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# WHEN PUBLISHING MATTERS MORE THAN EDUCATING: THE COSTS OF ACADEMIC PRODUCTIVISM

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## 1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

The delayed consolidation of a graduate education culture in Brazil may have resulted from the late emergence of Brazilian universities, which were established in the country only 400 years after the arrival of the colonizers. The first steps occurred only in the 1930s (Diniz, 2023). Two milestones consolidated the process in the following years: the creation of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC) in 1948; the establishment of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) in 1951; and the publication of Opinion No. 977/65 (Brazil, 1965), known as the Sucupira Report, in 1965, which defined and regulated graduate programs (Cunha, 2007), establishing the master's and doctoral levels of training.

The main reasons for defining and regulating the graduate education system were: the training of professors; fostering the development of scientific research by preparing researchers; and training technical and intellectual workers to meet national development needs (Brazil, 1965).

Later, in the 1970s, graduate education moved toward its institutionalization in Brazil, assuming strategic importance in the advancement of higher education. The institutionalization of Brazilian graduate studies has always been tied to Capes, from the accreditation, authorization, and evaluation of graduate programs to the objective of ensuring minimum quality standards, identifying national sectors to be developed, and reducing regional asymmetries (Cabral et al., 2020).

Today, the structure of Brazilian graduate education remains organized in cycles, under a centralized legal framework, subject to peer evaluation under the oversight of a state agency – Capes – and supported by systematic funding from CNPq (Fapesp, 2001). However, it seems that the motives that originally justified its creation have taken on different contours over time, especially regarding the emphasis on high-impact scientific publication and the system's actual contribution to the country's economic, social, and environmental development.

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## 2 RESEARCH IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

In a certain sense, publishing has become the most important element for advancing in academic and professional careers in recent years, even to the detriment of the researcher and of being a good professor in undergraduate education (one of the original purposes behind creating the graduate education system). This shift generates several consequences, but here we wish to discuss only one. Could the drive for productivity in academic journals be fostering a new form of illiteracy? To some extent, it seems that this new stereotype of illiteracy already holds a diploma and has an excess of social media accounts, yet, unfortunately, is unable to question and critique beyond merely superficial aspects.

Complying with governmental regulations from research funding agencies and with the evaluation requirements of graduate programs is important, but relegating all other functions inherent to the professorial role may not be a desirable path in the medium term.

There is no doubt that publishing a manuscript is one of the main ways researchers communicate emerging topics to society. It is well known that before reaching this stage, researchers have already followed an arduous path: properly formulating their research question, choosing a solid theoretical foundation, designing an appropriate methodology, and ensuring high-quality data collection to support their propositions, in addition to securing research funding. Afterwards, they must also overcome the challenge of convincing a serious and competent editor that their work deserves dissemination to a highly selective audience as a means of generating societally relevant contributions.

Publishing is unquestionably important, because if a study remains unpublished, it is essentially unfinished, which explains the drive to disseminate findings in high-quality journals and thereby gain recognition in one's academic field. However, although we often hear the expression "Publish or perish", it is necessary to ask whether it is truly fundamental and whether it even makes sense in our field, Accounting.

Is society – our ultimate interlocutor – being reached and benefited by publications in Accounting? Do these communications effectively reach the public? This is difficult to believe, given that the most "qualified" journals are inaccessible to many of our institutions, and therefore inaccessible to us as well. The debate is not new: one pays to publish and then pays again to access the databases to read the article.

Additionally, we must question whether our journals are truly "bad". Is it a problem of Brazilian journals not being included in these qualified databases? We would argue that this is not the case. Clearly, these are commercial databases, with difficult entry conditions for national journals, and which list publications that charge article processing fees.

Scopus data from 2023 show that the database included nearly 14,000 European journals, about half as many from North America, and fewer than 1,000 from Central and South America (Gulka, 2024). The number of journals from Central and South America is smaller than those from the Middle East and Africa. When faced with these figures, the impression is that our journals are not deficient; rather,

the inclusion criteria are problematic. Likely influenced by cultural factors and certainly by economic ones.

### 3 ACADEMIC PRODUCTIVISM AND ITS COSTS

The outcome of this high-profile productivism may well be the impoverishment of knowledge production, which ceases to seek answers to the problems that trouble society and becomes instead directed toward publication in international journals. Another problem arising from this hyper-focus on publishing is the marginalization of human-resource training, whether of professors or researchers. By giving excessive attention to scientific output, the graduate education system weakens the training of students, which should be its most important function. It also instills in emerging researchers the belief that their work has value because of where it is published, not because of what it has to say.

Perhaps this is the moment for us to concentrate on our true role. We would like to believe that this role is that of training human resources, as established in Opinion 977/1965, and that of conducting research committed to solving society's problems and advancing the country. This is especially crucial at a time when Brazil is experiencing a crisis in academic graduate programs. It is not difficult to find groups of professors at events across the country discussing the declining demand for master's and doctoral programs, with reports of seats that are not even filled.

What we observe is that the labor market does not reward the knowledge acquired. The group of students now entering graduate school is largely composed of public servants who will receive a substantial salary increase after completing a graduate program. Moreover, the number of professionals abandoning teaching – or never becoming interested in it – is growing. This is likely influenced by low wages, lack of incentives for research, excessive workloads, and numerous stressors that contribute to mental health deterioration.

Adding to all this are the internet, influencers, online games, digital betting schemes, among other distractions that further impair cognitive processes essential for articulating ideas and sustaining arguments grounded in scientific evidence that goes beyond what can be obtained from brief summaries or answers generated by artificial-intelligence algorithms. In other words, the stereotype of knowledge is no longer about overcoming obstacles and surpassing barriers but about overcoming financial hurdles. Unfortunately, this is not the image of knowledge or science as proposed by Carl Sagan in his book *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*.

This is a debate that urgently needs to enter our agendas. The rest... well, the rest may simply be ego disputes. But that is a conversation for another time.

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