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## Peru and its new challenge in higher education: Towards a research university

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### Abstract

The paradigm of research universities linked to the emergence of university rankings has unified and universalized the criteria relating to the quality of higher education. This situation has led to multiple responses across global society, which has started rating the quality of higher education systems through these rankings, supported by a series of indicators aligned to the characteristics of research universities. Given that the quality of a country's higher education is one of the fundamental pillars of its development, many countries have started to take government action in this respect. In the case of Peru, the response has been quick, with law 30220 being approved in 2014. It aims to regulate the quality of higher education through a series of specific conditions. By using a Delphi panel, this study analyzes the existing relationship between the conditions set out in law 30220 and the research universities' intrinsic characteristics.

Keywords: Research University; rankings; Peru; higher education; law 30220.

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## 1. Introduction

In this century, the scope of universities is no longer seen as merely preserving knowledge, nor as educating the elites in order to strengthen nations. Instead, they are seen as incubators of strategic resources, innovations and new technologies which, as business projects, provide results that extend further than a specific geographic area (Moncada, 2008; Orduna-Malea et al., 2010; Campillo, 2015). In the modern day, this model has been adopted by the so-called “world-class universities”.

During the first decade of the 21st century, and as a result of the emergence of international rankings, the term “world-class university” (a university with a global standing) became a fashionable term (Salmi, 2009). Since then, a number of studies emerged which tried to analyze the characteristics and unique aspects of these world-class universities. According to several comparative studies from the World Bank, many of the attributes of traditional universities with a global standing, classified based on the rankings, can be applied to research universities. One of the best known authors, Philip Altbach, states in his reports that natural evolution during this era has complemented the traditional focus of universities (teaching) and driven this more towards research. Institutions that focused on this now find themselves in dominant positions compared to others (Orozco et al, 2015). On this point, the expert clarifies that research can only lead to a university being recognized if it is “a study which breaks down knowledge barriers, which can be measured and communicated” (Altbach, 2004). It is as a result of these studies that the term “world-class university” starts to be aligned with the concept of research, which in this last decade has led to a new international paradigm derived from the North American research intensive university concept: The research university.

The emergence of these international rankings in 2003 has catapulted research universities as a benchmark for university quality. The high praise which these university rankings give to research has led to the universities which appear in the top spots of these rankings being universities in which research plays a major part in their operations (Orozco et al., 2015). As a result, research universities have become the new world-class universities, with the perception of university quality focusing on this new aforementioned paradigm: the research university (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). This has led to a large range of opinions amongst the scientific community, which has created a debate in terms of what these universities contribute in the context of the country (Ordorika & Rodríguez, 2010).

In many developed countries, there is a consensus that research universities have contributed to a modernization of disciplines and specializations in academic and scientific fields, whilst at the same time strengthening knowledge in new areas and understanding more complex situations. There is also a new point of view that proposes that the knowledge developed in the 21st century seems to come from the limitations of these same studies and advises the convenience of demanding other new ones to complement and strengthen them (Salmi, 2009). This process has led research universities towards a new paradigm from which certain questions arise, such as whether their existence as an institution is linked to the needs of the communities which they serve, and whether they promote a type of education which guarantees equal opportunities for everyone (Altbach et al., 2010).

Based on this, it is understood that establishing a research university in a country does not just depend on there being recognized talent amongst the population, political will or the necessary resources to build such a university. In reality, the most complex aspect of creating a world-class university in a country is the creation of a long-term vision. This plan is required in order to develop a model which is capable of enabling an institution to be aligned with the social development and economic strategy adopted by the country, for example. Other necessary considerations include reviewing their interaction between the country’s education system, which should also already be in a phase of reassessment and reform in order to guarantee the efficient running of a world-class university as well as their links with other institutions, with the objective of creating effective feedback in terms of learning, research and technology transfer, and creating a positive impact within the local and regional environment. If there has previously been no focus on all of these key factors mentioned, simply creating a World-Class or Research University does not guarantee a country’s development and productivity. As a result, these coming years will be crucial for different regions, such as Latin America,

which find themselves in a period of university reforms which are aimed at creating world-class universities based on the concept of research as a cornerstone for the country's development, as well as their own.

## **2. Characteristics of a Research University**

The World Bank reports are conclusive: thinking about research universities is currently equivalent to thinking about creating world-class universities. The high qualifications and achievement possibilities which graduates from these organizations have, the prestige associated with the publications presented by students and teachers on their research and studies, and the effectiveness and transferability of knowledge which they provide both the public and private sectors, demonstrate that research universities are a new educational model which takes knowledge and makes it interact at different levels within the global market (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; OECD 2009; Salmi, 2009).

Based on this focus, the operations of research universities depend on the following factors: talent potential amongst teachers, researchers, students and managers of the funds with which the institution is run, successful and flexible governance which enables them to reestablish themselves across different cultural and political contexts without sacrificing their academic and financial autonomy as well as their organizational vision, and abundant resources (in the form of donations, contributions and investments from the public and private sectors) which enable the deployment of tools and spaces which facilitate research and experiments (World Bank, 2002; Mohrman et al., 2008; Salmi, 2009).

Following a project with various universities (UCLA, UCB, UPM & UCSD), Adolfo Cazorla's work which was published in 2014 emphasized the gradualness of the concept of research universities as an objective which should always be considered with a strategic vision. As an example, research universities have a greater focus on postgraduate studies rather than degrees, but that does not mean that they only provide postgraduate studies. As a result, a university which wishes to change can start with an international level postgraduate degree which can gradually be strengthened and improved. In his report, Doctor Cazorla proposes three key characteristics which research universities should have: relevant teaching, research and links with society.

### **2.1. Relevant teaching**

Teaching has been, is, and will be one of the main components of the university concept. The university is intrinsically linked to teaching as a pillar for learning and transferring knowledge. The fact that this teaching is relevant contributes to the strengthening and prestige of the institution in which it takes place.

When it comes to considering which teaching is relevant we should turn to the concept of the university itself, which refers to the universality of the entity. Relevant teaching is not isolated, it is international (universal) and is not an end in itself but rather a way of transmitting existing knowledge, not only for teaching but also for teaching how to reflect, in order to develop. This development objective requires the teaching to be current, suitable and connected to the society which it will serve in the future. As a result, it is understood how research universities not only consider relevant teaching for degrees, but also when it comes to Masters and Doctorates, with these latter two disciplines allowing them to achieve a greater level of specialization. This enables them to connect with today's more technological and global society more easily.

### **2.2. Pioneering research**

Research should not be seen simply as another activity when teaching allows it, "rather as an intellectual motor which inspires teachers, means they are in state of creative tension, and allows them to transmit this knowledge in a creative and useful way for their students and for the society which they hope to improve" (Cazorla et al., 2014). Research, and its manifestation in high-impact publications,

provides a key indicator which measures the relevance and demonstrates the positioning of the institution.

Research represents these universities' driving force, and as a result there are important strategies focused on achieving this objective. Research is channeled through links between industry and the university, with the general aim of researching topics which can generate income. An important task is to define a suitable balance, in order to avoid a decrease in the quality of research whilst achieving financial stability.

### **2.3. Relevance and links with society**

“Relevance in society and its links to the university is a key component for these research studies. On one hand these links create substantial incomes which allow the institutions to operate, and on the other hand they keep these universities involved in social needs, at the forefront of progress, research and innovation. Without a doubt, this component is at the core of any institution which aspires to be recognized as a “research university”; as without ideas there are no projects, without projects there are no links to society or quality research which drives current and relevant teaching” (Cazorla et al., 2014).

The significant relationship between these three components is clear in terms of social relevance. The answer to why a university is relevant is clear: a university which researches topics requested by the society they serve, a university which as a result of its relevant teaching develops professionals dedicated to meeting social needs, is a relevant and well-connected university. When it comes to reviewing the literature, we can see how these world-class universities and mainly these research universities are linked to society through projects which the society itself requests (Ordorika, 2013; Castellanos et al., 2014).

These aforementioned characteristics of research universities are present in the main university rankings. If we analyze some of these rankings, such as Shanghai, The Times or Webometrics, we can see how to a greater or lesser extent their indicators are supported by said characteristics. Therefore, if a university wants to improve its position in the international rankings, it will have to strongly consider these characteristics.

### **3. Peruvian Law 30220**

Three main university reforms have been implemented in Peru prior to Law 30220. The first reform, referred to as “autonomy and co-governance”, was established with the Cordoba movement in Argentina, in 1918. During this time, academic quality was not a priority because “mainly small sectors of society with high levels of cultural capital in their household” were enrolled in education, because there were few teachers and “they had high levels of training, often obtained outside of the region”, and in particular, because in this era knowledge was updated slowly.

Following this came a second reform, termed broadly as “commercialization and differentiation”. This was characterized for establishing a model which differentiated public universities from private ones, providing the latter with promotion policies. During this phase, quality standards were not deemed necessary. As a result, it was presumed that students were the ones who could best select their higher education options. In summary, universities started to be considered as clients. A consequence of this reform, and due to widening the offer, new sectors of the population with relatively low cultural capital were able to access higher education, in what can be described as a democratization of professional studies. This led to increased differentiation amongst universities based on the quality of their teaching.

Finally, the third reform of “opening access and internationalization” led to a clear decline in academic quality as a result of reduced public funding per head and the creation of new universities offered to the market without internal or external systems which guarantee the quality of teaching.

During this last phase, a focus on higher education quality arose, a trend which started in England at the start of the 1990s.

These reforms resulted in a profound crisis for Peruvian universities. This crisis can be broken down into three key aspects. The first is that the State took over the administration of education policies at all levels, in an attempt to align them all. The logic behind this was that a national education project not only offers clear guidance in terms of where it wants to go, but also proposes mechanisms which articulate, according to needs, and the education system itself (Cuenca, 2013). This coincides with the World Bank's recommendations with regards to shaping and improving conventional and traditional universities in order to align them to the specific needs and requirements of the country (Salmi, 2009). This resulted in the need to create a new university law: law 30220. After two years of being debated, Law N° 30220 was finally enacted on the 9th July 2014. In order to implement this law, the National Institute for Higher Education (SUNEDU, 2014) was established as an autonomous organization of the Ministry of Education. It introduced the foundations of the system for mandatory and renewable licensing of universities, thus replacing the provisional operating authority which existed under the previous legal framework and which led to the proliferation of private universities. The SUNEDU establishes eight basic conditions to define the quality of higher education. These are as follows:

Condition I. Existence of academic objectives, degrees and qualifications, and study plans. There is a move away from the premise that a university has been able to establish all of this based on an evaluation of the situation and the expectations of future students. This also recognizes the way in which the administrative system which is responsible for its management is formed.

Condition II. Educational offering compatible with the objectives established during planning. For SUNEDU, this condition involves the university being able to show how it creates the budget for its activities and sustains its investment in following years.

Condition III. Adequate infrastructure and equipment to efficiently run classrooms. Everything that is required in a university is included in terms of minimum requirements for security, capacity available and technological equipment in order to guarantee the academic objectives stated in the first condition. This section requires that the facilities for university students should be differentiated from those for basic education, something which is currently a problem in Peru: there are records of universities which operate from offices, old schools or even shopping malls, for example.

Condition IV. Research and development lines. The supervisory entity states that all universities should design research activities led by their own teachers and students, in order to facilitate innovation and knowledge transfer.

Condition V. Availability of qualified teaching staff with no less than 25% of these being full time. With this point, SUNEDU is aiming to achieve greater interaction between students and teachers, including at class level in order to facilitate their learning and create research criteria.

Condition VI. Existence of basic complementary services. The guideline refers to all those medical, social, psychopedagogy and sporting services, among others, which without necessarily being educational enable the provide the student with conditions that foster learning and professional development.

Condition VII. Existence of mechanisms for mediation and entry into the job market. In a similar way to the point above, these services (such as job listings or professional placements) are seen as a way of facilitating and complementing students' development, especially those who require experience in the work place.

Condition VIII. Transparency. SUNEDU requires that all universities make information on their academic offering public, as well as their results and the quality of services they offer, with the aim of

helping students make better decisions and introducing a competitive aspect to the education and professional sector.

Through these conditions, the SUNEDU also aims to use this law to improve the position of Peruvian universities within the international rankings, which are led by research universities in which the characteristics intrinsic to these universities prevail. As a result, if the SUNEDU’s law aims to improve the ranking of Peruvian universities, it is important that the stated conditions are aligned to the main characteristics of research universities.

#### 4. Methodology

In order to measure the conditions imposed by the SUNEDU with regards to the characteristics described for the research university, a Delphi panel was selected due to the lack of impartial information which could be supported by expert judgment (Varela-Ruiz et al., 2012). Once the Delphi panel was chosen as the main methodology for the study a group of experts was identified. This group of experts was made up of 10 members of the international academic community, from different universities across the United States, Spain, Peru, Chile and Argentina.

As an initial methodological step, an open question was asked relating to the aforementioned characteristics of the research university. As a second step, recommendations from experts were included and a second wave was sent in which the experts were asked to score the basic conditions required to define the quality of teaching in the SUNEDU’s higher education with the research university’s characteristics. For this stage, a scoring was proposed on a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 indicating a low correlation and 4 indicating a very high correlation. The aim was to identify which of the research university’s characteristics related to each of the basic conditions imposed by the SUNEDU. The Delphi panel was completed with a third step in which the experts’ responses were incorporated and subsequently scored.

#### 5. Results

The results of the Delphi panel were very similar given that, as anticipated, the basic conditions imposed by the SUNEDU are an integral part of each of the research universities’ characteristics. The results obtained through the Delphi panel are shown in table 1

**Table 1. Results obtained through the Delphi panel**

Conditions	Teaching					Research					Links with Society				
	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4	0	1	2	3	4
Condition I	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Condition II	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Condition III	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Condition IV	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Condition V	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Condition VI	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Condition VII	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Condition VIII	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%	60%	20%	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%

In the table above, the “high” or “very high” responses (3 or 4) with a score of more than 50% are highlighted in yellow. Based on this data the aim is to observe which characteristics the SUNEDU’s different conditions have an impact on. The following table shows the characteristics of the research universities which the basic conditions have an impact on.



**Table 2. Results obtained through the Delphi panel**

Condition	Teaching	Research	Links with Society
Condition I.	X		
Condition II.	X		
Condition III.	X		
Condition IV.		X	
Condition V.	X	X	
Condition VI.	X		
Condition VII.			X
Condition VIII.	X	X	X

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The basic conditions established by the SUNEDU cover all of the research universities' characteristics. It is important to highlight that "teaching" is the most consistent characteristic across the different conditions; this could be due to the problems in terms of the quality of education that Peru has faced in recent years (SUNEDU, 2015). Law 30220 therefore has a noticeable focus on teaching, although the results also show characteristics related to research, links with society as well as overarching conditions that cover all of the characteristics (for example, condition VIII – transparency).

It should be noted that three of the basic conditions (IV, V and VI) cover aspects relating to research, a characteristic which we could argue is currently lacking in Peruvian universities, which are facing the challenge of training researchers in international research universities and trying to obtain the required resources which allow them to "support" investment in research. The results also show that the links with society are considered (as stated in the SUNEDU's document) from the point of view of assessment and entry into the job market, something which is probably driven by the strong growth in the country (Chirinos, 2011) in recent years and the need for a specialized workforce to enable this growth to be sustainable. These links with society should be univocal relationships (from the university to society) and not biunivocal as suggested by the characteristics of the research university (Cazorla et al., 2014). This could be due to the characteristics of the Peruvian economy, which is mainly based on exploiting raw materials and therefore does not necessarily require a strong scientific or technological basis for the country's development.

The fact that the SUNEDU's conditions cover, to a greater or lesser extent, the characteristics of the research university means that Law 30220 is laying the foundations for the transformation of Peruvian research universities. The correct implementation of these conditions will lead to future improvements for Peruvian universities in the international rankings, which assess the performance of the research universities' characteristics as one of their key indicators.

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