

**ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN DISTANCE EDUCATION
PROGRAMS, A GEOGRAPHY AND GENDER APPROACH**

***DESEMPENHO ACADÊMICO A PARTIR DE UMA PERSPECTIVA GEOGRÁFICA E
DE GÊNERO EM PROGRAMAS À DISTÂNCIA***

***RENDIMIENTO ACADÉMICO DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA GEOGRÁFICA Y DE
GÉNERO EN PROGRAMAS A DISTANCIA***

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ABSTRACT: The research aims to contrast the academic performance of students belonging to the master's in Education Mention in Quality Management in 2018, in its different mentions. From the dissection of the proposals made where a vision of the region of origin and gender is addressed. Method: The research is qualitative based on a post-positivist paradigm, nine students participated: five women and four men where in-depth interviews were applied to students who were then subjected to content analysis. Results: The university does not incorporate the gender perspective in its educational processes and, consequently, reproduces and legitimizes traditional socialization in its vision of gender, women show positive gaps compared to men, intensifying in the Tarapacá region, therefore, the participation of women for the purposes of this academic program is substantially higher than that of men.

KEYWORDS: Academic performance. Postgraduate. Gender. Origin. Long distance education.

RESUMO: *A pesquisa visa contrastar o desempenho acadêmico dos alunos pertencentes ao Mestrado em Educação Menção na Gestão da Qualidade em 2018, nas suas diferentes menções. A partir da dissecação das propostas feitas onde se aborda uma visão da região de origem e gênero. Método: A pesquisa é qualitativa com base no paradigma pós-positivista, com a participação de nove alunos: cinco mulheres e quatro homens, onde foram aplicadas entrevistas em profundidade a alunos que foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo. Resultados: A universidade não incorpora a perspectiva de gênero em seus processos educacionais e, por consequência, reproduz e legitima a socialização tradicional em sua visão de gênero, as mulheres apresentam lacunas positivas em relação aos homens,*

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intensificando-se na região de Tarapacá, portanto, a participação das mulheres para os fins deste programa acadêmico é substancialmente maior do que a dos homens.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Desempenho acadêmico. Pós-graduação. Gênero. Origem. Educação à distância.*

RESUMEN: *La investigación tiene como objetivo contrastar el rendimiento académico de los alumnos perteneciente al Magister en Educación Mención Gestión de Calidad año 2018, en sus diferentes menciones. A partir de la disección de los planteamientos realizados donde se aborda una visión sobre la región de procedencia y género. Método: La investigación es cualitativa sustentada en un paradigma post-positivista, participaron nueve estudiantes: cinco mujeres y cuatro hombres donde se aplicaron entrevistas en profundidad a estudiantes que luego fueron sometidas a análisis de contenidos. Resultados: La universidad no incorpora la perspectiva de género en sus procesos educativos y, como consecuencia, reproduce y legitima la socialización tradicional en su visión sobre el género, las mujeres muestran brechas positivas con respecto a los hombres intensificándose en la región de Tarapacá, por lo tanto, la participación en titulación de las mujeres para efectos de este programa académico es sustancialmente mayor que los hombres.*

PALABRAS CLAVES: *Rendimiento académico. Postgrado. Género. Procedencia. Educación a distancia.*

Introduction

Equal opportunities have become, in different societies, an essential aspect for the achievement of goals that, in many cases, should not be questioned regarding gender and geographic location. The educational process is fundamental to the future work of people and, therefore, the evolution of the whole country. For this reason, the role of education transcends the challenges for the education economy, since there are essential factors that impact the learning process in a relevant way for the development of essential policies. Educational practice is developed in fundamental environments which are key elements for the development of students, regarding their interaction with other authors and actors of such educational process.

From this perspective, Currie and Duncan (2012) research becomes relevant, in which the inequality of opportunities in the educational context is determined by the strong influence of the student's geographical conditions at the university level, evidently, the approach of the variables associated with academic performance student skills, effort, attitude, and aptitudes are a fundamental part of determining how much one is prone to failure or success. In this way, the assessment of such a situation opens the way for the analysis of other factors that

affect the disparity in academic performance as a phenomenon of study, such as gender and geographic location.

Regarding gender inequality and geographic location, according to the Education Quality Agency in Chile (ESPINOZA; TAU, 2015), there are important differences according to the results obtained in which they show a wide gap in favor of men in the area of mathematics, which increases as school years progress and affects the academic performance of distance learning students, but in reading tests women stand out. Likewise, in the Simce test it is estimated that both men and women tend in the same direction, in the case of this research, academic performance was categorized according to the region of origin and gender of the students belonging to the Master's in Education, year of 2018, of the mention Management of Quality, Education at Miguel de Cervantes University, Chile.

Academic performance from a geographical and gender perspective

Worldwide, several authors such as Erazo (2015, p. 9) state that “The system that measures the results and the construction of knowledge in students, which is created through the intervention of educational didactics that are evaluated using qualitative and quantitative methods in a subject”. This is an indicator of the level of learning achieved by students and represents the efficiency in achieving the curricular objectives in the various subjects of the school level attended.

For this reason, academic performance is important for teachers, directors and education professionals, since it allows to identify and understand the achievements obtained at the formative level. However, school performance, according to Castro, Castillo and Escandón (2011, p. 78, our translation), “cannot be considered only as an indicator of the abilities and development of different aspects of the student but must take into account other factors (internal and external) that affect school performance”.

According to what has been said, institutional actors recognize that there are other factors besides the student's interest in schoolwork, which must be considered. These factors are linked to the context of family, gender, region of origin, the work of the teacher, among others. In this sense, academic performance depends on many things, such as: economic circumstances, mood, emotional state, that is, a series of many other factors.

Based on what has been said, school success varies and depends on a combination of multiple elements, among them, teacher formation, the inclusion of technology in the classroom, emotional restraint, the region of origin, among others. Therefore, the student's

region of origin is one of the most important factors when analyzing academic performance, the environment is psychologically significant while it is within the individual's vital space and determines the point of intersection between the genetically marked possibilities, motivations and internal dynamics of man in his approach to the world around him.

Likewise, the student's region of origin determines the habits that make up the lifestyle of individuals, therefore, they also influence the ability to concentrate. For example, the mind is more receptive to learning new ideas and optimistic about a new tomorrow. Having stress under control is also an essential requirement to increase the level of concentration.

Given the above, it can be said that education depends on the country, since each government has different ways of analyzing education, among which we find the Finnish educational model, according to Páramo (2013), one of the protagonists of the brilliant documentary of Moore “¿Qué invadimos ahora?”, this model is characterized by being demanding in one aspect, but more flexible in others. Students have 5 hours of class and do not take homework to their homes, so children have plenty of time to use in extracurricular activities that stimulate and seduce them in their individual interests. The classrooms have leisure areas and are decorated to stimulate creativity as much as possible.

Also in second place is South Korea, which is a quite different education from Finland, characterized by managing an environment that promotes high competitiveness among students. It is a very rigid and rigorous model, one of the principles that govern this system according to Kirschbaum (2016, p. 89, our translation) is

[...] Stimulate study to achieve economic growth in the country. Its motto is: If you are first in class, you will be in life. The results obtained are positive. The government allocates almost 7% of GDP to education.

What is criticized in this system, supported by the high levels of demand from South Korean society in all areas, is the stress and competitiveness that sometimes set aside the fundamental emotional aspect for the development of healthy, active and happy children.

In the specific case of education in Chile, it is affected in different ways, because education in the most southern areas is very different from urban areas, since when the enrollment numbers in the southern areas are and appear smaller, behind them are hidden realities discursively sealed by frustration and unpleasantness. These are students who have lower learning results than those in urban areas, have higher indicators of dropout, which, in addition, occurs at a younger age, and in general, have lower levels of education than those of urban population.

This means that many Chileans have high expectations about education and the level of education to be achieved, just as elsewhere in the country, and most students also want to complete higher education. Access to education, according to Calvo (2016), mainly considers the transition to high school, reflecting the desire of many young people to advance more than their parents.

Gender is a social construction that dictates the roles that each person must play according to their sex in each area of life. Such a division determines the opportunities and limitations that everyone will have, according to their gender, to develop fully, but it also determines the possibilities of sustainable development for the group in which they develop.

Gender is a transversal category, of social and political relationship, which operates at multiple levels and which affects social interactions and behavior on a daily basis. In this sense, gender inequalities have important repercussions in guaranteeing fundamental human rights and in the right to education. It is necessary to address the gender approach in order to guarantee rights of access to society's goods and services with justice and equality in order to eliminate the gaps between men and women, in order to promote gender equality, so that both can have access to opportunities that will allow them the effectiveness of their rights, this indicates that there must be impartiality in the treatment that women and men receive according to their needs, either with an equal or differentiated treatment, but in a way that both are considered equivalent in terms of rights, the benefits, the obligations, as well as the possibilities of being professionals capable of facing possible conflicts.

In this way, the gender approach transcends all areas in which people develop, it will be possible to detect factors of inequality, discrimination, violence in a timely manner, to carry out actions, as well as to transform the situations that perpetuate these inequities, in the search for construction of female and male identities that are not based on the behaviors that have been socially assigned to men and women, but that generate a fair distribution of roles, in order to build a more egalitarian and democratic society.

Due to these differences and inequalities, the concepts of “gender equality” and “education for equality” are born. Equality is spoken of when the same esteem of experience, knowledge and values of women and men is produced, the same opportunities are also provided to participate equally in political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results. Therefore, gender inequality and more specifically gender-based discrimination is an affront to a fundamental human right and an obstacle to peace and development (QIAN, 2015, p. 321).

The surveys identify significant educational inequalities by gender, at the level of subjects. Male students have significant advantages in mathematics and female students have a similar advantage in reading and writing at both a bachelor's and higher level. Low levels of reading competence among men can increase the likelihood of failure and dropout, as a result, reduce the participation of men in tertiary education and their professional opportunities. Likewise, low performance in mathematics and science among women can reduce their interest in courses such as Computing, Engineering and Science (which offer greater opportunities to earn high incomes) (CALVO, 2016).

In this way, men dominate the areas of engineering, information technology and security, while women predominate in the areas of education and the social sciences. Generally, there is a higher proportion of women enrolled in courses such as Psychology, Early Childhood or Pre-School Education, Special Education and Basic Education and Nursing, and a higher proportion of men in courses related to engineering and those related to mathematics and applied sciences such as chemistry and medicine (PÁRAMO, 2013).

In view of what was said earlier, Qian (2015) considers that the number of female teachers represents approximately two thirds of the teachers of general non-university regime, almost reaching 68%. There is awareness about the fact that the teaching staff is mainly composed of women.

In the context of the master's degree from Miguel de Cervantes University, the case of this research is presented as a professionalization where there is a predominance of gender performance, one of which is the actual average duration of courses and/or programs according to sex, understood as the number of effective semesters that men and women delay in obtaining their title or final level, considering the time that elapses since they enter the first year of the course and/or program and the date (semester) in which they obtain their title and/or level by the institution.

Methodology

The research is of a qualitative type under the post-positivist paradigm, where it is possible to get closer to reality (HOUGHTON; HUNTER; MESKELL, 2012). The methodological approach used was the ethnographic one, which was applied to an isolated human group, specific case to the UMC Master's students in distance education.

The research was framed in three overlapping categories: attitude and higher distance learning. The participants in this research were Master of Education students from the Quality

Management term, cohort of the Miguel de Cervantes University, Chile, December 2018, the social actors selected for this research correspond to nine students: five women and four men. It should be noted that the method of selection of key informants was of the intentional type, in this regard, Carrasco and Calderero (2012) state that in qualitative research it is convenient to use the intentional sample, as it allows participants to be selected according to a profile and the quality of information they can provide, in keeping with the research purposes.

The information was obtained using the in-depth interview technique, where the interviewee talks about the aspect treated without detecting the researcher's objective (MARTÍNEZ, 2012). Regarding content analysis, a series of steps were followed: the object of analysis was selected, organizing the information, transcribing the interviews, delimiting the analysis units, the classification codes and the categories.

Regarding the content analysis, it was allowed to interpret the meanings when classifying the placed categories, Flores (2007), in turn, presents a social, scientific valuation, independent evaluation, informed consent and respect for the participants.

Results and analysis

The interviews were applied to students of the distance learning modality of 2018, from the Master's in Education in the Quality Management research line, cohort December 2018, eight students, four women and four men, participated, as described in Table 1.

Table 1 – Distance learning participants according to gender and geographic location

Interviewee	Geographic location	Gender
E ₁	I region. Tarapacá	Male
E ₂	Metropolitan region	Female
E ₃		Male
E ₄	VII region. Maule	Female
E ₅	VI region. Libertador General Bernardo O'Higgins	Male
E ₆	V region. Valparaíso	Female
E ₇	III region. Atacama	Female
E ₈	II region. Antofagasta	Male
E ₉	IV region. Coquimbo	Female

Source: Devised by the author

The regions that do not have students enrolled in the academic program are: VIII region Concepción, IX region Araucanía, X region Los Lagos, XV region Arica and Parinacota, XIV region of Rivers, XI region of Aysén, XVI region Ñuble and XII region of Magallanes. The content analysis in table 2 established the following categories:

Table 2 – Participant analysis categories and subcategories

Categories	Subcategories
Attitude	Gender equality
	Self-development
	Gender roles
Distance Higher Education	Self-improvement
	Preparation for the labor market
	Geographic location

Source: Devised by the authors

Attitude: In this category, the subcategories gender equality, self-development and gender roles were developed. Allport (1935 *apud* RODRÍGUEZ, 1997) responds to this category which mentions that an attitude is a mental and neurological state of attention, organized through experience, and capable of exerting a directive influence on the individual's response to all objectives and situations with which it relates. Attitudes are beliefs and feelings that predispose our reactions to goals, people and events.

Gender equality: According to UNESCO (2014, p. 9, our translation), it is “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same, but that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on the sex they were born”. It takes into account the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men, recognizing the diversity between men and women.

The responses issued highlight the academic risk situation for women and this leads them to apply more strategies than men and that, seeing these strategies work, continue to be applied: “Yes, I think there is a difference because they, the women, are more careful, much more judgmental [...] this habit of writing on a piece of paper whatever it is, they have adopted it very well [...]” (Interviewee 1, our translation), “[...] we are all the same, women and men can fulfill any area of administration, and in the educational field, there are already men as kindergarten teachers, few but there are, I have some friends who are at this level [...]” (Interviewee 4, our translation), “[...] We men are superior in Chile when it comes to mathematics [...]” (Interviewee 5, our translation), “women have a strength and an ability to concentrate, in any sense this is what I think and about study habits gives me the impression that they are more organized, [...] they are very meticulous” (Interviewee 9, our translation).

Self-development: The educational curriculum should consolidate in the student his growth in the best way, emphasizing in the personal profile the recreational, sporting, artistic, cultural and above all the humanitarian aspect. In addition, Pérez (2015), expresses that it is not enough to educate all persons, but we must educate the whole person. Traditional

education is only interested in the student's mind, and from it only the ability to memorize and repeat. The rest of the body and the person are supported by educational institutions because they have no choice but to assume them in their educational proposal. Consequently, it is important to take care of the body and worry about health, but without becoming enslaved or obsessed.

According to the participants, the growth of the personal profile must be strengthened, emphasizing the recreational, sporting, artistic, cultural and, above all, humanitarian aspects. Pérez (2015) expresses that it is not enough to educate all persons, but the whole person. Traditional education is only interested in the student's mind, and only the ability to memorize and repeat it, as the interviewees expressed: "Education is a learning alternative that implies the improvement of both men and women [...] through training strategies; inducing action-reflection" (Interviewee 6, our translation), likewise, "[...] regarding the legal aspect in Chile, both men and women have the right to achieve progressive self-development [...]" (Interviewee 7, our translation).

On the other hand, Ruiz (2012) express that the educational action that intends the development of each of the specific capacities will make sense as they integrate and collaborate for the integral development of the student, regardless of gender. The educational task has two axes: integrality and diversity, that is, all education must be directed in a complementary way to the integral formation of the person, since it must develop the differentiation of each of its faculties, focusing on what each one stands out, and in what each one is and should be able to be.

Distance higher education

Distance higher education is the stage in the educational process that is responsible for the formation of professionals in a nation. Education is life itself and that is why the university aspires that its students be the privileged actors and be recognized as conscious and critical subjects for professional formation. It is the process of continuous improvement in universities, breaking the status quo and traditional policies to open up innovation, technological, research and, above all, the humanist growth. Lamas (2000) states that distance higher education should not be considered as a process of aesthetic change, external, but as an internal transformation of all agents involved in the teaching and learning process, not only on the part of the teacher, but also of the student body, since it should be understood as a collaborative improvement of teaching practice.

Respondents consider

[...] The dynamics of today's society does not allow us to use time effectively, therefore, it is necessary for us to be executing several tasks at the same time and a way to carry them out is distance education, being a young, modern mother, I need to share time with my girl, in the first years of life, that is why, to be attentive to her education and mine, at the same time to be aware of fashion, my best ally is the telephone that allows me to make these three or more activities at the same time and achieve the most important thing, educating my daughter (Interviewee 2, our translation).

According to Ruiz (2012), the educational action aims to develop each of the specific skills that make sense to the extent that they are integrated and collaborate in the overall development of the student, regardless of the gender, just reaching vocational guidance.

Study techniques or methods vary according to age and educational stage, depending on the development of students' skills and abilities. They have to be adapted to each student; there are some that are ordered, others that are not. In all cases, objectives must be personalized; there are phases that are well focused and serve everyone. Respondents stated this

Distance education uses means or technical communication resources, allowing information to flow without limits of time or space, in this way, it reduces the geographical, economic, work and family obstacles that students may present and transforms the teaching-learning process, the acquisition of knowledge and education [...] (Interviewee 6, our translation).

Personal development and development of the human being

Higher education makes it possible for the student to achieve his goals and personal achievement, not only to obtain a professional diploma, but that this will become the sustenance to form a family. Ruiz (2012) expresses that, thanks to higher education, the full development of man's capacities is achieved, which would otherwise not be easy to achieve, while aiming at the integration of each individual in the society in which he lives, as the active and responsible member that he should be, not educating for a particular moment in the curriculum, nor to face a particular situation, but educating for life and throughout life, simply because education is combined with the future.

Thus, the participants consider:

[...] I am not the typical macho man, who must be the breadwinner at home, my partner is a dynamic girl, she goes to the gym, takes the bus to the nursery for a while, studies English and advertising, and sells crafts made by

her childhood friend, all this contributes to her personal fulfillment [...]
(Interviewee 4, our translation).

Preparation for the labor market

The real function of the university is to transform graduates into high-quality professionals for a globalized world, where academic preparation and personal profile prevail over other demands of work activity. López citing the work of Delors (1997) explains that universities must go beyond the purely instrumental vision that higher education has had, traditionally considered as the mandatory way to achieve certain goals (titles, economic advantages, acquisition of status) and consider in it in its entirety, its dimension of full development of the person, that is, the total realization of the human being who, integrally, learns to be one in an interrupted process that extends throughout life.

According to the participants:

[...] I must prepare because I am not going to submit to any man... I have to work and be financially stable [...] (Interviewee 6, our translation).

[...] I want my wife to prepare herself, to study so that she can have a better position, can have a position and therefore, a better salary [...] (Interviewee 7, our translation).

The woman must prepare herself without abandoning her children, the man must provide everything necessary for the family [...] (Interviewee 5, our translation).

[...] Women achieve more degrees in the academic program of Education than men. They are more applied [...] (Interviewee 2, our translation).

What is evident is that the connection between study and professional activity is based on the formation of habits, a discipline and love of work, so that the future professional can feel it as an individual and social need that allows his full development. The professional in formation develops, from professional and personal point of view, as he assimilates, appropriates and systematizes a series of sociocultural and professional knowledge, and when he participates in practical activities with other people (teacher, instructor, other professionals, family, community) who know more about this professional knowledge than he does.

Geographic location

Zabalza (2013) reveals that achieving effective teaching is a complex task and a strong social challenge, with high intellectual demands and that effective teaching consists of a series of basic skills that can be acquired, improved and expanded through a sustained process of formation and where the geographic aspect also plays a role. Soutar and Turner (2012, our translation) add: “Whatever the factors involved in determining student preference; some factors will be more important than others in determining university preferences”.

According to the participants:

Education in Chile is extremely expensive, adding this with where we live we do not have universities, therefore the importance of distance education to allow men and women to receive formation for life using technology [...] (Interviewee 6, our translation).

The area of origin of the student stigmatizes academic performance in some way, because throughout Chile education is not the same... there is discrimination, private institutions have better education [...] (Interviewee 5, our translation).

[...] I had not studied because where I live there are no postgraduate level of studies in education [...] (Interviewee 3, our translation).

[...] My wife did not continue to professionalize because where we live it is difficult for her to use technology... I study because I work two hours from home... she has to take care of the children [...] (Interviewee 9, our translation).

Students who live near a campus are more likely to go to university, even though they may not be able to go to the campus located near their home. The proximity of the place is a key factor affecting the choice of education for some students. Drewes and Michael (2012) argued that applicants choose a university close to their home if this university is similar in all other respects to the universities that are furthest from their homes.

Final considerations

The interviews carried out with the students of the Master's in Education of 2018 from the Quality Management, Education line of the Miguel de Cervantes University, Chile, show how the participants largely addresses the relationship of academic performance in relation to the context of origin and gender.

Regarding academic performance, it can be said that in the first place, the most southern regions of Chile do not have students enrolled in the academic program, given that it

coincides with the information disclosed in the theoretical framework, which highlights that the number of students in regions XI of Aysen and XIII Magallanes is considerably lower than the other regions of Chile, this, in turn, is explained by the low offer of higher education programs and enrollments in these regions, which directly influences the negative results of learning and academic performance found in the area.

Second, due to the high concentration of female audiences, the Tarapacá region, Metropolitan Region, VIII region of Bío Bío are those with the highest number of approved candidates, noting that women show positive gaps in relation to men in the three mentioned regions, intensifying this in the Tarapacá region, therefore, the participation in women's degrees for the purposes of this academic program is substantially greater than that of men.

As for the information provided by the participants, in the gender subcategory, some roles are maintained as a consequence of the cultural context in which they find themselves, for example, in the tasks to be performed, where the woman is the protagonist in the tasks of caring for and raising children, while the man must be the provider of his family (SOUTAR; TURNER, 2012), according to what was said by the participants, they, most of them, are not in agreement with this stereotype, and proclaim equality between man and woman. Vásquez (2012) affirms that men or women should not be excluded in any way, everyone should be empowered to go ahead and do their best.

The results of this research allow us to conclude that the participants induce to build a society with equal rights between genders and where people's origin is not a limiting factor for academic performance in distance learning, for this reason, a critical and reflective attitude towards these inequalities must be promoted.

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