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Evaluation Methodology for Graduate Follow-Up and The Development of Complex Competencies in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Graduate follow-up in higher education requires systematic and scientifically validated strategies to ensure educational quality and strengthen professional competencies. This study aimed to design an evaluation methodology to enhance graduate follow-up processes and promote the development of complex competencies in university professionals. A mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative procedures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 experts in educational management, and structured questionnaires were administered to 46 graduates from a Human Medicine program at a private university in Lima. Data collection techniques included interview guides, observation, and surveys. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding, while quantitative data were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results confirmed the theoretical validity of the proposed graduate-tracking metamodel, highlighting its coherence, relevance, and capacity to generate reliable information about graduates' professional trajectories. Quantitative findings revealed weaknesses in self-information, self-training, and self-development competencies, as well as insufficient preparation to meet the demands of the labor market. The integration of the complex competencies approach emerged as a key component for guiding curricular improvements and reinforcing employability. In conclusion, the proposed methodology proved effective for evaluating and monitoring the development of complex competencies in university graduates, enabling continuous feedback on curricula and strengthening institutional processes for educational quality assurance.

Keywords: Graduate follow-up, Complex competencies, Educational evaluation, Higher education, Employability, Quality assurance.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a decisive role in shaping advanced human capital, providing professionals capable of responding to the complex demands of the labor market and contributing to socioeconomic development (Becker, 1964; Adedeji & Campbell, 2013). However, several studies show that the transition of university graduates into formal employment still exhibits significant gaps between the competencies acquired during training and those required in professional environments (Ávalos Quispe, 2021; Contreras & Kuri-Alonso, 2023). In the Peruvian context, reports from SUNEDU (2022) and the National Education Council (2020) have highlighted the need to implement systematic graduate-tracking mechanisms as part of quality assurance processes and the relevance of academic programs.

At the international level, graduate-tracking studies have proven to be key tools for assessing curriculum relevance and informing educational design based on graduates' performance in the labor market (Allen & van der Velden, 2009; Schomburg, 2007). Nevertheless, in Peru, such initiatives have been largely limited to the collection of administrative data and do not include the assessment of complex competencies, understood as the integration

of cognitive, procedural, attitudinal, and value-based capacities required for professional practice in uncertain and changing contexts (González, 2008; Tobón, 2008). This lack of standardized methodologies prevents universities from monitoring the real impact of their training on graduates' professional development and hinders compliance with the quality standards established by SINEACE (2018).

In response to this problem, the present study aimed to design an evaluation methodology for graduate tracking oriented toward identifying, analyzing, and strengthening the development of complex competencies in graduates of a Human Medicine program at a private university in Lima. This design was grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996), the meaningful learning approach (Ausubel, 2002), human capital theory (Becker, 1964), and connectivism (Siemens, 2004; Downes, 2007), which converge on the premise that professional learning is a continuous, self-regulated, and contextualized process. As such, it requires evaluation through comprehensive systems that articulate academic, labor, and social dimensions (Boulton & Lucas, 2011; Altbach et al., 2009).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach with a predominantly qualitative orientation, grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). A methodological development design was employed, aimed at constructing and validating an evaluation methodology for tracking university graduates. This design made it possible to integrate qualitative techniques for the conceptual development of the model and quantitative techniques for its empirical verification (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018).

Participants

A non-probabilistic sampling strategy based on institutional criteria and expert judgment was used. The sample consisted of 20 experts (academic administrators, university faculty members, and specialists in quality assurance and curriculum management in health science programs) and 46 graduates from the Human Medicine program of a private university in Lima, belonging to the 2018–2022 cohorts and currently engaged in active employment. The inclusion criteria considered: (a) a minimum of ten years of experience in curriculum design, university management, or employability (experts), and (b) completion of the academic program and at least one year of professional experience (graduates). Incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded. All participants signed an informed consent form, in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013).

The sample consisted of 20 experts and 46 graduates, whose characteristics are detailed in Table 1. The experts were primarily university faculty members, academic administrators, and specialists in quality assurance and graduate follow-up, with a mean age of 46.8 years and more than ten years of professional experience. Meanwhile, the graduates belonged to the 2018–2022 cohorts of the Human Medicine program, had an average age of 28.4 years, and reported at least one year of active employment in health-sector institutions.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample.

Group	N	Age (Mean)	Sex (Female / Male)	Academic / Professional Profile	Years of Experience
Experts	20	46.8	11 / 9	University faculty, academic administrators, and specialists in educational quality and graduate follow-up	≥ 10
Graduates	46	28.4	30 / 16	Graduates of the Human Medicine program (2018–2022 cohorts) with active employment	≥ 1

Instruments

Two specific instruments were designed for data collection. The semi-structured interview guide for experts included questions aimed at assessing the conceptual coherence, relevance, and operational feasibility of the proposed methodology. The structured questionnaire for graduates, composed of 40 items on a five-point Likert scale, measured four key dimensions of graduate follow-up: curricular relevance, graduate image, social impact, and stakeholder satisfaction (González, 2008; SINEACE, 2018). Content validity was determined through expert judgment, yielding an Aiken's V index above 0.80, and internal reliability was calculated using Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$, a value considered optimal for exploratory studies (Hair et al., 2019).

The questionnaire administered to graduates consisted of items organized into four dimensions: curricular relevance, graduate image, social impact, and stakeholder satisfaction. Each dimension included specific indicators that allowed for assessing the degree of development of complex competencies achieved after their university

training. Table 2 presents representative examples of the items used, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 2. Items from the Graduate-Tracking Questionnaire and Complex Competencies.

Item No.	Dimension	Indicator	Item Statement
C1	Curricular Relevance	Disciplinary Updating	I consider that the content received during the program was aligned with current labor market demands.
C2	Curricular Relevance	Learning Transfer	The knowledge acquired has enabled me to solve real problems in my professional environment.
C3	Graduate Image	Professional Reputation	I perceive that the degree I earned is well regarded in the labor field.
C4	Graduate Image	Institutional Recognition	I feel that my university maintains an active connection with its graduates.
C5	Social Impact	Community Contribution	My professional performance has generated a positive impact on the community.
C6	Social Impact	Innovation and Leadership	I have promoted improvements or innovative projects in my workplace.
C7	Stakeholder Satisfaction	Employer Satisfaction	Employers value the competencies I acquired during my training.
C8	Stakeholder Satisfaction	Personal and Vocational Satisfaction	I am satisfied with the training I received and its contribution to my professional development.

The validation of the methodology was carried out through the judgment of 20 experts, who evaluated the components of the model based on criteria of clarity, coherence, relevance, theoretical pertinence, feasibility, and sufficiency. Table 3 details the items considered in the assessment process, rated using a four-point scale that allowed for estimating their level of adequacy and consistency.

Table 3. Evaluation Criteria and Items Used in the Expert Judgment.

Item No.	Evaluated Criterion	Item Statement
J1	Clarity	The statements of the methodology are understandable and written with precise language.
J2	Internal Coherence	There is logical correspondence among the proposed objectives, categories, dimensions, and indicators.
J3	Relevance	The components of the methodology address essential aspects of graduate tracking.
J4	Theoretical Pertinence	The methodology is adequately supported by current theories and approaches on complex competencies and higher education.
J5	Feasibility	The methodological proposal is feasible to implement in real university contexts.
J6	Sufficiency	The elements considered allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the development of complex competencies.

Procedure

The methodological process was carried out in four sequential phases. First, a systematic literature review was conducted on complex competencies, graduates, and follow-up models (Altbach et al., 2009; Schomburg, 2007). Second, the methodological metamodel was designed, defining its categories, dimensions, indicators, and evaluation instruments. Subsequently, validation through expert judgment was conducted using interviews and thematic qualitative analysis (Flores-Kanter & Medrano, 2019) to ensure the conceptual and procedural coherence of the model. Finally, a pilot application of the questionnaire was administered to graduates, and the data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS v.25 in order to verify the empirical consistency of the methodological proposal.

Figure 1 schematically represents the four phases that composed the study's methodological procedure. This process began with a systematic literature review to provide the theoretical foundation for the proposal, followed by the design of the methodological metamodel with its categories, dimensions, and indicators. Subsequently, the model underwent validation through expert judgment to ensure its conceptual and operational coherence, and finally a pilot application of the questionnaire was carried out with graduates, whose data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

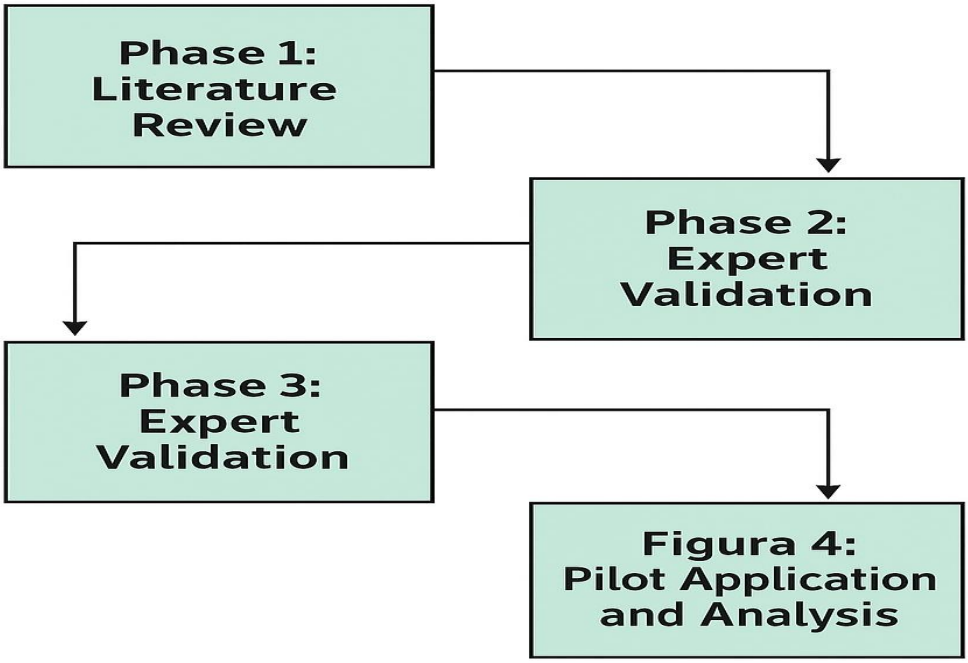

Figure 1. Phases of the Methodological Procedure.

Table 4 details the actions carried out in each phase of the methodological procedure, specifying their objectives, activities, products, and techniques used. This organization ensured the logical coherence and scientific rigor of the process, from the theoretical foundation and the design of the metamodel to its expert validation and the subsequent pilot application to verify its empirical consistency.

Table 4. Description of the Phases of the Methodological Procedure.

Phase	Objective	Main Activities	Products Generated	Techniques and Instruments
1. Literature Review	To theoretically ground the methodological proposal	Search, selection, and analysis of scientific literature on complex competencies, graduate tracking, and evaluation models	Bibliographic review matrix and preliminary conceptual categories	Systematic documentary review
2. Metamodel Design	To construct the conceptual and procedural framework of the methodology	Definition of categories, dimensions, indicators, instruments, and evaluation criteria	Structured methodological metamodel and operationalization matrix	Deductive analysis and researcher consensus
3. Expert Validation	To ensure the coherence, relevance, and feasibility of the proposal	Selection of experts, administration of interviews and evaluation questionnaires, analysis of expert judgments	Content validity report and Aiken's V index	Semi-structured interviews, expert judgment
4. Pilot Application and Analysis	To verify the empirical consistency of the model	Administration of the questionnaire to graduates and statistical analysis of results	Cleaned database, Cronbach's α coefficient, and exploratory factor structure	Structured questionnaire, SPSS v.25

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed through inductive thematic coding, identifying patterns and conceptual relationships within the experts' responses. The quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations), internal reliability tests, and exploratory factor analysis, with the purpose of establishing the preliminary structural validity of the questionnaire and supporting its use in institutional follow-up contexts (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5 summarizes the analytical techniques applied to the qualitative and quantitative data, specifying their sources, purposes, and tools used. This organization allowed for the integration of findings derived from expert interviews and the questionnaire administered to graduates, ensuring rigorous data treatment to assess the validity and consistency of the proposed methodology.

Table 5. Data Analysis Techniques Used in the Study.

Type of Data	Source	Analytical Technique Applied	Purpose of the Analysis	Tools Used
Qualitative	Expert interviews	Inductive thematic coding	Identify patterns, conceptual relationships, and consensus on the coherence of the model	Thematic analysis matrix (Excel)
Qualitative	Expert judgment comments	Categorical content analysis	Assess the clarity, relevance, and feasibility of the methodological components	Atlas.ti (manual systematization)
Quantitative	Graduate questionnaire	Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations)	Describe general trends in graduates' responses	SPSS v.25
Quantitative	Graduate questionnaire	Reliability testing (Cronbach's α)	Determine the internal consistency of the instrument	SPSS v.25
Quantitative	Graduate questionnaire	Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)	Establish the preliminary structural validity of the questionnaire	SPSS v.25

The stepped representation in Figure 2 illustrates the stages of data analysis carried out in the study, showing the progressive flow from data collection and organization to processing, categorization, statistical validation, and presentation of results. This approach made it possible to coherently integrate the qualitative and quantitative procedures applied to ensure the rigor of the data analysis.

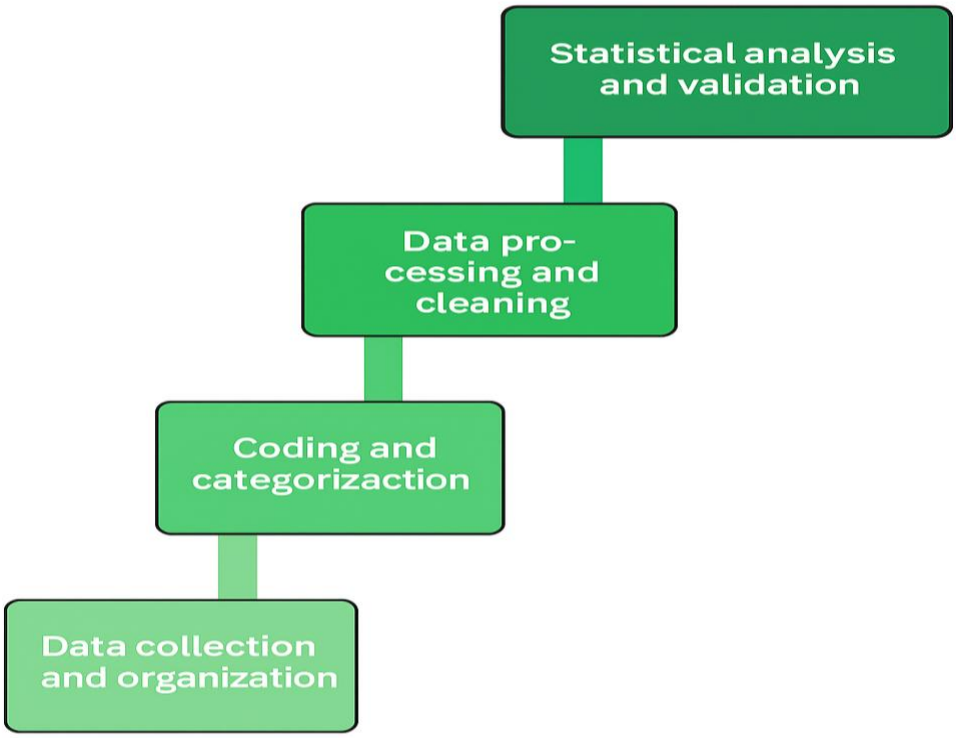

Figure 2. Stages of Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data obtained through the application of the instruments was conducted at two complementary levels. First, content validity was assessed through expert judgment, whose results showed a high level of agreement regarding the criteria of clarity, relevance, and coherence, with Aiken's V index values above 0.85, confirming the adequacy of the items and the structure of the designed instrument. Subsequently, the pilot application of the questionnaire was administered to graduates, and the results were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive analyses made it possible to characterize the participating population according to sex, area of training, and time since graduation, as well as to estimate the means and standard deviations of each evaluated dimension (curricular relevance, graduate image, social impact, and satisfaction).

Findings revealed that graduates with a longer time since graduation obtained higher scores in indicators of self-training and continuous professional development, whereas recent graduates showed higher performance in indicators related to labor market insertion and adaptation to new workplace demands.

Likewise, gaps were identified in the development of complex competencies associated with weaknesses in institutional feedback and alignment with the labor market. Table 6 shows that graduates exhibit strengths in self-training and commitment to their professional development, although gaps persist in employability and the development of complex competencies. Those with a longer time since graduation stand out for their specialization and participation in socially impactful projects, whereas recent graduates show lower levels of employability and professional satisfaction.

Table 6. Questionnaire Results.

Nodes	Approximate Conclusions
Risks and Weaknesses	There is a marked difference among actors across the different phases in identifying labor market insertion capacity and the development of complex competencies. There is a tendency among professionals to prioritize continuing studies in response to labor demands and professional pressure upon graduation.
Self-Training	Graduates with more than three years since graduation typically hold some type of specialization or postgraduate studies. Proficiency in foreign languages is highly important for professional development and essential for pursuing postgraduate education.
Employability	Graduates who completed longer pre-professional internships showed greater ease in entering the labor market and securing stable employment in a shorter time.
Social Impact	An increasing interest in participating in social and community projects was identified, especially among graduates with training in humanistic and health-related fields.
Professional Satisfaction	Most graduates reported feeling satisfied with their university training, although they noted the need to strengthen digital and leadership competencies to respond to current labor market demands.

Finally, reliability tests (Cronbach's α) and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were conducted, confirming the internal consistency and structural validity of the questionnaire. The analysis identified a four-factor structure that explains 71% of the total variance, providing empirical support for the methodological proposal. Table 7 presents the results of the psychometric analysis of the questionnaire, showing high levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.91$) and an adequate factorial structure composed of four factors that explain 71% of the total variance. These findings confirm the instrument's reliability and structural validity, supporting its use for evaluating graduate follow-up and the development of complex competencies in higher education contexts.

Table 7. Results of the Reliability and Structural Validity Analysis of the Questionnaire.

Applied Test	Purpose	Result Obtained	Conclusion
Cronbach's α	Assess the internal consistency of the items	$\alpha = 0.91$ (overall)	The instrument demonstrates high internal reliability.
Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)	Identify the underlying structure of the items	4 factors, explained variance = 71%	A coherent and stable factorial structure is confirmed.
KMO and Bartlett's Test	Verify data suitability for factor analysis	KMO = 0.89; Bartlett $p < 0.001$	The data are adequate for factor analysis.

The scree plot in Figure 3 illustrates the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) applied to the graduates' questionnaire. A clear inflection point is observed beginning with the fourth component, indicating that only these factors present eigenvalues greater than 1, according to Kaiser's criterion. This result supports the retention of four main factors that explain most of the total variance, confirming the structural validity of the instrument.

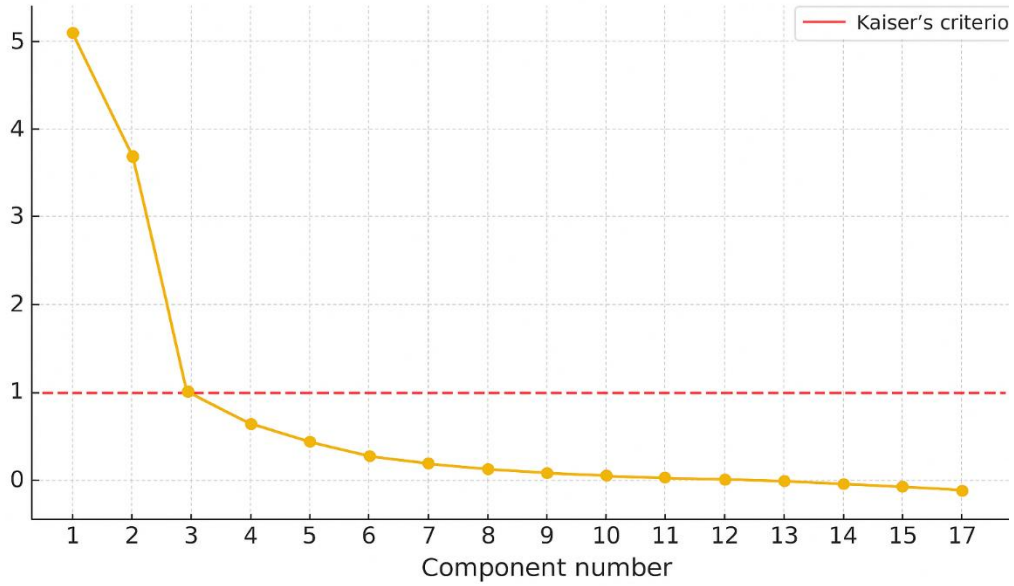

Figure 3. Scree Plot of the EFA for the Graduates' Questionnaire.

Table 8 presents the factor loading matrix resulting from the exploratory factor analysis, showing that the items were coherently grouped into four factors with loadings above 0.40, which confirms the structural validity of the questionnaire administered to the graduates.

Table 8. Rotated Factor Loading Matrix (EFA).

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Communality (h^2)
Item 1	0.72	—	—	—	0.61
Item 2	0.75	—	—	—	0.64
Item 3	—	0.68	—	—	0.59
Item 4	—	0.81	—	—	0.71
Item 5	—	—	0.84	—	0.74
Item 6	—	—	0.66	—	0.56
Item 7	—	—	—	0.79	0.69
Item 8	—	—	—	0.82	0.71

Note: Only loadings ≥ 0.40 are shown. Highlighted loadings indicate the final grouping of items into the four identified factors.

Table 9 shows the correlations among the four extracted factors, revealing moderate and significant relationships that indicate conceptual coherence without redundancy, thereby supporting the discriminant validity of the instrument.

Table 9. Correlations Among the Identified Factors.

Factor	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Factor 1	1.00	—	—	—
Factor 2	0.42	1.00	—	—
Factor 3	0.36	0.48	1.00	—
Factor 4	0.31	0.39	0.44	1.00

Note: All correlations are significant ($p < 0.05$). Moderate relationships are observed among the factors without evidence of overlap, supporting discriminant validity.

The results summarized in Table 10 present the mean values and standard deviations obtained for each factor, highlighting higher scores in professional projection and strategic planning, which reflect perceived strengths in the development of complex competencies after graduation.

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics by Questionnaire Factor.

Factor	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Possible Range
Factor 1 – Strategic Planning	32.45	6.87	10–50
Factor 2 – Performance Regulation	28.91	7.42	10–50
Factor 3 – Results Evaluation	30.12	5.98	10–50

Factor 4 – Professional Projection	35.28	6.15	10–50

The results obtained demonstrate that the questionnaire designed to evaluate graduate follow-up and the development of complex competencies exhibits appropriate levels of reliability and psychometric validity. The high internal consistency, the clear four-component factor structure, and the moderate correlations among factors confirm the theoretical coherence of the proposed model. Likewise, the descriptive values obtained for each factor reveal a favorable assessment of the competencies acquired, particularly in professional projection and strategic planning. Taken together, these findings support the relevance and robustness of the methodological proposal, providing an empirical foundation for its future institutional application.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results confirm that the designed questionnaire constitutes a psychometrically sound instrument for evaluating graduate follow-up and the development of complex competencies in university contexts. The high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.90$) and the identification of a four-factor structure explaining 71% of the variance support the theoretical coherence of the proposed model, which integrates dimensions related to strategic planning, performance regulation, results evaluation, and professional projection. These components have been recognized in previous studies as essential elements for strengthening employability, professional adaptation, and lifelong learning in higher education (Altbach et al., 2009; Schomburg, 2007; MEN, 2022).

Moreover, the findings reveal significant differences among groups of graduates: those who have been graduated for more than three years show higher levels of self-training, postgraduate education, and involvement in socially impactful activities, whereas recent graduates exhibit wider gaps in labor market insertion, lower professional satisfaction, and difficulties managing their own competency development. This pattern aligns with the findings of Ávila-Reyes and Navarro (2021), who argue that transitions between initial training and professional practice are often shaped by socio-educational gaps that limit the early development of complex competencies, particularly in Latin American contexts characterized by high labor pressure.

Complementarily, the exploratory factor analysis showed a moderate association among factors, indicating that although interrelated, the evaluated dimensions represent differentiated and non-redundant constructs. This coherent structure is consistent with the perspective of Teng and Yang (2022), who emphasize the need to assess graduates' professional development across multiple competency domains integrating technical, metacognitive, and attitudinal aspects to achieve a comprehensive professional profile.

Nevertheless, this study presents certain methodological limitations: the non-probabilistic design and the use of self-report instruments may introduce selection or social desirability biases and restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research should employ representative samples and complementary validation strategies, such as confirmatory factor analysis and concurrent validity, to strengthen empirical evidence and broaden the applicability of the proposed model (Teng et al., 2021; Karlen et al., 2023).

In conclusion, this study contributes a validated methodological model that enables a comprehensive assessment of graduate follow-up and the development of complex competencies, offering a strategic tool for educational quality management. Its implementation in universities will support curriculum refinement, strengthen curricular relevance, promote lifelong learning, and align professional training with the dynamic demands of the labor market and the knowledge society (Pozzo & Rosso, 2023; Trigos-Carrillo, 2024).

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