

# The Research Agenda for Higher Education in Peru: Towards the Design of Evidence-Based Public Policies

La agenda de investigación para la educación superior en el Perú: hacia el diseño de políticas públicas basadas en evidencia

A agenda de pesquisa para o ensino superior no Peru: Para o desenho de políticas públicas baseadas em evidências

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## Current Situation

Since 1551, when Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos was created, the number of universities in Peru has grown gradually, reaching a total of 59 universities in 1996, 31 of which were private and 28, public (National Association of Rectors, 2012). After Legislative Decree 882—aimed to foster private investment in education in a context of increasing demand from applicants—was passed by the Congress of the Republic of Peru on November 9, 1996, a remarkable growth in the number of institutions providing university-level education took place, reaching to 143 institutions: 92 private and 51 public universities in 2018 (National Superintendence of University Higher Education, 2018). A similar phenomenon occurred in technological higher education institutions (IEST), which grew a 15% in number just between 2008 and 2017. Currently, according to the ESCALE (Education Statistics Unit), there are 370 public and 472 private IEST (Ministry of Education, 2018).

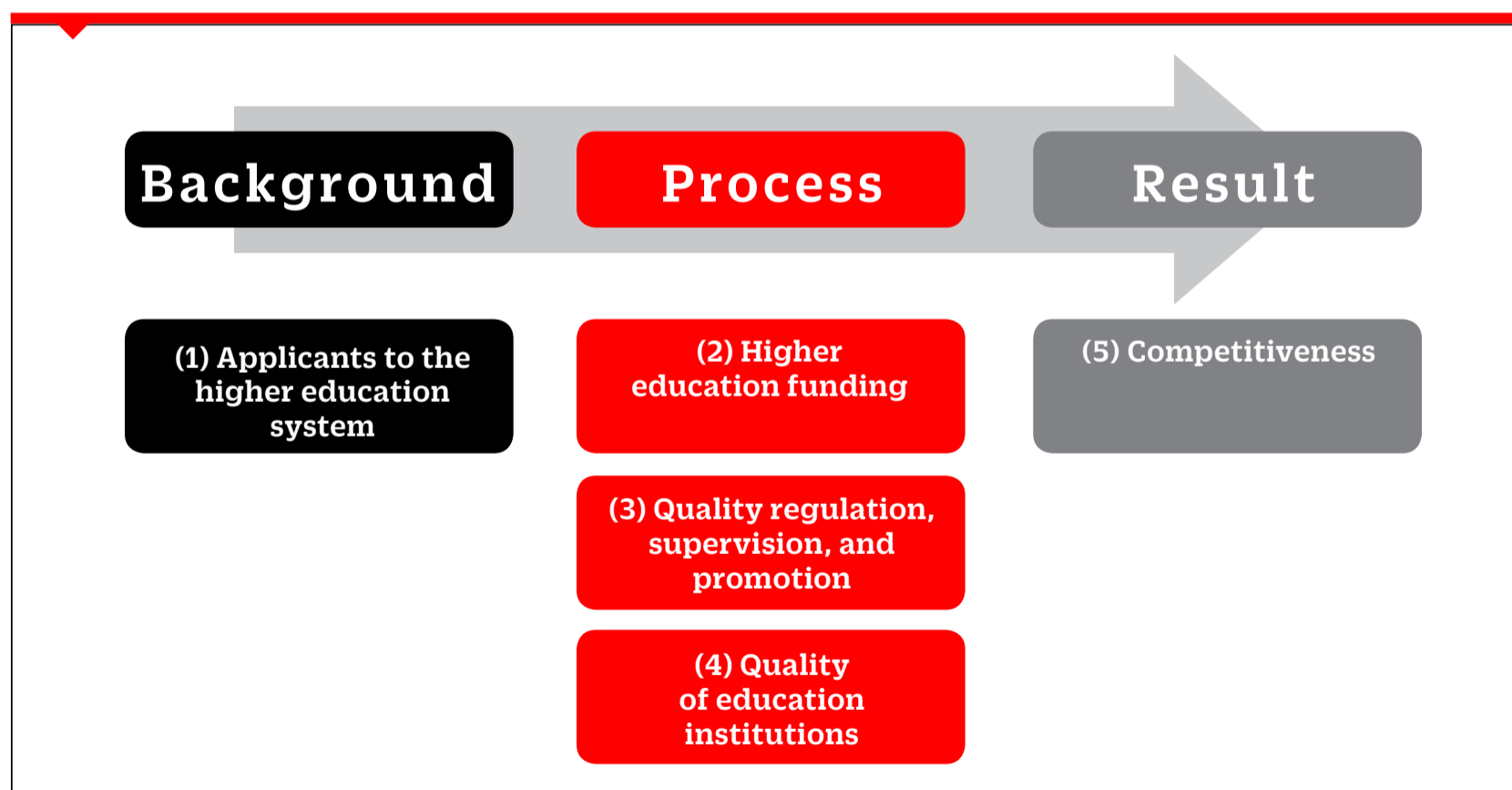
Massification of the higher education offer allowed a higher amount of students from diverse socioeconomic levels to access university education. However, such process was not aligned with the quality improvement in higher education offered, by both public and private universities, with few exceptions (Gautier, 2012). Quite the contrary, it suffered a progressive deterioration over time, along with insufficient and inadequate funding, and poor quality regulatory mechanisms (Constitutional Court of Peru, 2008).

Such a context created the ideal timing for passing the University Law on July 9, 2014, (Law No. 30220, Congress of the Republic of Peru, 2014), which can be seen as the first step toward the higher education reform. Additionally, in November 2016, a new Law of Higher Education Institutes was enacted (Law No. 30512, Congress of the Republic of Peru, 2016), and the National System of Evaluation, Certification, and Accreditation of Education Quality (SINEACE) was declared under reorganization, currently in development for a new law proposal.

Besides that, one of the most important topics brought by the new University Law is the creation of the National Superintendence of University Higher Education (SUNEDU), entrusted with the regulation of the basic quality conditions of university higher education by fostering the Institutional Licensing process and several supervisory actions. In turn, the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) approved a policy for Quality Assurance of University Higher Education, pursuant to the duties assigned to it by the University Law, and implemented policies in higher education mainly associated with the supply of further funding to improve conditions in terms of infrastructure and faculty, in addition to promoting research.

## Perspectives of the Higher Education System: Towards the First Research Agenda

The country's Higher Education System relies on little information and, particularly, has little documentation based on solid research. This restricts a sustained progress towards a research agenda aimed at reinforcing that role inherent to higher education institutions. However, proposals of some conceptual models to ease the study and analysis of each element of that system can be reported (Montes, 2016). Our proposal seeks to include a broader vision that would allow identification of key aspects of higher education. Thus, we identify three stages: background, process, and outcome. This simplified model allows to identify and organize five general axes and provides the flexibility to identify and prioritize the sub-axes that are relevant to define a research agenda for higher education in Peru (de Miguel, 1994; Scheerens, 1991). This exercise was driven by the PROCALIDAD project, under the modality of consultation process performed with representatives of academia and higher education management institutions (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Proposal for a Higher Education General Process. Procalidad

Table 1 describes problems that need to be addressed with further consideration and need to be made visible for an adequate decision-making by the different Higher Education System sectors. Said problems have been identified from the available evidence, information, existing national instruments, and experience in public management.

**Table 1**

*Process, axes, and main problems*

1. Background	<b>Applicants to the Higher Education System</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scarce articulation of the educational model in Regular Basic Education (EBR) with the necessary skills for higher education</li> <li>2. Absence of vocational orientation mechanisms</li> <li>3. Inadequate selection processes</li> </ol>
2. Process	<b>Higher Education Funding</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Insufficient funding</li> <li>2. Inefficient prioritization and planning of activities</li> <li>3. Restrictions and poor use of certain resources (CANON)</li> </ol>
	<b>Quality Regulation, Supervision, and Promotion</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deficient information for an adequate supervision and promotion of higher education institutions</li> <li>2. Deficient regulation and articulation of quality assurance processes</li> </ol>
3. Outcome	<b>Quality of Higher Education Institutions</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Faculty with insufficient skills</li> <li>2. Outdated educational model and curricular programs not synced with market needs</li> <li>3. Low level of research production and internationalization</li> <li>4. Insufficient modernization of management systems</li> </ol>
	<b>Competitiveness and Development</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low performance of Peruvian universities</li> <li>2. Low country competitiveness</li> </ol>

## **Why a Research Agenda and what are Evidence-Based Policies? Which are the remaining challenges?**

As in other areas responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating public policies based on solid scientific evidence, in the education sector, strategies are also being developed to promote the generation of evidence that allows informed decision-making. As a reference, we cite the funding generated in the US, which allowed to direct 150 million dollars to the funding of public education (Borman, Hewes, Overman & Brown, 2003), a budget that was justified by the evidence generated by research on effectiveness (Slavin, 1997).

In Peru, MINEDU started funding public universities in 2016 based on indicators and results. This type of mechanism has been called Management Agreements and has allowed transferring resources for a total of up to 310 million Peruvian soles between 2016 and 2017, based on budget, academic, and research performance indicators; as well as indicators related to the adaptation of higher education institutions to the new University Law.

In turn, the Higher Education Quality Improvement Project (ProCalidad), a public investment project financed by the Peruvian Government and the World Bank, supplemented and contributed specific tasks for the strengthening of the higher education system and its institutions. During the last years, it has financed quality improvement processes in higher education institutions (institutes of higher education and universities) for a total of 120 million Peruvian soles. These efforts were and still are important, but more input and evidence are needed to identify the relevant problems and the services that should be prioritized for future funding.

The implementation of the Higher Education Reform has generated a much-needed space for debate and has allowed articulating the experience and knowledge of the public and private sectors—from both managing and academic actors—in order to facilitate the generation of evidence based on rigorous approaches for the decision-making at different levels. The Higher Education Reform is in its first stage of implementation and, like any strategy, it needs to be critically evaluated to propose adjustments and improvements that will bring forward positive results for the System. In the next issue of our journal, the axes and sub-axes of this higher education research agenda will be presented in detail, which will contribute a valuable input to better guide the efforts aimed at generating solid scientific evidence for the implementation of public policies that will result in a substantial improvement in the quality of services provided.

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