

Exploring the labor context of organizational communication academia in Latin America: perspectives and challenges

Explorando el contexto laboral de la academia de la comunicación organizacional en América Latina: perspectivas y desafíos

Explorando o contexto laboral da academia de comunicação organizacional na América Latina: perspectivas e desafios

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ABSTRACT | The labor context of Latin American academics in the field of organizational communication is presented through on an empirical study that examines four dimensions: research activities, institutional demands, wellbeing at work, and sociodemographic and labor aspects. We applied a questionnaire to 81 researchers from 12 Latin American countries, and the data collection took place between October 2019 and April 2021. The results show that researchers face challenges in terms of resources and research support. In addition, the level of professional demands and perceived well-being vary more by gender. The article expands the understanding of the reality of Latin American researchers in the field of organizational communication, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, as well as differences in working conditions according to the institutional system and gender.

KEYWORDS: organizational communication; labor conditions; Latin America; academia.

HOW TO CITE

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RESUMEN | *El contexto laboral de las personas académicas de la comunicación organizacional en América Latina se presenta a partir de un estudio empírico que explora cuatro dimensiones: las actividades de investigación, las exigencias institucionales, el bienestar laboral, y aspectos sociodemográficos y laborales. Para ello se aplicó un cuestionario a 81 personas académicas, representantes de 12 países de América Latina, entre octubre de 2019 y abril de 2021. Los resultados demuestran que los participantes enfrentan desafíos con respecto a los recursos y a la asistencia para investigar. Por otra parte, las exigencias institucionales y de bienestar laboral percibido varían en función del género. Este artículo amplía la comprensión de la realidad laboral, identificando fortalezas y debilidades, así como diferencias en las condiciones laborales según el régimen institucional y el género.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *comunicación organizacional; condiciones laborales; Latinoamérica; academia.*

RESUMO | *O contexto de trabalho das pessoas acadêmicas de comunicação organizacional na América Latina se apresenta com base em um estudo empírico no qual se exploram quatro dimensões: as atividades de pesquisa, as demandas institucionais, o bem-estar no trabalho, e os aspectos sociodemográficos e trabalhistas. Para isso, foi aplicado um questionário que foi respondido por 81 pessoas acadêmicas, pertencentes a 12 países da América Latina entre outubro de 2019 e abril de 2021. Os resultados demonstram que os participantes enfrentam desafios com relação a recursos e assistência para pesquisar. Por outra parte, as exigências das instituições e a percepção de bem-estar variam de acordo com o gênero. Assim, o artigo amplia a compreensão da realidade do trabalho na América Latina identificando pontos fortes e fracos, bem como as diferenças nas condições de trabalho segundo o regime institucional e o gênero.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *comunicação organizacional; condições laborais; América Latina; academia.*

INTRODUCTION

In the Latin American region, the last decades have been characterized in the political sphere by the end of dictatorships and the consolidation of democratic governments in several countries and in the economic sphere by the predominance of neoliberal policies in the region (Ibarra-Colado, 2003, 2006; Walker, 2021). In this context, Saforcada and colleagues (2022) point to two processes that have influenced the configuration of today's universities in the region. On the one hand, the growth of higher education with an increase in enrollments, the number of institutions and the diversity of undergraduate and graduate programs and degrees, and on the other hand, the stagnation or cutback of public funding for universities. This means that the growth of higher education in Latin America has not always been accompanied by an increase in public funding. Rather, public higher education systems have tended to be de-funded, while at the same time market-based policies have been implemented that promote "the privatization and commodification of higher education and knowledge" (Saforcada et al., 2022, p. 1). Both processes have an impact on the organization of academics' professional lives.

We often explore an academic field through the writings that constitute it. While state of the art or bibliometric studies are valuable as they shed light on the most studied topics, the most used methodologies and the most influential people in the field (Salas Forero, 2011; Angel Botero, 2013; Angel et al, 2017; Contreras-Delgado & Garibay-Rendón, 2020), these studies do not consider the context in which academic production takes place. In this sense, Angel and colleagues (2017) make a call for the development of readings of the field that take into account "the concrete conditions of academic production in Latin America" (p. 286). Following this call, this article attempts to describe the working context in which academics in the field of organizational communication (hereafter OC) academics produce knowledge in Latin America from 2019 to 2021. Note that we use the term organizational communication as an umbrella to encompass related terms such as public relations, strategic, corporate or institutional communication. So far, the field of OC has been studied mainly from the perspective of professional practice. The biannual studies of the Latin American Communication Monitor (LCM) are an example of this. Since 2013, they have reported on trends and changes in skills and professional development in the field of strategic communication and public relations in the region (Latin American Communication Monitor, 2024), but little is known about the working conditions of academics in this field (Ferrari et al., 2020; Cataño-Otálora et al., 2020; Palacios-Serna, 2021).

This study looks at the working conditions of academics working at public and private universities in 12 Latin American countries. We examine, on the one hand, the material conditions, i.e., the type of contract, resources and support

for research and aspects related to institutional requirements, and, on the other, the social aspects linked to academics' wellbeing (table 1). We adopt a bottom-up perspective (Vásquez Donoso et al., 2018; Vásquez, 2022), focusing on the perceptions of individuals to identify the main strengths and weaknesses of their working conditions, the differences between the dimensions studied and the institutional system, and the aspects of academic work that present gender differences.

To this end, we applied a questionnaire - of our own elaboration, based on the literature on the issues addressed - to Latin American academic experts in CO from 12 countries, examining their working conditions along the following dimensions: research activity, institutional demands, wellbeing at work and sociodemographic aspects.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, we analyze the literature that examines the field of CO from a work context. We found studies that focus on the work of its professionals in private or third sector organizations (Arzuaga Williams, 2019; León Duarte, 2006; Kunsch, 2006; Moriceau et al., 2022; Rodrigues, 2022). There is also literature on teaching research in this area (Ferrari et al., 2020; Cataño-Otálora et al., 2020; Palacios-Serna, 2021). However, in the academic reference databases consulted (Scopus, Google consulted (Scopus, Google Scholar), we did not find any articles dealing with the working conditions of CO academics in Latin America. The closest were the studies by Müller and colleagues (2023) and Carrasco-Campos and Saperas (2021), which deal with the work of academics in the field of communication. The study by Müller and colleagues (2023) study was conducted during the pandemic period and focused on the question of who was most affected by COVID-19 prevention measures and how partner relationships, parenthood or motherhood affected academic production in the field of communication at German, Austrian and Swiss universities. Carrasco-Campos and Saperas (2021) argued about the influence of neoliberal thinking on the institutionalization of the field of communication in Europe. To this end, they focused on the institutional pillars that support academic research: the publishing industry, international associations and the bodies that evaluate research and reputation. The latter assume a mercantile mindset that manifests itself in the promotion of research interests and standards that define the field of study in a particular way (Fairclough, 1993).

Labor context of academics in Latin America

We understand academic work as "a specific form of informational work that has to do with the production and dissemination (reproduction) of knowledge, skills and academic practices" (Allmer, 2018, p. 26). Following this author, it is crucial

for us to understand academic work from the meaning of labor, which anchors the creative and productive activity of labor in the social structure (political, economic and cultural context) and recognizes the enabling and constraining nature of the structure in everyday practices. In this regard, it is not the same to do academic work at a university in the global North as at one in the global South.

Since the 1990s, Latin American academics, specifically those working in public universities, have witnessed the strong social debate on the role and reform of the state (Saforcada et al., 2022). The university, as a result and target of public policies in higher education policy, has not only experienced not only budget cuts, but also the gradual conversion to administrative models typical of private companies. This type of transformation is referred to by authors such as Slaughter and Leslie (1997) as academic capitalism, which refers to "a set of initiatives and behaviors that are economically motivated to secure external resources" (Ibarra-Colado, 2003, p. 1059). In other words, the tendency is to transform the university into "a provider of services that adapts its products to market demands: training, research in areas defined as priority or innovative, and technical assistance to companies and governments" (Sisto et al., 2021, p. 4). These global inclinations manifest internally in universities in mercantile practices that have modified the nature, content and organization of academic work. Examples of these practices include "the development of nomadic careers, the virtualization of activities, the intensification of tasks, and the control of outcomes" (Walker, 2021, p. 3; Martínez Alcántara et al., 2023). Flexible working models that promote part-time and temporary contracts are also an expression of academic capitalism. In this context, Mansano de Mello and Santos-Alves (2017) point out that, in Brazil, this situation is more common in private universities in Brazil. This type of contract makes academic work precarious, as tasks such as preparing lectures and correcting evaluations take place outside the school cycle and without remuneration. This leads to a high volatility and labor turnover.

Working conditions related to research

According to the latest report of the Regional Conference on Higher Education (Observatorio Iberoamericano de la Ciencia la Tecnología y la Sociedad, 2018), although three quarters of Latin American researchers work at universities, "the numerical hegemony of universities in terms of human resources for science and technology is not reflected in the resources allocated to them for research" (p. 18). The Unesco State of Science 2023 report shows that "investment in R&D in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole accounted for 2.32% of the total amount invested worldwide in 2021" (p. 17). The regional investments show a significant gap between the countries that concentrate the largest investments, such as Brazil with 62%, Mexico with 13%, Argentina with 9%, Colombia and

Chile with 3% and the other Latin American countries (Ibero-American Network of Science and Technology Indicators, 2023).

Likewise, research also develops in a heterogeneous higher education system with public, private and mixed institutions based on traditions and values that affect the prioritization of research and the resources allocated to its development. The specificities of each type of institution bring challenges, either in adapting to public policies or to the trends created to meet market needs (Lenz, 2017; Rodríguez, 2017). For example, according to the Latin American Observatory of Educational Policies (Rodríguez, 2017), in some private institutions in Brazil there are few incentives to conduct research and a significant percentage of academic staff have to combine research work with a 40-hour per week workload. In countries such as Chile, despite laws that require 80% of staff to be permanent and 20% to be temporary in public institutions, unions report a disparity and a ratio of 30% and 70% respectively. These practices are a direct result of the neoliberal policies that have been in place at the region's public universities since the 1990s (Walker, 2021). Sieglin (2019) points out that these policies in Mexico have led to a process of disempowerment of academic communities, limiting their autonomy and where decision-making processes are clouded by issues such as funding and structures in these institutions. On the other hand, Mattos and Silva (2020) point out that certain private institutions in Brazil are incentivized to conduct research related to market sectors, which motivates this interaction between research and industry.

Wellbeing at work

Academic work is considered to be one of the professions that cause more stress to its employees (International Labour Office, 1981). The peculiarities of this profession make it difficult to recognize and diagnose illnesses (Silva, 2015). This author cites competitive relationships and the fragile bonds of solidarity in the academic environment as some of the factors that cause it (Silva, 2015). This can be seen, for example, in conflictual relationships with other academics (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), with students (Hakanen et al., 2006) or in the lack of social support from their environment (Marqués Pinto et al., 2005).

For Millán and colleagues (2017), the wellbeing of teachers in a work context results from the balance between psychological wellbeing and university dependence on the university. In the former, the authors include variables such as the influence of political contexts, salary and social security, management of situations with students, resources, professional development, student discipline of students, and commitment to teaching work. Regarding university dependence, the authors highlight the assessment of working conditions, the social environment and the regulation of teachers in the institutions.

Gender-related demands and challenges

Hurtado Saa (2021) points out that Western academia is built on cultural notions of masculinity, heteronormativity, class, and race. This contributes to the failure of female teachers to fulfill their expectations and ideals as academics given the context of productive sociability and instrumental reasoning of these environments (Silva, 2015). For example, Montes-López and Simbürger (2021) have shown that female academics in Chilean and Spanish institutions believe that they are primarily responsible for work-life balance, while in the case of their partners, they are only seen as co-responsible. The authors also pointed out the lack of support from the university environment in the search for this balance, which offers different opportunities and investments to female researchers who decide to pursue an academic career. It is crucial to consider the gender variable, as the academic environment can hinder the construction of women's equality scenarios.

METHODOLOGY

The data presented here are part of a broader mixed methods research whose aim is to map the academic development of CO in the Latin American region based on the perceptions of academics and their productions. In this text, we focus on the data on working conditions (table 1) from the quantitative phase of the study, which is exploratory in nature. For this phase, a questionnaire was designed based on an extensive literature review (Vásquez et al., 2022), from which the theory being operationalized is extracted. No previous instrument was adapted or used. This was validated both statistically (Cronbach's alpha: 0.992) and by seven pairs of experts. The following table summarizes the variables considered in this publication.

Dimensions	Subdimensions	Variables	Questionnaire questions	Types of response
	Responsible for research project(s).	Responsibility in the investigation.	I have or have had research projects in CO under my responsibility.	Closed
	Research-teaching articulation.	Teaching and research affinity.	I have the possibility to teach subjects with greater affinity to my research.	Likert Scale
	Agency to define the research agenda.	Degree of interest in current line of research.	Currently, I am developing the line of research of my main interest.	Likert Scale
Research activity	Integration to research groups.	Participation in at least one research group.	I am part of a research group in CO.	Closed
		Wi-Fi access.	I have Wi-Fi access.	Closed
	Research resources.	Individual workspace. Paid research assistants.	I have an individual workspace. I have paid research assistants.	Closed Closed
Institutional requirements		Funds to participate in academic activities.	I am able to attend congresses and events funded by the institution.	Closed
	Research agenda.	Degree of pressure from the institution in relation to the lines of research.	I feel pressure from my institution to follow a specific line of research.	Likert Scale
	Research funds.	Degree of pressure from the institution in relation to conducting applied research. Degree of pressure from the institution to apply for funds.	I feel pressure from my institution to do applied research. I feel pressure from my institution to apply for research funds.	Likert Scale Likert Scale

Table 1 continues >

Dimensions	Subdimensions	Variables	Questionnaire questions	Types of response
Institutional requirements		Degree of pressure from the institution to collaborate with colleagues in the institution.	I feel pressure from my institution to collaborate with colleagues from my institution.	Likert Scale
	Academic collaboration.	Degree of pressure from the institution to collaborate with international colleagues.	I feel pressure from my institution to collaborate with international colleagues.	Likert Scale
Wellbeing at work	Work-life balance.	Level of work-life balance.	I balance my work with my personal life.	Likert Scale
	Satisfaction with the profession.	Alternatives for professional change.	I am thinking of changing careers.	Likert Scale
	Competitiveness in the workplace.	Level of competitiveness at work.	I feel that my work environment is competitive (there is competition or rivalry among colleagues).	Likert Scale
Sociodemographic and labor aspects	Demographics.	Country of origin.	Country of origin indicated.	Closed
		Genre.	Indicated gender.	Closed
	Institutional regime.	Public.	Regime that characterizes the institution in which he/she works.	Closed
		Private.		Closed

Table 1. Operationalization according to dimensions, subdimensions and variables for the study of working conditions in CO

Source: Own elaboration

Description of the sample

The validated questionnaire was assembled on the Question Pro platform and distributed by email between October 2019 and April 2021¹. To this end, a directory of 276 OC scholars was compiled based on information from the websites of 73 universities offering degree programs in organizational communication and public relations in Latin America, as well as from academic associations in the region. A sample of voluntary respondents was used. The inclusion criterion for the sample was to be an scholar in the field of OC or related areas. A total of 81 valid questionnaires, i.e., those where all questions were completed, were received from 12 countries in the region; partial responses were discarded. This represents 29.4% of the total entries in the directory. We grouped the responses into three subregions and others, which recorded the following percentages of responses: North America (Mexico), 28.3%; Central America and the Caribbean (Cuba, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic), 7.4%; South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela), 61.1%, and others, 2.4%² (table 2). Mexico (28.40%) and Brazil (24.79%) are the two countries with the highest response rate. To ensure the proportionality of the sample by subregion, the results for Brazil are presented separately.

The subdimensions of institutional system, contract type and gender were included as they provided insightful results when crossed with the dimensions of working conditions. As we can see in table 2, 54% of the respondents work in public universities and 46% work in private universities. In terms of type of employment, 76% have a full-time contract, 15% are part-time and 9% report hourly contracts. In terms of gender variable, 79% of women and 68.2% of men have a full-time contract, 10.5% and 27.3% respectively have a part-time contract and 10.5% and 4.5% respectively work on an hourly basis. Participants predominantly identified themselves mostly as women (73%), which is common in this field (Latin American Communication Monitor, 2024). It should be noted that the questionnaire was open to include other gender identities or not to specify one.

1. The details of the construction of the questionnaire and the application strategy are explained in Vásquez and colleagues (2022).

2. We included questionnaires from two Spanish scholars because of their involvement in the OC development in Latin America, an important aspect for other topics developed in the larger research.

Country or region	Institutional regime		Type of contract			Genre		Sample by region or country
	Public	Private	Weather complete	Part-time	Other (hourly)	Female	Male	
Brazil	17	3	15	3	2	16	4	20
Mexico	16	7	19	2	2	16	7	23
Central America and Caribbean	5	1	5	0	1	5	1	6
South America (-Brazil)	4	26	20	8	2	21	9	30
Other	2	0	2	0	0	1	1	2
Total sample	44	37	62	12	7	59	22	81

Table 2. Detailed description of the sample

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the research activity

Research activity is an axis of higher education that has been the target of commodification trends (Carrasco-Campos and Saperas, 2021). Authors such as Walker (2021), Alvarado (2019) and Ibarra-Colado (2003) point out that this is manifested in aspects such as the reduction of time dedicated to research (specifically in the field of Social Sciences) and the institutional definition of research agendas based on market demands, among others.

The data (figure 1) show a panorama in which a high percentage of the sample is or has been responsible for the development of research projects, 78% in private universities and 76% in public universities. An even higher percentage say they do so in their main area of interest (84% at public universities and 81% at private universities). Likewise, the majority of the sample agrees that they have the opportunity to teach research topics (74% and 73% respectively).

From these results, it could be assumed that the commodification trends related to the reduction of time dedicated to research and the interference of institutions in research agendas have not significantly affected the research work of the study participants in the study.

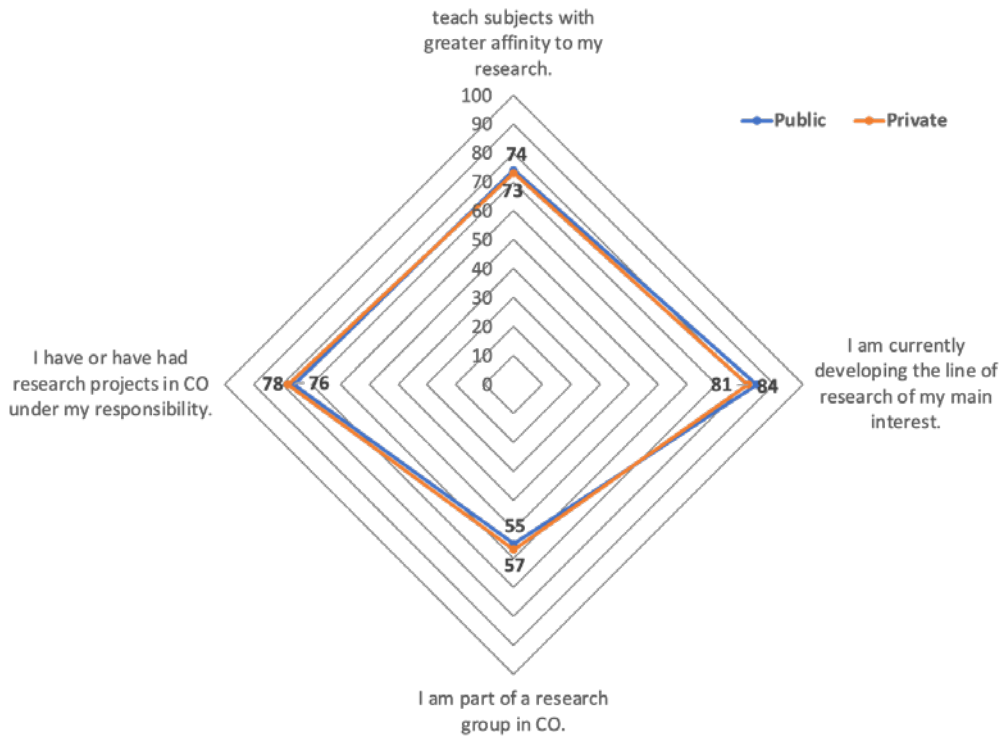


Figure 1. Characteristics of the research activity

Source: Own elaboration.

We would like to point out that almost half of the sample is not part of OC research groups (45% in public institutions and 43% in private institutions). Although the difference by type of institution is not significant, the participation of researchers from private institutions (57%) is higher than from public institutions (55%). These data describe a research practice that is conducted on an individual basis.

Institutional requirements

The research activity takes place within the framework of university institutions, so we considered vital to know the participating academics’ perceptions of institutional requirements. As Walker (2021) and Carrasco-Campos (2021) note, this is one of the aspects in which the global trends of commodification have been installed.

In general, the variables that assess the perception of the demands made by universities have low values compared to the variables that describe working conditions. The values are slightly higher at private universities, which could be interpreted as a perception of greater demands on the part of these institutions. For example, 22% of participants from private universities and 17% from public universities stated that they felt under pressure to pursue a specific line of research.

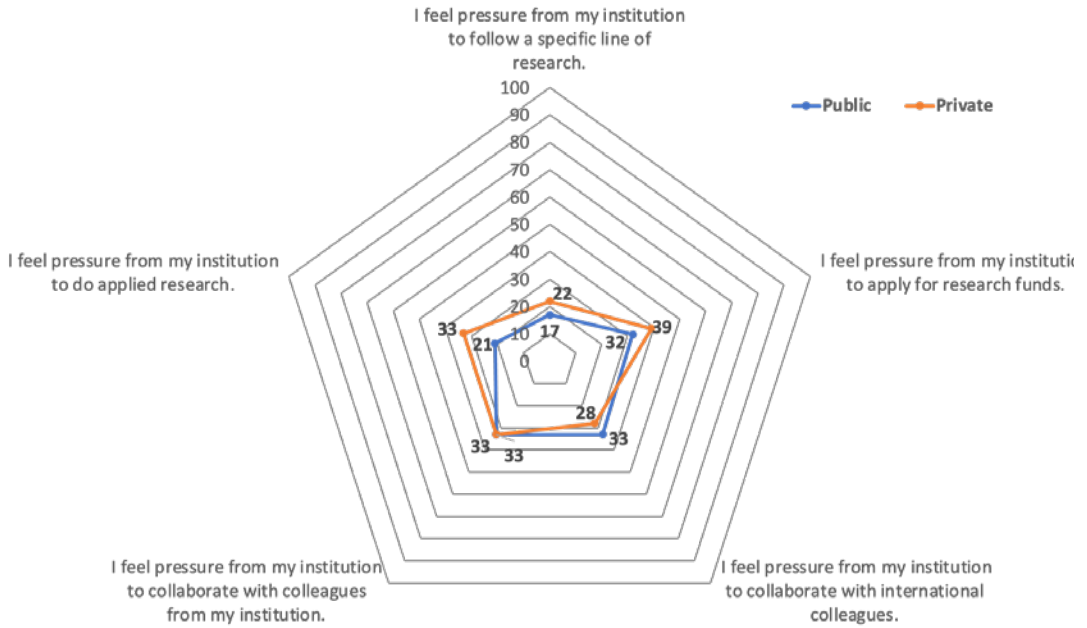


Figure 2. Institutional requirements

Source: Own elaboration.

Those working at private universities registered greater institutional pressure on issues such as applying for research funding (39% versus 32% at public universities) and developing applied research (33% versus 21% at public universities). On the other hand, those working at public universities reported greater pressure on issues relating to collaboration issues, both at the institutional and international level, and the issue of applying for funding (figure 2).

Another interesting aspect of the measurement of this variable is that the option of neither agreeing nor disagreeing received the highest percentage in the different dimensions (18%, 25%, 25%, 25%, 29%). These data could indicate that these demands have not been institutionalized, i.e., they are not part of the norms that regulate academic work, and, therefore people do not have a well-defined position in this regard. Another interpretation is that the participants see these demands for granted as a natural part of doing academic work in the field of CO. The reflections of Carrasco-Campos and Saperas (2021) on the relationship between the field of communication and mercantilist ideas support this interpretation. According to these authors, "economic, technological and media globalization have created a space to consolidate the 'marketplace of ideas' in the field of communication", as "communication research has been one of the most dynamic and strategic factors in the development of political and economic systems" (p. 196).

Institutional requirements	Institutional regime		Genre	
	Public	Private	Female	Male
I feel pressure from my institution to follow a specific line of research.	17% (6/41)	22% (8/36)	20% (11/55)	18% (4/22)
I feel pressure from my institution to apply for research funds.	32% (13/41)	39% (14/36)	42% (23/55)	18% (4/22)
I feel pressure from my institution to collaborate with international colleagues.	33% (13/40)	28% (10/36)	37% (20/54)	14% (3/22)
I feel pressure from my institution to collaborate with colleagues from my institution.	33% (13/40)	33% (10/36)	39% (21/54)	9% (2/22)
I feel pressure from my institution to conduct applied research.	21% (9/40)	33% (12/36)	31% (19/54)	9% (2/22)

* Based on the responses of agree and strongly agree.

Table 3. Institutional requirements

Source: Own elaboration.

When examining the institutional requirements with regard to the gender variable (table 3), it is evident that the pressure is greater for women. For example, it is found to be almost 23 higher than for men by almost 23% (42% and 18% respectively) when applying for research funding. The pressure to collaborate with colleagues in the institution is also higher for women (39%) than for men (9%). The pressure to collaborate with international colleagues is still relatively higher for women (37%) than for men (14%). There are also significant differences between women and men in the demand for applied research also varies considerably between women and men (31% and 9% respectively), but there are no major differences in the perception of pressure to pursue a specific line of research line.

Material conditions for research

Another aspect that is an integral part of the work context is the material conditions provided by the institutions to carry out the work. We found that the majority of participants have individual workspaces and Wifi access in both public and private universities have their own workspace and Wi-Fi access (figure 3). In both cases, participants from private institutions have greater access (76% and 95%) than participants from public institutions (74% and 81%).

However, in aspects such as funding for research assistants, we see a high percentage, with around 70% (private universities) and 79% (public universities) of participants who do not having this resource for their research. Those conducting research at private institutions report having 9% more opportunities to have assistants (30%) than participants at public institutions (21%). However, when it comes to means to attend academic events, we see a higher percentage of those from public institutions (47% and 38% for private institutions).

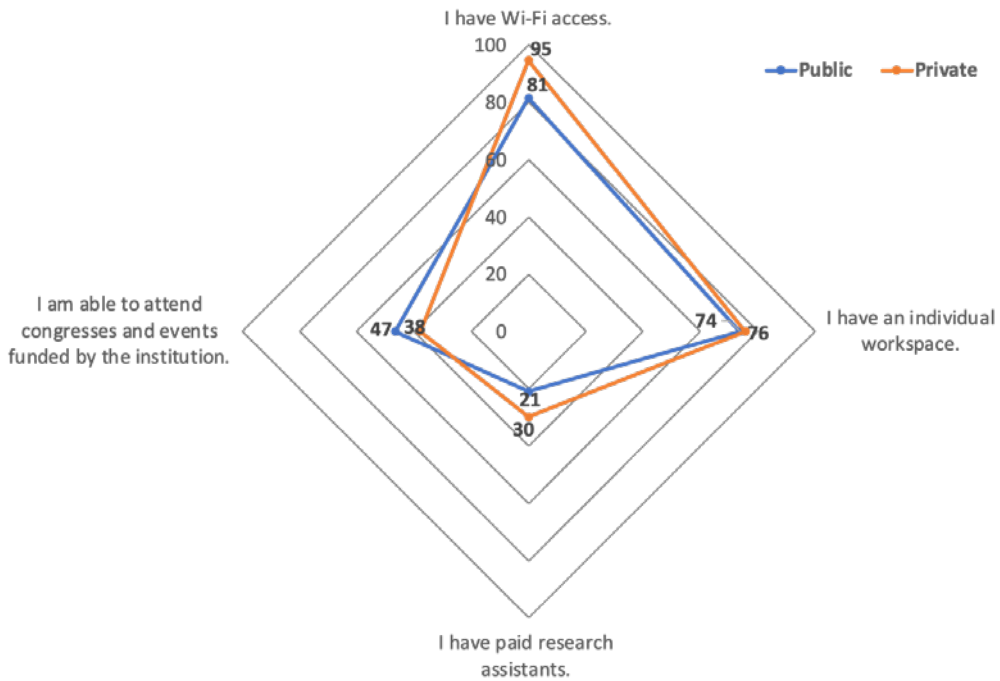


Figure 3. Research resources

Source: Own elaboration.

Research resources	Institutional regime		Genre	
	Public	Private	Female	Male
Wi-Fi network access	81% (35/43)	95% (35/37)	88% (51/58)	86% (19/22)
Individual space	72% (31/43)	76% (28/37)	69% (40/58)	86% (19/22)
Paid research assistants	21% (4/43)	30% (11/37)	28% (16/58)	18% (4/22)
Funded congresses and events	47% (20/43)	38% (14/37)	40% (23/58)	50% (11/22)

* Based on the responses of agree and strongly agree.

Table 4. Research resources

Source: Own elaboration.

We highlight the percentage of those who do not have this resource, as it clearly shows this weakness (53% and 62%). This not only affects the visibility of academic work and the building of networks in the field of CO, but also leads to socioeconomic gaps in the academic institutions, as the possibility of disseminating the work done depends on access to other funds, including personal means.

When we examine this data in terms of gender, it is noticeable that the percentage of women who say they have individual workspaces (69%) is lower than that of men (86%). Sometimes these spaces are linked to management and coordination positions; the data collected do not indicate hierarchies, so we cannot venture to draw conclusions in that sense. Another difference emerges in relation to the percentage of female researchers who report having funds to attend congresses and events (40%), as it is lower than that of men (50%).

Wellbeing at work

We operationalized occupational wellbeing into three subdimensions: work-life balance, job satisfaction and competitiveness at work (Silva, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

The majority of respondents (72% of public universities and 70% of private universities) state that they are able to reconcile work and private life. Some 17.5% neither agree nor disagree with this statement, and 11.2% disagree. Those who work full-time also report a better work-life balance (72%) compared to those who work part-time (42%).

Regarding competitiveness at work, it is observed that people in public institutions feel more pressure (58%) than those in private institutions (43%). Analyzing this variable in relation to gender, it can be seen that the percentage of those who feel pressure or rivalry among colleagues is higher among women (55%) than men (41%).

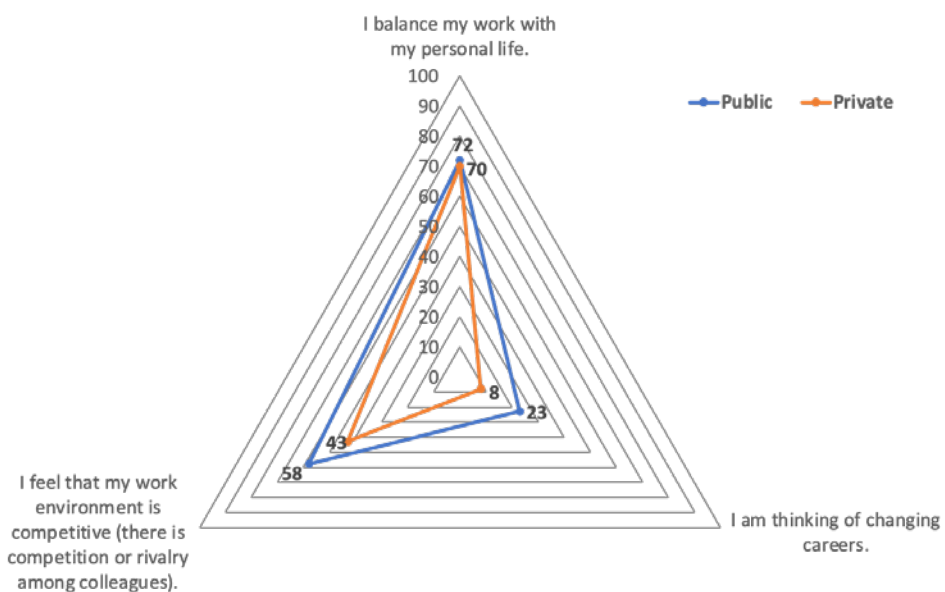


Figure 4. Wellbeing at work

Source: Own elaboration.

Wellbeing at work	Institutional system		Genre	
	Public	Private	Female	Male
I balance my work with my personal life.	72% (31/43)	70% (26/37)	67% (39/58)	82% (18/22)
I am thinking of changing professions.	23% (10/43)	8% (3/37)	19% (11/58)	9% (2/22)
I feel that my work environment is competitive (there is competition or rivalry among colleagues).	58% (25/43)	43% (16/37)	55% (32/58)	41% (9/22)

* Based on the responses of agree and strongly agree.

Table 5. Wellbeing at work

Source: Own elaboration.

Seventy-seven percent of professionals at public universities state that they have no intention of changing their profession, as opposed to 92% at private universities. When we analyze this satisfaction variable in relation to gender (table 5), we find that the percentage of men who plan to change their profession is lower (9%) than that of women (19%).

A lower percentage of women (67%) than men (82%) say that they have a good work-life balance. This difference may be the result of overwork among women with double shifts who have an unequal division of household responsibilities. People who work at public universities report a better work-life balance.

DISCUSSION

The results show that the working conditions are generally favorable for the development of research. It is a strength that 77% of the sample is responsible for research projects and that the level of affinity between research and teaching agenda is 73.5%. It is also worth mentioning the high degree (82.5%) of interest in the research direction being developed. It seems equally positive to us that the pressure to conduct research in a particular area is perceived as low (19.5%).

In terms of material conditions, access to Wi-Fi (88%) and individual workspace (75%) stand out. In addition, 71 of respondents state that they want a good work-life balance.

Furthermore, half of the respondents (56%) are not part of a research group, have neither funding from the institution to attend academic events (57.5%) nor paid research assistants (74.5%) and perceive their work environment as competitive (50.5%).

These results suggest a limited budget (Ibarra-Colleado, 2003; Walker, 2021) that contributes to the development of research as an individual activity that does not seem to have the necessary institutional support for its dissemination.

The low report on institutional requirements has caught our attention, as the literature reviewed shows a panorama in which these demands determine the daily practices of academics in different Latin American countries (Basil Rodríguez, 2019; Saforcada et al., 2019). Carrasco-Campos and Saperas (2021) provide some insights to understand these findings. These authors locate communication and media research in what they call the neoliberal academy, as it "promotes professional standards in terms of work routines, theoretical and methodological procedures, strategic objects of study and criteria for the evaluation of academic activity" (2021, p. 204). Although the criteria described do not apply exclusively to the field of communication but to the way in which academia is currently conducted, in our field they are embodied in what the authors call administrative research, which refers to applied research aimed at practical purposes. This explanation is supported in the field of organizational communication by the bibliometric studies of Angel Botero (2013) and Angel and colleagues (2017), who find a clear tendency towards normative discourses (Deetz, 2001) in research. This means that researchers are concerned "with the function, roles, and activities of professionals in the field, as well as the effectiveness of communication in solving organizational problems" (Angel, 2017, p. 285). These concerns are consistent with a mercantilist view of research (Ibarra-Colado, 2003).

In terms of differences related to the institutional system, perhaps the most revealing data are related to institutional demands. Although they reported lower percentages than the other variables, they showed some important characteristics of commercialization, especially in private universities, for example, the results related to the question on pressure to conduct applied research and pressure to compete for funds. Public universities also showed features of commodification. An interesting fact concerns the question of employee wellbeing: the perception of competitiveness in the work environment is more pronounced among academics at public universities, reaching a difference of about 15%. These results are promising due to the relative job security attributed to the public sector. However, this does not lead to a decrease in the perception of competitiveness, but rather to an increase.

Finally, regarding gender-related differences, despite the criticality promoted in universities and the impact of feminist thinking in academia, universities continue to be "a social space characterized by the same inequalities as other areas of society, such as gender discrimination" (Montes-López & Simbürger, 2021, p. 9). The results of the questionnaire partially support this statement. Although the sample showed

a considerable majority of women (72.9%) in the academic field of CO in the region and 80% have a full-time contract, the data on institutional demands raised red flags, as the perception of institutional pressure is more pronounced for women than for men. The same applies to work-life balance, with women reporting lower levels. These results are in line with the findings of other studies (Montes-López & Simbürger, 2021; Cisterna et al., 2021) on the challenges of balancing university and family for a female academics

, but also present universities with the challenge of creating and maintaining a working environment that is not only equitable, but also takes into account the fact that "the family is part of the context of scientific knowledge production" (Montes-López & Simbürger, 2021, p. 10).

CONCLUSIONS

This text contributes to the corpus of studies interested in the working conditions of academics by providing empirical data for the field of CO sector in Latin America. The strengths and weaknesses identified pose challenges for Latin American universities in terms of funding to promote research as teamwork (research groups, assistants) and for its adequate dissemination in national and international academic scenarios. We also highlight the need to consider gender variables and the institutional system in future research.

As part of our self-reflective and critical work, we are aware that our analysis also has limitations. Greater and more diverse participation of the countries that make up the region is an aspect that should be improved in future research. Although the data analyzed represents 29.35% of the CO directory of academics, the results reveal interesting trends. Working conditions are a complex and multifactorial object of study. The data in this article were collected using an extensive questionnaire that covered seven topics in addition to working conditions, covered seven themes to examine the field of CO from both the academic and labor domains. Therefore, it is limited in terms of measuring certain dimensions such as wellbeing at work, which are much more complex, and as a result certain simpler variables (age, position or length of employment) that would have been relevant were not included.

Finally, we believe it is important to systematize and analyze gender-specific differences in working conditions in more detail.

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