coincidence.

According to Diaz-Bazo (2021), even though doctoral programs are spaces for the construction of knowledge at the highest level and generate a favorable framework for the training and accreditation of the researchers that a country needs, "…little is known about what is taught and how research is 'taught' to form the identity and competencies of a researcher..." Consequently, there is a lack of "pedagogical culture" in the training of doctors, as numerous authors recognize, and this training is a "black box" with few studies and theories that help to understand it (Diaz-Bazo, 2021, p. 1062).

Focusing attention on doctoral training as a pedagogical process, with the support and contributions that research in this specific field can make, is a key factor in the necessary increase in its quality and relevance.

However, the desired improvement in the pedagogical dimension of doctoral training will only be possible if priority is also given to the issue of its management, given the strategic nature of this process, which coordinates efforts to achieve rational objectives in the development of organizational processes, and educational processes in particular. Improving the management of doctoral training is particularly important for optimizing the functioning of doctoral programs; this, in turn, requires the proper functioning of their management bodies.

The study of the management bodies of doctoral programs requires elucidating what is meant by management bodies, a term that is found in the specialized literature under different names. Mintzberg (1991), as cited in Carballal (2017), places them among the four types of liaison devices that operate within the framework of the organizational structure and names them standing committees. According to Carballal (2017): "The standing committee is a more stable grouping over time; it meets regularly to analyze and decide on issues of interest, for example, boards of directors and technical advisory councils" (p. 293).

Governing bodies, as Ramos *et al*. (2023) call them, are those responsible for directing the core activity, which constitutes the raison d'être of an institution. These bodies are present in a wide variety of contexts, from a national government to the board of directors of a company, the steering committee of a non-profit organization, or the board of an educational institution.

From the perspective of administrative law, Caballero-Sánchez (2023) specifies that "…administrative bodies are those identified parts of the administrative structure with the capacity to express the will of the person or Administration as a whole and bind it (by issuing administrative acts, entering into contracts or agreements, issuing provisions of a general nature, etc.), or at least with the capacity to intervene in its formation in a necessary and identified manner (an advisory body or a selection body)" (p. 216).

Likewise, the author argues: "Every administrative body has an officially appointed head, who may be individual (a specific administrative authority) or collegial (a group of people, whether authorities, public employees (...), or even private individuals with some technical or representative quality), in which case one of its members will assume the presidency. Headship entails the capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for its exercise or lack thereof" (Caballero-Sánchez, 2023, p. 219).

Although the management bodies of doctoral programs have a scope restricted to an academic program and constitute a structural unit that complements the organizational structure of the institution to facilitate the management of a postgraduate training process, they have characteristics that typify the aforementioned bodies, namely:

- They make key decisions regarding doctoral training.
- They propose and assist in establishing policies within the framework of a doctoral program or programs to guide the actions of those involved.
- They are designed to supervise and direct activities related to doctoral training.
- They issue provisions of a general nature and are binding, such as those contained in the regulations they may decree.
- Its members are officially appointed by designation or election.
- One of its members assumes its presidency or coordination.
- The ownership of its members (as a collegiate body) and that of its coordinator entails the capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for its exercise or lack thereof.

Based on the more general objective of "Analyzing the theoretical and methodological references that support the management of the doctoral training process by doctoral committees and authorized institutions, including their internationalization," proposed as part of the project "Management of the doctoral training process and its internationalization" (University of Pinar del Río, 2024), a study was developed with the more specific objective of identifying trends associated with the missions,

structuring, and functional content of the management bodies of doctoral programs, from the examination of regulatory documents from eleven Latin American and European countries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on 20 regulatory documents referring to postgraduate education (12) and doctoral training (8), of national (2), institutional (17) and specific doctoral program (1) scope, from 11 countries in Latin America and Europe (Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama and Peru) (Table 1).

Table 1. Regulatory documents related to postgraduate education and doctoral training reviewed during the study

Reg.	País	Institución	Norma		Alcance		
			Pos.	Doc.	Nac	Ins	Pro
R-1	Argentina	Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (2003)	X			X	
R-2	Colombia	Universidad del Rosario (2018)	X			X	
R-3	Argentina	Universidad Nacional de la Plata (2003)	X			X	
R-4	Argentina	Universidad Nacional de La Plata (2018)		X		X	
R-5	Argentina	Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (2022)	X			X	
R-6	Bolivia	Universidad Autónoma "J. M. Saracho" (2008)	X			X	
R-7	Bolivia	Escuela Militar de Ingeniería "Mcal Sucre" (2024).	X			X	
R-8	Chile	Universidad de Santiago de Chile (2015).		X		X	
R-9	Chile	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (2020)		X		X	
R-10	Colombia	Universidad de los Andes (2019)		X			X
R-11	Colombia	Universidad Santo Tomás, (2019)	X			X	
R-12	México	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (2018)	X			X	
R-13	México	Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa (2023)	X			X	
R-14	Costa Rica	Universidad de Costa Rica (2024)	X			X	
R-15	Bélgica	Universidad de Namur (2024)		X		X	
R-16	Ecuador	Consejo de Educación Superior (2019)		X	X		
R-17	Perú	Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (2022)	X			X	
R-18	España	Reino de España (2011)		X	X		
R-19	Panamá	Universidad Latina de Panamá (2022)	X			X	
R-20	Panamá	Universidad Autónoma de Chiriquí (2002)		X		X	

Legend: Reg. (Regulations); Pos. (Postgraduate); Doc. (Doctorate); Nac (National); Ins (Institutional); Pro (Doctoral Program)

Source: prepared by the authors

Depending on the type of research and the objective that guided it, the main method of the empirical level used was the documentary review, together with qualitative content analysis, as an associated procedure.

In addition to the document review using qualitative content analysis, theoretical methods such as analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, and comparative methods were used, along with descriptive statistical techniques, which enabled the processing and analysis of data and the obtaining of information associated with the expected results.

RESULTS

For the purposes of this study, the units of analysis were the functions, powers, and responsibilities of the doctoral program management bodies as set forth in the regulatory documents under review. The established categories refer to the processes involved in doctoral training.

Doctoral training is understood as a pedagogical process, with special curricular implications, aimed at the research training of the doctoral student. It culminates in the public defense of an original thesis. This process requires demonstrating a degree of scientific maturity, an ability to independently confront and solve complex problems, and a deep theoretical and practical mastery of the area of knowledge of the program being studied. Due to its specific nature, it involves systematic supervision of the doctoral student's compliance with the general training plan and the progress they achieve based on the results of said training.

Based on the definition of the categories used to classify the functions of the bodies responsible for conducting doctoral programs, elements related to the management of doctoral training were also taken into account, such as: the management of academic staff involved in the training process; the planning, organization, regulation, control, and accountability of program activities; the internal functioning of the governing body; and the evaluation, accreditation, and quality improvement of the program. Issues related to document management, credit certification and validation, cooperation with other intra- and inter-institutional bodies, the inclusion of the international dimension, and the material, financial, and informational assurance that supports training activities were also considered.

Based on these assumptions, 12 categories were defined, each of which represents a characteristic process of doctoral training and was classified as key, strategic, or supportive.

As a result of the theoretical systematization, based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions presented, the following results were obtained: a) missions of the doctoral program management bodies; b) names, composition, and access to these bodies; c) management of the doctoral program management bodies; and d) functional content of the doctoral program management bodies. The main findings are presented below.

a) Missions of the management bodies of doctoral programs

The regulations on postgraduate studies, and the more specific ones regarding doctoral training, recognize the need for and include the establishment of collegiate bodies for the management of postgraduate programs, and particularly doctoral programs. In this regard, the missions justifying their creation are specified in:

- the planning, organization, coordination, management, administration, review, monitoring, control, evaluation of the activity of the doctoral program;
- the academic management of the program in matters concerning the definition of guidelines, orientation, organization, conduction and operation;
- monitoring the quality of the program;
- the curricular management of the program (responsibility for its definition, updating);
- the validation of the different stages of the doctoral students' curriculum (admission to the doctoral program, registration, midterm evaluation, constitution of a thesis jury, private defense and public defense) and;
- advising the authorities of academic units on doctoral studies.

b) Name, composition and method of access to the management bodies of doctoral programs

The names given to the governing bodies of doctoral programs vary, even within the same country. The most common terms are academic committee (Argentina, Mexico), doctoral academic committee (Argentina), or doctoral academic committee (Bolivia). Other terms used are doctoral committee (Colombia, Chile), doctoral committee (Ecuador, Argentina), academic commission (Panama and Spain), and doctoral academic commission (Panama); as well as postgraduate program committee (Costa Rica), doctoral program committee (Chile), program committee or group of postgraduate programs (Colombia), and steering committee (Peru).

The aforementioned bodies are appointed and respond to the academic units (faculties, departments, research centers) to which the programs are assigned, or to specialized bodies of the universities responsible for postgraduate education or doctoral training, such as: doctoral schools (Spain), postgraduate schools (Peru), postgraduate study centers (Panama) or the Secretariat of Continuing Education (Bolivia).

Various regulations establish that these bodies can be specific to the management of one or more doctoral programs, and even for the joint management of master's and doctoral programs with continuity designs. The criteria for grouping several doctoral programs under the direction of a single body are varied; one of them may be the approximation of the areas of knowledge they cover. An example of this is the "specific doctoral commissions" (with a specific scope) for "Human and Social Sciences" and "Health, Sciences, and Technology" established at the University of Namur, Belgium.

The composition and access of members of these management and/or advisory bodies is also heterogeneous, even within the same national context. However, based on the analysis of the regulations considered for this study, two general trends can be identified regarding their composition.

The first, slightly predominant, trend favors staffing committees and commissions responsible for the management and/or advising of doctoral programs with active academic and research staff. These staff are part of the regular (tenured) faculty of the academic units and institutions involved in the doctoral program. These staff may also include part-time professors working in these entities, as well as professors, researchers, and specialists from other institutions and public bodies. The main criterion for membership in these bodies is the prestige and merits achieved through academic and scientific performance in the program's area of knowledge and lines of research (Table 2).

The second trend, which, although a minority but nonetheless significant, characterizes the composition of the committees and commissions in charge of doctoral programs by the simultaneous presence of directors of the academic units involved or of specialized bodies (deans, graduate school directors, directors of the program's implementing units, directors of participating departments and academic entities, virtual and distance education departments, among others), with a less decisive representation of active academic staff (professors and researchers). In most cases, the highest-ranking director presides over the meetings of these bodies (Table 2). From the researchers'

perspective, this can be detrimental to the fulfillment of the academic function of these bodies, and can lead to their actions tending to shift more toward an "administrative" dynamic.

Table 2. Trends in the composition of the management bodies of doctoral programs

Reglamento	Tendencia (T1/T2)	Reglamento	Tendencia (T1/T2)
R-1	**T1**	R-11	**T2**
R-2	**T2**	R-12	**T2**
R-3	**T1**	R-13	**T2**
R-4	**T1**	R-14	**T1**
R-5	**T1**	R-15	**T1**
R-6	**T2**	R-16	**T1**
R-7	**T1**	R-17	**T1**
R-8	**T1**	R-18	**T1**
R-9	**T2**	R-19	**T2**
R-10	**T1**	R-20	**T2**

Source: prepared by the authors

Some of the committees and commissions, although this may be more significant in either direction, include students among their members, who are granted the opportunity to express their opinions, with restrictions on their right to vote and to participate in the discussion of certain topics. The Regulations of the University of Santo Tomás, Colombia, also provide for the participation of graduates of the program.

The diversity that characterizes the process of forming the governing bodies of doctoral programs, based on the information provided by the regulations under review, is also evident in the method of accession of their members. Two practices are evident in this regard: their appointment by the academic authorities to whom the programs report and their election by members of the faculty. The heterogeneity among these bodies is also evident in the definition of the term for which the members of the academic staff who comprise these bodies are elected or appointed, which can range from two to four years.

c) Management of the management bodies of doctoral programs

The management of the governing bodies of doctoral programs generally falls to a representative of the academic staff (professor or researcher), in the vast majority of cases, or to a small management team, who may be appointed by the relevant authorities or elected to the position by the members of the body in question.

The person responsible for this management process, with the implications it entails, is referred to in most of the regulations studied as the "director" or "coordinator" of the program or programs. They are also called program head and president.

In some cases, the management of the program's management body may also be assumed by a director of the academic unit or a specialized body for the management of postgraduate or doctoral training (dean, vice-dean, secretary of continuing education, vice-rector of postgraduate studies).

The regulations examined also include the definition of the specific functions, responsibilities, and powers of the directors or coordinators of the program management bodies, in addition to those established for such bodies. In this regard, it is worth highlighting some that are recurrent in the established regulatory documents:

- Monitoring full compliance with the doctoral academic policy and current regulations.
- The proposal of strategies, projects and decisions that lead to the consolidation of the program.
- The preparation of the program's annual work plan for submission to its management body for approval.
- The preparation and presentation of the program's annual budget and its proposal to the relevant authorities.
- The development of the academic program.
- The scheduling, convening, and chairing or facilitating of meetings of the management body.
- Monitoring the decisions of the program's management body and the higher authorities responsible for the postgraduate program.
- The proper recording of administrative management information.
- The preparation of the annual report and the reporting of program results to the governing body and the highest postgraduate level, and its dissemination to the faculty.
- Monitoring the quality of research and teaching carried out in the program.

- The organization and management of the program's self-assessment and national and international accreditation processes.
- Holding regular meetings with academic staff to discuss issues of interest to the program and maintain a permanent channel of communication.
- Processing with higher authorities matters related to the program's teachers.
- Acting as a liaison among students, program faculty, and academic unit directors and other higher authorities.
- Representation of the program before national or international bodies.
- The request to the relevant authorities for logistical support requirements for the best execution of the program.

d) Functional content of the management bodies of doctoral programs

As explained above, in order to establish the characteristics that distinguish the functional content of the management bodies of doctoral programs, the functions, powers and responsibilities of these bodies were considered as units of analysis and 12 categories were defined referring to processes (key, strategic and support) concerning doctoral training (Table 3).

Table 3. Categories (processes) identified for qualitative content analysis

Letra	Categorías (procesos)	Tipo de proceso
A	Gestión documental, certificación de créditos y convalidaciones	**(Apoyo)**
B	Gestión curricular	**(Clave)**
C	Evaluación, acreditación y mejora de la calidad del programa	**(Estratégico)**
D	Admisión y movimientos de matrícula (reingresos, prórrogas, bajas)	**(Clave)**
E	Planificación, organización, regulación, control y rendición de cuentas	**(Estratégico)**
F	Gestión de la investigación doctoral	**(Clave)**
G	Culminación de estudios doctorales	**(Clave)**
H	Gestión del personal académico	**(Estratégico)**
I	Funcionamiento interno del órgano de gestión del programa	**(Estratégico)**
J	Relaciones y cooperación intra e interinstitucionales e internacionalización	**(Apoyo)**
K	Aseguramiento material y financiero	**(Apoyo)**
L	Supervisión al plan de formación general del doctorando	**(Clave)**

Source: prepared by the authors

Following the logic of qualitative content analysis, 190 functions, powers, and responsibilities were identified, found in 19 regulatory documents examined (2 national, 16 institutional, and one doctoral

program document). These functions were placed, in each case, into one of the 12 defined categories. One function that did not fall within the processes associated with these categories remained to be classified, as it is not considered appropriate for doctoral training (note that some of the regulations examined govern the functions of management bodies for the various forms of academic postgraduate studies, not just doctoral programs).

The number of functions established in the regulatory documents reviewed varies widely, ranging from 4 to 20, for an average of 10 per regulation. Likewise, the number of processes (of the 12 identified) associated with these functions also varies, ranging from 2 to 10, for an average of 5.9. The mode is 6 processes (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of processes to which the functions established in each regulation contribute

Reglamento	Número de procesos a que tributa	Reglamento	Número de procesos a que tributa
R-1	4	R-11	4
R-2	7	R-12	8
R-3	No se consideró	R-13	6
R-4	5	R-14	7
R-5	8	R-15	2
R-6	6	R-16	6
R-7	8	R-17	6
R-8	7	R-18	3
R-9	6	R-19	5
R-10	10	R-20	5

Source: prepared by the authors

It is also observed that a significant number (121, for 63.9%) of the 190 registered functions are grouped into five of the established categories (processes): B (Curriculum management), D (Admission and registration movements: re-admissions, extensions, withdrawals), F (Doctoral research management), H (Academic staff management) and I (Internal functioning of the program management body), the first three being key processes, and the last two being strategic (Table 5).

Table 5. Number of functions that contribute to the categories (processes) related to doctoral training

Categoría (proceso) relativa a la formación doctoral	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	S/U	Total
Tipo de proceso	Ap	Cl	Es	Cl	Es	Cl	Cl	Es	Es	Ap	Ap	Cl		
Número de funciones que tributan al proceso	10	20	9	33	10	23	12	21	24	17	1	9	1	190
Porciento	5.3	10.5	4.7	17.4	5.3	12.1	6.3	11.1	12.6	8.9	0.5	4.7	0.5	100.0

Legend: Ap (Support Process); Cl (Key Process); Es (Strategic Process)
Source: prepared by the authors

Below are the results of the analysis process considering the categories that were established.

Category (process) A. Document management, credit certification and validations (Support)

In this category, 10 functions were included in the regulations of nine institutions in six countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Panama). These functions relate to: approval of applications for validation, homologation, and equivalence of activities, courses, and studies completed before entering the program, in national or foreign institutions (8), and the evaluation and approval of applications for recognition of academic credits (2). No specific functions related to document management were recorded.

Category (process) B. Curriculum management (Key)

The category grouped 20 functions established in 13 national and institutional regulations of nine countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru), which were referred to: the evaluation and approval of curricular modifications and adjustments to courses, the study plan, other activities and the general conception of the program (7); the curricular evaluation of the program (3); the approval of proposals related to course and subject content, study plans and other curricular aspects of the program (7); the evaluation and approval of criteria and procedures for evaluating academic performance and the leveling stage, as well as requirements and levels in the mastery of foreign languages (3).

Category (process) C. Evaluation, accreditation and improvement of the quality of the program (Strategic)

This category included nine functions established in eight regulatory documents of universities in six countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Peru), which refer to: the proposal of recommendations on indicators, goals and mechanisms for the evaluation, monitoring and accreditation of programs (2); the periodic evaluation of the quality and performance of the program (3); the supervision and monitoring of development and improvement plans derived from self-assessment and program evaluation processes (4).

Category (process) D. Admission and registration movements (re-admissions, extensions, withdrawals) (Key)

This is the category in which the largest number (33) of the functions stated in two national regulations, 12 institutional regulations and one doctoral program, from 10 countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama and Peru), were classified, which denotes the importance given to the activities that are considered as content of the process that identifies the category. The functions included in the regulatory documents refer to: the design, organization, execution, decision and dissemination of the results of the admission of applicants to doctoral programs (26); the evaluation and approval of applications for re-entry (3); the request and approval of extensions and temporary interruption of studies (3); the evaluation and decision on permanence and withdrawal from the doctoral program (3).

Category (process) E. Planning, organization, regulation, control and accountability (Strategic)

Associated with this category, which refers to an important strategic process in doctoral training, were 10 of the functions listed in seven of the regulations examined, corresponding to university institutions in five countries (Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Panama and Peru). The responsibilities assigned to the training management bodies, included in this category, relate to: approval of annual work plans and the opening of new academic cycles (3); periodic and annual analysis and evaluation of the results of the program, the courses and the different activities that comprise it (4); supervision of the development of program activities (1); approval of the opening of new entries to the program, as well as proposals for courses and activities (2); and the appointment of committees required for compliance with the study plan (1).

Category (process) F. Doctoral research management (Key)

This category grouped 23 functions contained in 10 of the regulations examined, corresponding to eight countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico and Panama). The functions included here allude to one of the key processes of greatest relevance to doctoral training (doctoral research) and to the management of this process: the appointment of the program's tutors and/or thesis supervisors and the analysis of their activity (12); the approval of the thesis plans and projects submitted by doctoral students (6); the systematic evaluation of the progress achieved by doctoral students in their research activity and the adoption of corresponding measures based on their results (4); the definition and approval of the program's research lines (1); and the evaluation of the status of doctoral students' publications and the adoption of decisions in this regard (3).

Category (process) G. Completion of doctoral studies (Key)

Related to this category were grouped 12 functions, established in seven regulations of national (1), institutional (10) and program (1) scope, put into force in four countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador), which require the managing bodies of doctoral programs to: approve or endorse the proposal to a higher authority of the juries for the defense of the theses (6); approve the authorization to support the theses (2); approve the rules for the presentation of doctoral theses (1); and establish criteria and approve or propose recognition for the quality of the theses and their support (3).

Category (process) H. Academic staff management (Strategic)

This category, given the strategic process to which it refers, is of capital importance for the development of doctoral training. 21 functions were classified in it, established in 14 national (1) and institutional (13) standards, developed in eight countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Panama). The aforementioned functions refer to: the approval or the endorsed proposal of the professors who will perform different roles in the program (9); the definition of the profile of the program's professors and other requirements to be taken into account for their approval (2); the approval of thesis supervisors, the definition of their profile, their training routes, the maximum number of theses they may supervise (4); the evaluation of the academic performance of professors and tutors (2); the creation and updating of committees and registries of tutors (2); and the definition of specialization and training priorities for teaching and research staff (1).

Category (process) I. Internal functioning of the program management body (Strategic)

In this category, 24 functions were classified, contained in 12 national (1), institutional (10) and doctoral program regulations, corresponding to nine countries (Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Panama), referring to: the preparation, approval and updating of the regulations and other internal rules of the program and the strict control of their observance (9); the appointment, advice and approval of the work plans of the coordinators or directors of the program (3); acting as a body for the knowledge and solution of all types of matters that concern the smooth running of the program (3); the appointment of subcommittees and working subcommissions that are considered appropriate for the operation of the program (2); holding regular meetings of the body (1); requesting reports and rendering accounts to the personnel associated with the program (1); establishing academic and scientific orientations (1); and attending to academic requests and the resolution of conflicts between students and thesis supervisors (4).

Category (process) J. Intra and inter-institutional relations and cooperation and internationalization (Support)

This category includes 17 functions established in nine institutional regulatory documents from seven countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Peru), related to: the promotion and approval of strategies and actions for coordination with other undergraduate and graduate programs and academic cooperation; determining the equivalence of academic activities carried out within the framework of agreements and scientific degrees obtained abroad; recommending and/or managing inter-institutional agreements; promoting requests for support for the program; appointing program representatives to other bodies; advising academic units and other university bodies on doctoral matters; and promoting the internationalization of the program.

Category (process) K. Material and financial assurance (Support)

Among the categories initially identified, this was the one least associated with the functions analyzed (only 1), included in the Regulations of the Graduate School of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, which refers to the review and approval of the doctoral program budget.

Category (process) L. Supervision of the doctoral student's general training plan (Key)

Although this category refers to a key process of doctoral training, given the characteristics of its conception and curricular dynamics, only nine functions were classified within it, established in eight of the regulatory documents of six countries (Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Spain, and Mexico) that were examined. These functions refer to: the approval of doctoral students' general work plans and the establishment of academic activities they must complete, associated with their study plan, as well as any changes and modifications in this regard; the definition of newly admitted doctoral students who require leveling courses; the annual monitoring and evaluation of compliance with the research plan; and other activities considered in their training plan.

DISCUSSION

Qualitative content analysis, which was fundamental to the entire study, made it possible to determine the characteristics relating to the functional content of the doctoral program management bodies, based on a study of the articles concerning the functions, powers, and responsibilities of said bodies in the regulations that govern them.

Content analysis is assumed from a qualitative perspective, in the understanding that it is prepared from a bibliographic review, where the captured reality becomes knowledge from the interpretation of the information offered by the documentary sources that comprise it (Gruezo-Valencia and Solis-Mora, 2022). Logic involves a transition that starts with the identification of units of analysis and culminates in categorization (category identification). The units of analysis "…are the segments of content of written messages that are of interest to investigate, and which can subsequently be expressed and broken down into categories and subcategories…" (Fernández-Chaves, 2002, p. 38); "…they represent segments of information, chosen with a particular and unique criterion that can be coded and ultimately categorized" (Cáceres, 2003, p. 63).

Categorization, on the other hand, "…is an operation of classifying the constituent elements of a set by differentiation, after grouping by gender (analogy), based on previously defined criteria" (Bardin, 2002, as cited in Díaz-Herrera, 2018, p. 127). According to Aigneren (1999, as cited in Díaz-Herrera, 2018), categories "…are the boxes between which the recording units will be distributed for their classification and counting" (p. 128). Their identification requires compliance with requirements such as: defining from a criterion; exhaustiveness (classifying all the coded material); relevance (they

must reflect the research objectives); objectivity (sufficiently clear); being independent of each other (Cáceres, 2003; Díaz-Herrera, 2018).

The document review revealed a general consensus and established practice regarding the creation of specific collegiate bodies to manage doctoral programs. Their actions should promote the order and formality required for doctoral training and the proper implementation of national and institutional policies related to this process, as well as effective quality assurance.

It is evident that there is a wide diversity in the way in which the governing bodies of doctoral programs are established and structured, which is manifest not only in the multiple names by which they are identified, but also in the dissimilar alternatives for accessing their members and the heterogeneity of their composition. Their ownership, as recognized in the specialized literature, "(...) entails the capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for its exercise or for the lack thereof" (Caballero-Sánchez, 2023, p. 219).

The analysis reveals the wide diversity present in the functional content of the management bodies of doctoral programs, which is expressed in the number of established functions and in the number of processes related to doctoral training (key, strategic, and support) to which these functions contribute, taking into account the proposal by Almaguer-Torres *et al.* (2020). For these authors, strategic processes "...have the purpose of specifying the goals or objectives, the policies to be followed, and the strategies to be used to achieve them" (p. 102); key or operational processes "...are designed or identified, taking into account the fundamental activities for which the project was created in order to serve clients..." and support processes "...have the purpose of guaranteeing the material, human, and financial resources required for the execution of the project" (p. 103).

There is also an imbalance in the priority given by the governing bodies of doctoral training programs to key and strategic processes associated with training. While on the one hand, priority is given to admissions and enrollment processes, doctoral research management, curriculum management, the internal functioning of the governing body, and academic staff management, on the other, regulations do not favor attention to other processes of this nature, such as: the completion of doctoral studies; supervision of the doctoral student's general training plan; planning, organization, regulation, control, and accountability; and evaluation, accreditation, and quality improvement of the program. Academic staff management, as a highly relevant strategic process, demonstrates a

functional polarization toward the recruitment and selection of faculty, to the detriment of other subprocesses such as training and development.

The study offers novel results that pave the way for knowledge and understanding of doctoral training management as a crucial process for optimizing the development and outcomes of this academic form of postgraduate education. Further, it is necessary to expand the documentary review in the European context and extend it to other geographic regions such as North America, Asia, Australia-Oceania, and Africa, in order to enrich its findings and identify new trends.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

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