

Status of qualitative research in doctoral theses in education in Perú

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Abstract

Introduction: The status of qualitative research in education has been analysed in other countries, while in Peru, only isolated data are available. **Objective:** To analyse the situation of qualitative research in education in Peru. **Method:** 350 doctoral theses (2004-2024) were reviewed through content analysis and critical analysis of academic discourse. **Results:** Qualitative studies are comparatively few in contrast to quantitative ones; the qualitative research methods most frequently employed are phenomenology, hermeneutics and case studies; furthermore, thesis authors conceive of qualitative research as a methodological option different from quantitative research, but this supposed distinction becomes blurred in practice, under the precepts of empiricism and positivism. **Discussion:** By considering qualitative research as exploratory and inductive, and of a less rigorous and subjective nature, they reduced to a merely technical-instrumental resource..

Keywords: Education; qualitative research; methods; Peru; doctoral theses.

El estado de las investigaciones cualitativas en las tesis doctorales en educación en el Perú

Resumen

Introducción: El estado de la investigación cualitativa en educación ha sido analizado en otros países; mientras que sobre el Perú se cuenta apenas con datos aislados. **Objetivo:** Analizar la situación de la investigación cualitativa en educación en el Perú. **Método:** Se revisaron 350 tesis doctorales (2004-2024), mediante el análisis de contenido y análisis crítico del discurso académico. **Resultados:** Los estudios cualitativos en comparación con los cuantitativos son escasos; los métodos de la investigación cualitativa que en mayor número han sido empleados son la fenomenología, hermenéutica y estudios de caso; además los tesisistas conciben la investigación cualitativa como una opción metodológica distinta a la cuantitativa, pero esta supuesta diferencia se diluye en sus abordajes bajo los preceptos del empirismo y el positivismo. **Discusión:** Al considerar a la investigación cualitativa como exploratorio e inductivo, de menor rigurosidad y de carácter subjetivo, se la convierte en un recurso técnico-instrumental.

Palabras clave: Educación; investigación cualitativa; métodos; Perú; tesis doctorales

Introduction

Qualitative research in education has received little attention throughout its history. However, this situation gradually began to change in the last decades of the 20th century, notably increasing in

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the 1980s and 1990s ([Erickson, 2017](#)). This is evidenced by the increase in the number of papers published, as well as the number of journals specialized in qualitative research in education ([Bogdan & Biklen, 1994](#)).

Regarding the history of qualitative research, there are works referring to its situation in North America and Europe, especially in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. In the education field there are studies on its origins and development ([Bogdan & Biklen, 1994](#); [Cooley, 2013](#); [Goetz & LeCompte, 1988](#); [Erickson, 2017](#); [McKerman, 1999](#); [Spindler & Spindler, 2000](#); Yon, 2003), the use of research methods and techniques ([Koro-Ljungberg & Douglas, 2008](#)), its prevalence against quantitative ones ([Devetak et al., 2010](#)), among others.

In Latin America, studies on the situation of qualitative research in education have been conducted in some countries ([Barabtarlo & Theesz, 1998](#); [Catalán, 2021](#); [Guzmán-Valenzuela & Barnett, 2019](#); [Rockwell, 1991](#), [Tedesco, 1987](#)), as well as research focused on specific national contexts, such as Brazil ([Belo & Mercado, 2022](#); [Sánchez, 1982, 1987, 1998, 2003](#); [Souza, 1998](#); [Zanette, 2017](#)), Mexico ([Bertely & Corenstein, 1998](#); [Rockwell, 1998](#); [Corenstein, 2001](#); [Rueda, 2007](#)), Costa Rica ([Brenes et al., 1998](#)), and Argentina and Chile ([Batallán, 1998](#)). However, in the case of Peru, the available data are still partial or scattered ([Bustinza, 2014](#); [Cencia, 2017](#); [Cruz et al., 2010](#); [Sime & Díaz-Bazo, 2016](#)). During the first decades of qualitative research in Latin America, educational ethnography and participatory research played an important role ([Anderson & Montero-Sieburth, 1998](#)). Thanks to the early encounter between ethnographic research and critical perspectives, studies were carried out on school failure, education in popular sectors, daily school life, teachers as workers and the hidden curriculum, as well as social and cultural reproduction ([Rockwell, 1991](#)).

In Brazil, qualitative research began in the 1970s ([Zanette, 2017](#)). For example, in graduate works between 1971 and 1984, although empirical analytical epistemological options predominated, phenomenological and critical dialectical research was also accepted, thanks to the greater democratization of society and greater academic

freedom ([Sanchez, 2003](#)). Between 1972 and 1995, the field of science education saw the growth of qualitative studies ([Megid, 1999](#)). Currently, qualitative research in Brazil is consolidated ([Rocha et al., 2019](#); [Zanette, 2017](#)).

In parallel, also during the 1970s, theoretical methodological works began in Spain ([Guzmán et al., 2008](#)), although most of the authors came from the field of sociology ([Sandín, 2003](#)). Likewise, the critical paradigm nourished the debate on epistemological presuppositions ([Bartolomé, 1992](#)). The first qualitative studies in education appeared in the 1980s and were consolidated in the 1990s ([Guzmán et al., 2008](#)). However, at present, mixed methods and evidence-based research have had a considerable impact on its status, and qualitative research has been devalued both in scientific journals and in university teaching, on top of being progressively instrumentalized ([Fernández & Postigo-Fuentes, 2020](#); [Fernández et al., 2021](#)).

In Mexico, in the 1970s, the Center for Research and Higher Studies on Social Anthropology (*Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social*) and the Department of Educational Research (*Departamento de Investigaciones Educativas*) contributed significantly to the advance of educational ethnography ([Rockwell, 1998](#)). However, the dominant tradition in educational research during the 1970s and early 1980s was positivism, linked to behaviorism and psychometric analysis ([Bertely & Corenstein, 1998](#)).

In Argentina and Chile, educational ethnography faced serious difficulties in its beginnings, derived both from the advocates of the hegemonic quantitative model and from the influence of the military dictatorships. In this context, school systems were captured by authoritarian policies, which researchers with anthropological training and experience in popular education stood against ([Batallán, 1998](#)).

In the case of Costa Rica, qualitative research was promoted by the Multinational Center for Research on Education (Centro Multinacional de Investigación Educativa) and the Ministry of Education, which contrasts with other Latin American countries, where the main promoters were scholars associated with the left ([Brenes et al., 1998](#)).

In these countries, the incorporation of qualitative methodologies in qualitative research responded to their socio-historical conditions, with theoretical and methodological differences. Theoretically, critical perspectives on education and research cemented the disenchantment with hegemonic models. On the methodological level, qualitative research was conceived as a legitimate alternative for understanding the complex dynamics in education.

In the case of Peru, qualitative research has been, and continues to be, a marginal approach. At the Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, 10 qualitative studies were identified in doctoral dissertations in education between 2001 and 2010 (Bustinza, 2014). Meanwhile, in three universities in the center of the country, between 2010 and 2015, Cencia (2017) found no qualitative studies. Likewise, in 13 universities (4 private and 9 public), in the period between 2009 and 2013, Sime & Díaz-Bazo (2016) reported that less than 5% of the doctoral dissertations in education used qualitative methods.

On the other hand, the analysis of the situation of qualitative research, based on the methodological theoretical foundations and the conceptions about methods, techniques, and instruments, reveals several complex problems. Qualitative research constantly faces the siege of empiricism, and the presuppositions of evidence-based research are transposed to qualitative research (Cheek, 2008; Denzin, 2009; Denzin & Giardina, 2008; Hernández Hernández & Revelles, 2019; Howe, 2008; Packer, 2013; St. Pierre, 2006; Vasilachis, 2019), as well as those stemming from mixed methods and triangulation (Gobo, 2023). Currently, we observe the increasing instrumentalization of qualitative research (Demuth, 2015; Fernandez et al., 2021), as well as its McDonaldization (Brinkmann, 2015).

In view of this, the present study aims to reveal the status of qualitative research in doctoral dissertations in education. To date, no research of this magnitude has been conducted in Peru in any area, field, or discipline. Likewise, there has been no critical analysis of the methodological contents of the dissertations to unravel the conceptions of qualitative research, the research

methods and techniques, the process of analysis, and the role of theory.

Method

Design

This work has a qualitative approach, where the design emerges from the constant articulation and confrontation between the empirical and theoretical moments (González, 2006). Likewise, given that discourse analysis constitutes one of the main approaches of qualitative research (Rapley, 2014), and considering that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is part of the critical perspectives of discourse studies (Van Dijk, 2016a), this research model is adopted, for two reasons: a) because the object of study requires it, and b) because discourse analysis is selected (Sayago, 2014).

On the other hand, since our object of study are doctoral dissertations, they can be approached both as academic discourses and as academic products. Research with CDA approaches academic discourse as part of professional and institutional power, in which the beliefs, knowledge, and opinions of professional and institutional elites—defined as authoritative (researchers and experts) and reliable voices—are usually accepted. In that framework, rules and routines emerge in the context of the continuous discursive reproduction of power in such fields and institutions (Van Dijk, 2016a). In institutional discourses, differentiated epistemic roles are played between experts and novices, and their actors mobilize different shares of power in their relations (Van Dijk, 2016b). In the case of doctoral dissertations, their authors have novice epistemic roles, accepting the authorized beliefs, knowledge, and stances and adjusting their intellectual production to conventional methodological rules and routines.

Techniques and Instruments

The technique used in this study was documentary analysis. In the first phase, to get a general idea of the state of qualitative research in education, a form was used to include data such as the dissertation's publication year, the university, and the specified research method. In the second phase, a matrix was

used to record information on the contents of the dissertations and to incorporate comments as well as questions. These were some of the questions: *What phenomena, events, situations should preferably be studied by means of qualitative methods? What role does theory play in inductive models? Does qualitative research, being data-based, constitute a type of evidence-based study? Does the phenomenological method provide insight into the inner world? Is hermeneutic research equivalent to text or document analysis?* Subsequently, possible answers were sought in the dissertations and reference lists. The answers obtained were, in turn, the object of new problematizations.

Procedure

To identify and classify the dissertations as qualitative studies, the methodological chapters and abstracts were reviewed in the repositories of those universities that have doctoral programs in education, for the 2004-2024 period. Abstracts were reviewed for those papers in which only this part is accessible.

From the methodological chapter, text fragments were also extracted and organized into macro categories, such as the conception of qualitative research, the conception of research methods, information analysis, interpretation, and theory. In turn, the 350 papers considered in this study were doctoral dissertations in education written by Peruvian authors, and those written by authors from other nationalities were excluded.

Análisis de datos

The analysis of the information gathered was initially carried out with the support of theoretical references, which provided previous categories such as epistemological bases, research design, research strategy, method, data collection techniques and instruments, data analysis techniques, and rigor and quality criteria. Subsequently, new categories were incorporated: characterization of the research, conceptions about qualitative research, conceptions about research methods, analysis and interpretation, the role of data and the place of theory, among others.

The information was organized in folders taking into account the methods used. These folders included text fragments referring to conceptions

about methods, qualitative research, and its processes. Fragments of text were then selected and comments and open codes were added, which constituted the inputs for the interpretation and critical analysis.

The documentary analysis was based on the assumptions of critical discourse analysis. The texts were analyzed both for their conventional and socially organized properties, as well as for their use during production, circulation, and consumption ([Atkinson & Delamont, 2015](#)). This implies paying attention both to the less clear, less crystallized aspects, as well as to what is explicit and evident ([Conde, 2009](#)).

Results

Qualitative research in doctoral dissertations in education in Peru reaches 4.28%. This figure corresponds to 350 dissertations out of a total of 8,233 (2004 to 2024), in which the qualitative approach is made explicit in the methodological section. Between 2004-2014, only five qualitative studies (1.36%) were identified; between 2015 and 2019, 32 (1.09%); while, between 2020 and 2024, the proportion rose significantly to 6.42%, which evidences a notorious growth in recent years.

When these 350 dissertations are disaggregated by university, there are notable differences between the different institutions. Likewise, when comparing the number of qualitative studies versus quantitative studies, it becomes clearer which universities favor qualitative studies the most.

On the other hand, 22 universities did not have any qualitative studies, and another 12 universities had very few (between one and four). In other words, of the 45 universities with doctoral programs in education, qualitative were produced in 23 of them (including the 11 universities in Table 1 and the 12 mentioned), while in 22 none were found. Likewise, of the 350 dissertations in which the term qualitative is explicitly mentioned, 8.57% correspond to documentary reviews (systematic reviews, trajectory and intellectual production of certain authors, historiographical studies, and others). Similarly, certain methods were adopted more frequently (see Table 2).

Table 1

Qualitative Research by University

University	Period	Qualitative	Total
Universidad Cesar Vallejo	2011-2024	240	4499
Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle	2007-2024	19	1133
Universidad Marcelino Champagnat	2011-2024	13	23
Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola	2015-2024	10	29
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú	2015-2024	9	12
Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos	2004-2024	8	338
Universidad Nacional del Altiplano	2009-2024	8	84
Universidad Nacional de San Agustín de Arequipa	2015-2024	7	157
Universidad Femenina del Sagrado Corazón	2013-2024	7	51
Universidad Nacional San Cristóbal de Huamanga	2020-2024	6	29

Note. The total in this table corresponds to the number of doctoral dissertations in education in each institutional repository.

Likewise, in seven dissertations no particular method is specified, while in 16 others the methodological chapter is not accessible, only the abstracts. On the other hand, about 10 methods different from those in Table 2 are mentioned in the dissertations, such as source analysis, emergent, historical interpretative, among others. In addition, 12 dissertations mention the use of more than one method.

However, when examining the conceptions about research methods in the methodological chapter, these are disconnected from the epistemological assumptions. Similarly, neither the analytical process nor the references or bibliographical sources cited are consistent with the theoretical and methodological bases of such methods. Likewise, qualitative research, in general, is conceived as a technical-instrumental resource. Qualitative research is characterized as flexible, inductive, exploratory, not very generalizable; it is also conceived as opposed to quantitative research, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

Due to the nature of our research, we have used the qualitative approach, which uses data collection without numerical measurement to discover or refine research questions in the process of interpretation. (T27)

Therefore, we establish a qualitative interpretive approach, because we use inductive reasoning since we study the perceptions of people in their natural everyday state. The qualitative research

Table 2

Methods or Designs

Methods	Quantity
Fenomenológico	103
Fenomenológico-hermenéutico	32
Estudio de caso	48
Hermenéutico	31
Etnográfico	15
Investigación acción	14
Teoría fundamentada	7
Descriptivo	6
Investigación documental	6
Investigación evaluativa	2
Narrativo	1
Sistematización de experiencias	1

Note: Not all the methods or designs mentioned in the dissertations are included.

method is based on the observation of natural behaviors, speeches, and open answers for the subsequent interpretation of meanings. (T13)

This analysis is characterized by a deep reflection on the structure of the phenomenon where the goal is not to obtain generalizations but generalities concerning the experiences of the participants of the study. (T16)

Under these conceptions, qualitative research is seen as useful for the study of certain topics that

are difficult to measure. Likewise, it is conceived as inductive in nature, given that data constitutes its raw material, even when the interpretations are not too far removed from the data.

It is also considered that qualitative research by itself is insufficient and only exploratory in nature (Moral, 2016). Those who adopt these conceptions rely mainly on the epistemological assumptions of empiricism, positivism, and its variants. Subjectivity is understood as a personal issue in the face of which objectivity is pursued by reducing biases derived from subjectivity.

As for the criteria of rigor or quality, in the dissertations in which it is made explicit and in those that are approached indirectly, these are seen as necessary resources to achieve greater objectivity.

It is understood that this type of research relies on the moral quality of the researcher, who must be subject to what the object of study shows and, although it is somewhat difficult, subordinate their subjectivity to the objectivity of the study. This is the condition why this type of research becomes important and it is possible to take its conclusions as points of reference for another type of study. (T40)

As can be seen, this type of research requires the person in charge of the study to possess an authentic research spirit, which will be capable of bending any subjective situation to the rigor of a study that responds to a concrete reality. (T10)

Likewise, a responsible treatment and use of the information was considered, with the personal commitment not to alter the information collected, to validate it with scientific rigor, and to be absolutely faithful to the commitments with the participants and with the institution with regard to any reciprocity benefit offered. (T12)

On the other hand, the theoretical methodological referents of phenomenology appear in only one work, both in the methodological foundation and in the analysis. In the other cases, phenomenology is mentioned, but the analyses carried out are scarcely articulated with it.

The present qualitative research used the phenomenological method because it is the appropriate one to study a problem that can only be approached from within the subject. (T40)

The main focus of inquiry of the phenomenological design lies in the different experiences of the participant, which, for this research case, was the mental representation of happiness. It is about analyzing the inner world of people who are influenced by their ability to establish representations from language, culture, their history and values. Based on that, we deduce that each person has a qualitatively different perception, which makes each one have their own experience over time. The same would be true regarding the mental representation of happiness. (T54)

In relation to phenomenological studies, emphasis is placed on personal experiences, associating them with personal subjective aspects and personal experiences. Thus, phenomenology becomes a methodological option to study individual subjectivity.

For its part, the hermeneutic method can appear as a procedure of information analysis or as a modality of documentary analysis.

The method is hermeneutic, since it interprets the information gathered by the informants. (T160)

Regarding the process of analysis, most of the methods have a similar structure, differing only in the data collection phase. Thus, ethnography is distinguished from the others by the length of time devoted to data collection; action research is oriented to the collection of information on the effects of improvement strategies; the case study focuses on the collection of data from particular cases that are representative of the group; and grounded theory is seen as useful for coding and categorization in the process of data analysis.

Therefore, during the research, I stayed in the Asháninka communities to understand the point of view of the villagers in their natural environment, living with the group, understanding the interactions within the group and with external agents while maintaining a certain distance as a researcher; so, I took notes after conducting the in-depth interview. (T5)

Action research design aims to understand and solve specific problems of a community linked to a group of students in the classroom of the second grade of primary school. (T25)

The research is a case study, although it can be

juxtaposed to different designs, since each case presented in reality has its own characteristics, peculiarities, and singularities (T84).

The design used in this research is based on grounded theory, the systematic design procedure with open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and emergent design (T11).

On the other hand, the differences attributed to the different versions of qualitative research are dissipated when they are assigned the same characteristics. Likewise, by presenting them as a set of regular procedures, they are converted into homogeneous processes that can be standardized.

To defend the analysis process carried out, this study appeals to the use of regular procedures that guarantee the suitability of the interpretations made, such as coding or categorization. It is also sought to ensure their correspondence with the data by means of triangulation and saturation.

The initial data analysis continued. For coding, all segments of the available material were reviewed, and initial categories of meaning were generated by constant comparison, eliminating redundancy and developing evidence for the categories to raise the level of abstraction, as stated by [Hernández et al. \(2010, p. 494\)](#). (T11)

Categorization was used to define the field of study and its subsequent execution. Likewise, the categories were divided into their respective subcategories. Subsequently, the final analysis and interpretation was carried out. (T23)

The analytical process is understood as the phase in which the data are reduced to draw conclusions based on similarities. The analysis is carried out following a sequence of procedures, such as the assignment of codes and the search for similarities and recurrences. Reiterative expressions turn into evidence or indicators and then become categories.

These categories are often derived from the terminology used in the research questions, the objectives, or the interview guides.

The authors of the doctoral dissertations, although they have opted for qualitative methods, in a context where quantitative methods are hegemonic, end up being reabsorbed within the assumptions of positivism and empiricism. Neither the philosophical foundations of phenomenology

nor those of hermeneutics were able to permeate their conceptions of the research process, although several authors have mentioned them. Thus, the institutionalized academic discourse that circulates within universities is perpetuated in the form of rules, routines, and standardized procedures. Consequently, those who deviate are viewed with distrust. Undoubtedly, the beliefs, conceptions, and ideologies of professional and institutional elites are propagated in doctoral dissertations.

Discussion

As discussed in the findings, the number of qualitative studies in the field of education in Peru has gradually increased in recent years. In other countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, qualitative research, in its beginnings (1970s and 1980s), was conducted based on theoretical references from critical perspectives, which were translated into participatory action research and critical ethnography. In Peru, however, their late incorporation has gone hand in hand with mixed methods and evidence-based research. Therefore, the ontological and epistemological perspectives adopted tend to be aligned with positivism, empiricism and its variants.

Regarding the state of qualitative research in universities in the country, and given the scarcity of previous studies, the findings are confronted with descriptive and bibliometric studies conducted by [Cruz et al. \(2010\)](#), [Bustanza \(2014\)](#), [Cencia \(2017\)](#), and [Sime & Diaz-Bazo \(2016, 2019\)](#). At the Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, Cruz et al. identified only one qualitative study, while Bustanza reported ten. These results differ from those in this work, in which 1.68% (19 of 1,133) correspond to what was reported by the dissertation authors. On the other hand, Bustanza does not specify how he established the difference between qualitative and quantitative studies.

In three universities in the center of the country (Universidad Nacional Hermilio Valdizán, Universidad Nacional Daniel Alcides Carrión, and Universidad Nacional del Centro del Perú),

between 2010 and 2015, [Cencia \(2017\)](#) did not find any qualitative studies, although, in the repository of Universidad Nacional del Centro del Perú, there is a qualitative study from 2015. This allows us to reaffirm that qualitative research occupies a marginal place in these universities, given that in Universidad Nacional del Centro del Perú, between 2014 and 2024, only three qualitative studies were identified out of a total of 87; in Universidad Nacional Hermilio Valdizán de Huánuco, three out of a total of 116 between 2015 and 2024; and in Universidad Nacional Daniel Alcides Carrión, between 2018 and 2024, none.

[Sime & Díaz-Bazo \(2016, 2019\)](#) reviewed doctoral dissertations in education for the period between 2009 and 2013, in 13 universities belonging to the Peruvian Network of Universities (Red Peruana de Universidades, RPU). However, reviewing only that select group did not allow us to map in its integrity the state of doctoral dissertations in the country. Leaving out, for example, Universidad César Vallejo, which concentrates 54.65% of dissertations at the national level, has notorious implications for the results. Regarding qualitative methods, they indicated that less than 5% of the dissertations make use of them. These data partially differ from the findings of the present study, where it was found that, at the national level, between 2004 and 2014, 1.36% of the studies were qualitative, and between 2015 and 2019, 1.09%.

Regarding the conception about qualitative research, its processes, and its methods, these are largely approached as technical-instrumental procedures. It is characterized as opposed to quantitative, inductive, exploratory, descriptive, subjective, and not very generalizable. However, it should be noted that the relationship between quantitative and qualitative research is complex. Quantification refers to the treatment of data, but all types of research deal with qualities ([Saltalamacchia, 2008](#)). In other words, knowledge production is, in essence, qualitative. Focusing the discussion on data collection and analysis implies subsuming methodological, epistemological, and ontological issues to simple technical questions.

The idea that qualitative research generates less valuable knowledge than quantitative research has become widespread, so many qualitative

researchers modify their reports to make them more acceptable ([Fernandez et al., 2021](#)). In order to approach studies that offer scientific evidence, technical mechanisms are used to guarantee scientific rigor and validity. Likewise, the term subjectivity is often used as an epithet to attribute to the researcher a lack of rigor and impartiality in their analysis and interpretation ([Zarco, 2015](#)).

Those who follow the quantitative logic instrumentalize qualitative approaches, reducing them to mere data collection techniques ([Fernández et al., 2021](#)). The McDonaldization of qualitative research translates into the overvaluation of techniques, time limitation in data collection, standardization, and the uncritical adoption of software for analysis ([Brinkmann, 2015](#)). As a consequence of the popularization of qualitative research, in certain academic settings, there is a risk of instrumentalizing it ([Ramírez, 2016](#)). Likewise, with the indiscriminate and increasingly inflationary use of the term qualitative research, the different versions of qualitative research are presented as if they were homogeneous ([Demuth, 2015](#)).

Phenomenology and hermeneutics were developed within different philosophical schools, with complex presuppositions that, when transferred to the empirical field, often run the risk of overshadowing their epistemological and ontological presuppositions. Phenomenological philosophy has been used in different ways in empirical research, and there are schools with notable differences ([Cohen & Omery, 2003](#)). The hermeneutic perspective is characterized not by the mere integration of hermeneutic philosophy into the social sciences, but rather by a process of self-reflection within these disciplines regarding their methods and scope ([Herrera, 2010](#)).

The analysis of information is conceived as a standardized procedure, in which data are the protagonists. Under these precepts, both theoretical production and the elaboration of categories are subordinated to the data. In the analysis, the legitimized academic discourses on both the object of study and the research process are reproduced, and very rarely are the hidden or implicit meanings of the data analyzed. Instead of constructing new concepts or reformulating

existing ones, the theories and discourses agreed upon within the field of study reproduced so as to legitimize the findings (Vasilachis, 2013). Thus, what is found through these works is that certain statements and shared conceptions in the form of common sense are reaffirmed in the legitimized academic discourses.

In this regard, it is worth remembering that data do not speak for themselves (Sanmartín, 2003), nor is theory the objective description of reality. In the process of analysis and interpretation, different horizons of thought are confronted and dialogue. These processes are fundamentally dialectical, articulating the discourse produced, the conjectures, and the theoretical framework (Callejo, 2001). Theoretical production constitutes an open system where the ideas of the researcher and the empirical moment are integrated, a space where the theoretical model assumed by the researcher and the current moment of the research are in constant tension (González, 2006). The articulation between the empirical and the theoretical is a process of constant deconstruction and reconstruction (Ibáñez, 1985).

Finally, it is necessary to point out methodological limitations of the present study. Not all universities have uploaded their dissertations to their repositories, and, in some cases, only the abstract is available. Therefore, for the content analysis of the methodological chapter, we resorted only to those that offer complete information. Likewise, given that the structure of the dissertations varies among universities, the analysis of the most common aspects was prioritized. In addition, due to the length of the paper and the objective of emphasizing the hegemonic positions, dissertations assuming more critical positions consistent with the epistemological referents of the non-hegemonic version of qualitative research were largely left aside.

In the face of the instrumentalization of qualitative research, we highlight the need to incorporate its epistemological and ontological presuppositions both in university education and during the research process. Likewise, the importance of articulating analysis and interpretation with the specific methodological assumptions of each qualitative method, instead

of reducing all analysis to codification and categorization processes is vindicated.

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