

## Holistic Limitation of Doctoral Training

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenge of fostering a holistic vision in doctoral training amid increasing specialization. While deep expertise is essential for advancing knowledge, excessive focus on narrow fields during PhD studies often limits understanding of broader social, cultural, and environmental contexts. Drawing on Bauman's critique of knowledge fragmentation and other academic perspectives, the authors highlight that traditional doctoral programs emphasize specialization and isolated research projects, frequently neglecting interdisciplinary collaboration and contextual impact. The study argues for rethinking doctoral education to balance specialized depth with multidisciplinary engagement. This involves admitting candidates whose projects, mentors, and communities embrace multidimensional paradigms, thereby promoting broader critical analysis and professional maturity. The doctoral thesis should represent not a closure but a starting point for an ongoing research trajectory that addresses complex, multidimensional issues. Ultimately, developing a holistic vision equips doctoral students to better understand their research topic in its entirety, identify new questions, generate innovative ideas, and communicate effectively across disciplines. The paper calls for formal studies to examine how holistic doctoral training improves researchers' preparedness to contribute meaningfully to society and tackle complex global challenges.

**Keywords:** Doctoral Training, Holistic Vision, PhD Specialization, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Research Education in PhD

### INTRODUCTION

Having a completely holistic vision of a research topic can be a challenge, whether due to its complexity, time and resource limitations, the fragmentation of knowledge in disciplines, disciplinary biases and/or prejudices. In this sense, extreme depth in a specific area during a PhD can lead to expert knowledge and can also limit the broader perspective by relating its eventual impact on other subject areas.

The idea that extreme depth in a specific area can limit the broader perspective is discussed in academic literature; in fact, some authors argue that excessive specialization can lead to a limited or "tunneled" view of knowledge. For example, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has discussed how excessive specialization can lead to a fragmentation of knowledge (as synonymous with individualization, characteristic of modernity), which makes it difficult to understand problems from a global perspective. (Bauman, 2003) (González, 2007) (Boada & Gomez-Trujillo, 2020). However, beyond the criticism of modernity, the complexity of new societies and the phenomenon of immediacy (Hernández, 2015), the question would be whether doctoral training would really be allocating space

and time to developing an exhaustive understanding and depth of its field of study, which includes a holistic vision of the multiple areas, aspects or ramifications; which, although it is true that they cannot be analyzed completely, offer in the same way, from their experience and detailed knowledge, a scientifically significant understanding of the phenomena and their symbiotic impact in social environments and in various thematic areas of “expert” knowledge.

That is why an epistemological debate can even be raised, which could discern over time, costs of formal study and even other aspects inherent to doctoral training, thus generating incentives for a more paradigmatic, positivist position on the subject, focusing on the object and/or phenomenon, sacrificing its vision of multidimensional impact on the environment (Pérez-Serrano, 2010). According to Bosch (2018), doctoral students should be trained to be thinkers and not just specialists, who recognize how errors can occur, who enhance their critical-questioning thinking, seeing their work through the lens of social responsibility with a view of reproducibility of documented research (Boada, 2022); in fact, it is worrying that “Scientific productivity depends more on rote knowledge than on competence in critical thinking” (Bosch, 2018).

The nature of doctoral research also implies a deep immersion in the existing literature, the exploration of multiple methodological approaches, the analysis limited to various doctrines and, of course, what would be the critical analysis of previous ideas (limited or not to a certain doctrine), beyond the disciplinary vision. All of this should result in a broader perspective within the limits of the specialized field; However, this “immersion” usually deepens the area of specialization even further, promoting a deep critical analysis but limited to a narrow contour of the current doctrine and discipline, minimizing areas of social, cultural, environmental, and even other impact. topics of scientific knowledge that could contribute (directly or indirectly) to the development of their doctoral candidacy. In this sense, we ask ourselves, and any doctoral course should reflect: How broad is enough to say that it is not too immersive but is more extended in its surroundings and context? Is it possible to define some combination criteria between contextual breadth and thematic depth?

In this sense, the fulfillment of the times of modern doctoral commitments in the traditional educational system, as well as the current social dynamics, has led institutions that offer doctoral studies and their participants to develop a “standard” system of research training based on the deepening and specialization of these themes, this with a view to developing new scientific knowledge, with extensive Meta Analysis and State of the Art, and with a minimum limit of interaction and evaluation of impact on the environment; some perhaps with the intention that they be developed later during their professional life as a consecrated Doctor. In this way, individual doctoral studies are encouraged (not in teams), where the interaction must be based on the tutor - tutee and “referring” authors on the thematic area that is being studied, thus leaving out (or minimizing) the influence from other actors from other areas of knowledge who could impact the doctoral research study. For this reason, the doctoral thesis should not be a final product that demonstrates the skills developed by the researcher during his doctoral process, but should also be a clear evidence of the consolidation of training and research continuity; the doctoral thesis should not be a closure of the doctoral study, but a beginning and/or continuation of what will be life as a dedicated researcher and theoretical reference on the chosen thematic line of study.

Currently, whether due to economic motivations or social pressure derived from the accelerated vision of formal education (we recommend conducting a formal study on the motivations of those who wish to study a doctorate), professionals who wish to pursue a doctorate may be driven to look for simple (not complex) options. This search may be based on the themes offered by the institution, its financial benefits, or the community that, in a broad but shallow way, receives a diverse number of preliminary projects. In all cases, the doctorate is then established with functional difficulties that massively impact the training of the future doctor, ignoring or downplaying the original motivations for achieving formal fifth-level studies, such as: passion for research, the development of advanced research skills, the desire to explore complex questions, the development of scientific impact and social, cultural, and even environmental contribution (Ochoa, et.al. 2020).

This is why, we insist that achieving a balance between the field of specialized content and multidisciplinary research is essential to generate a space that allows nurturing the opportunity to combine your knowledge in a balanced way with experts in other areas to obtain a more comprehensive and holistic vision, applicable, and permeable to social, cultural and environmental surroundings (Boada, Muñoz & Pacheco, 2024). The critical aspect that we present is that, in the culture of research, in many fields, tends to favor specialization, since it is considered “a sign of rigor and knowledge”, leading to applicability, multidisciplinary, and holistic vision as a “simple” application of the specialized topic in other areas of knowledge, thus minimizing the creation of a new development of discernment from multi-contextual interactions.

In this sense, a suggested proposal consists of considering admission to doctoral programs under a paradigmatic community where the research project, mentor, and the community share elements of a multidimensional and multi-contextual paradigm, which deepens the debate and research not only disciplinary but also contextual. All this with the intention of training a doctor not only in the formal performance of work associated with a research project (thinking about a candidacy exam and a defense of a doctoral thesis), but with

sufficient professional maturity to analyze complex problems, delving into debates with epistemic and high-impact multidisciplinary cohort.

In summary, while it is difficult to have a complete holistic view of a research topic due to the depth required in a specific area, PhDs should have the ability to gain a very profound and broadly specialized understanding of their field, which should be strengthened (and not only complemented) by interdisciplinary collaboration to obtain a broader symbiotic perspective, including a discussion around the State, where questions are raised of how to promote and finance doctorates aligned to long-term social and development challenges of a country or community?

In fact, we conclude this paper by inviting to formally investigate how doctoral students who develop a holistic vision of the topic they research are better prepared to understand the topic in its entirety, identify new research questions and generate new ideas; as well as being better prepared to communicate their results effectively in a multidisciplinary and complex surrounding.

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