

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Neoliberal academia and epistemic tension in knowledge production: interrogating research collaboration

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Research Domain: International Perspectives and context (IPC)

Abstract:

The term 'collaboration' has, broadly, a positive connotation in academia. Collaboration makes it possible to create new knowledge. Also, in collaborating, affective processes of mutuality and cooperation emerge. However, in practice, social interactions involve uneasy relationships of power. This is particularly evident in academic research collaboration in a context of competition for financial resources and prestige where asymmetrical relationships come into play. By means of a bibliometric analysis of papers produced by at least one Latin-American academic from 2000 and 2017, this paper critically examines research collaboration in the neoliberal academia with a special focus on the North-South divide. In particular, it focuses on research collaboration and patterns of paper co-authorship between academics from the global South and the global North. This presentation ends by offering insights about how to democratize research collaboration in which shared vocabularies, concepts, theories, subjectivities and affective processes are involved.

Paper:

Framework

In academia, collaboration is valued since it makes it possible to create new ideas, approaches and strategies in teaching, research and service. Also, in collaborating, affective processes of mutuality and cooperation emerge. The formation of research networks play an important role in creating new knowledges and in pursuing the internationalization of universities. However, research collaboration involves asymmetrical relationships based on power. This is particularly evident when collaboration involves countries and institutions from the global North and the Global South (Obamba and Mwema, 2009).

Universities and their academics have internalised neoliberal narratives (Morley, Marginson &

Blackmore, 2014) in relation to academic productivity, competition and internationalization and prestige so as to emulate the so called 'world-class universities'. A world class university is a university that works under standards of excellence especially in research terms (Altbach, 2004), usually measured by indicators established by international rankings (Hazelkorn, 2017). These hegemonic narratives about prestige - which promote comparative measures and competition among universities within and among countries- have been specially inspired by an American model of university based on elite universities' performance (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2014). Such a model works well with few universities in countries such as the USA and the UK. However, in less-developed countries, such as Latin American countries, the material conditions to become a 'world class university' are rather out of reach. In this context, a question emerges: which is the nature of research collaboration that academics from Latin America establish with colleagues from the North through publications and co-authorship?

Methodology

By means of a bibliometric analysis, an examination of the patterns of research collaboration through paper co-authorship in the field of higher education is offered. In particular, papers co-authored by at least one Latin-American academic and published in the Web of Science (core collection), SCOPUS and SciELO (a well-known index in Latin America and South Africa) were identified. Several searches were conducted in the WoS index core collection, SCOPUS and SciELO using similar keywords and categories. A total of 130 papers in the WoS core collection, 844 papers in SCOPUS and 1,240 papers in SciELO published between 2000 and 2015 were identified.

Outcomes

1. Papers in higher education studies in Latin America are have been increasing in number over the years. This is particularly evident in journals indexed in SCOPUS and SciELO although papers in WoS have also increased in numbers in the last years.
2. Most of the papers are published in both Spanish and Portuguese. This is due to the fact that these two languages are vernacular languages in the region. SCOPUS and SciELO have a higher number of papers published in Spanish and Portugal unlike WoS journal which are mainly published in English.
3. Dominant research topics across three indexes are system policies and higher education reforms, teaching and learning processes, quality, privatization and state-market relationships.
4. The percentage of papers in higher education studies published by Latin American scholars with scholars outside their own countries is rather low, although it tends to be higher in WoS journals (38.4%, 50 papers).
5. Although international publication is rather limited across all three indexes, when publishing in major journals – such as those in the WoS core collection– Latin American scholars prefer

to co-publish with academics in the Global North. In the case of WoS papers with collaboration outside Latin America, most of the leading authors are from the Global North.

Discussion

Although international research collaboration and co-authorship might be seen as positive value, this paper offers an invitation to interrogate it. While objective indicators can be proposed so as to measure international research collaboration in terms of economic value or academic production, the very process of collaboration involves an asymmetry in which the binomial relationship of dominant/dominated underpins international patterns of publication.

The fact that the most prestigious journals are managed by commercial and transnational companies located in the North and that most are published in English presents challenges to universities and academics not only in higher education in Latin America but also in non-English-speaking countries. Publications in English in well-regarded journals have become a 'must' for many of these academics because they need to keep their university positions and demonstrate their productivity. There are, therefore, geopolitical barriers in research collaboration that are imposed upon academics in countries in the global South, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Despite this situation, Latin American academics profusely publish in less well-regarded journals and in their local languages. A hypothesis to this double pattern of publication is going to be offered at the Conference. Mainly, it is proposed that there are different epistemic values guiding the will to publish.

Additionally, it seems productive to envisage new and imaginative ways to put into practice a type of collaboration that considers the richness that can be brought in by both parts. Two steps towards this direction are proposed here. On the one hand, a democratization of collaborative research through the creation of a common space of collaboration in which shared vocabularies, concepts, theories, subjectivities and affective processes come together so as to value ways of thinking from different places and experiences. This entitles spaces for both consensus and dissensus in the academia that allows the interrogation of hegemonic knowledge (Guzmán-Valenzuela, in press; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019; Guzmán Valenzuela, Queupil & Ríos- Jara, on line first) and promotes and values a multiplicity of knowledges. On the other hand, a second step consists of giving weight to the need of building research capacity within collaborating institutions in the South (Obamba and Mwema, 2009) so as to promote and consolidate them.

These two steps will help and shape new ways of research collaboration between the global North and the global South so as to obtain mutual benefit. Nations, global organizations, higher education systems and academics from both parts of the world have a responsibility in promoting these new ways of valuing knowledge and putting into practice research collaboration.

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