Experiences of the master's degree graduated from the school of nursing in Culiacán, Mexico

Experiencias del egresado de maestría de la facultad de enfermería Culiacán en México

Experiências do mestrado da faculdade de enfermagem de Culiacán no México

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Abstract

Introduction: The master's degree program in nursing offered by the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa through the Culiacan School of Nursing contemplates that graduates should develop competencies and provide answers to problems related to nursing care. **Objective:** To describe experiences of graduates of the master's degree in nursing from the Culiacan School of Nursing. **Methodology:** Qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological, and interpretative study using the technique of in-depth interviews, supported by a semi-structured guide and with informed consent, applied to six graduates of the master's degree in nursing. The data were processed through thematic content analysis by De Souza Minayo in 3 stages: ordering and open coding, data classification, and horizontal and cross-sectional analysis, with which a category and two subcategories were obtained. The final analysis was carried out through an inflection from empirical to theoretical and vice versa. **Results:** In the experiences lived by the graduates, emotions experienced during the development of research competencies were identified; these emotions affected their cognitive process by living with stress, despair, fear, or depression, and these emotions led them to be

competent in research, database search, use of software, and publishing skills. **Conclusions:** After their experiences in the master's degree program in nursing, the graduates showed that they had lived emotions that affected their mental health, facing physiological and emotional problems derived from the stress experienced. As for their research skills, they reported being able to search databases, perform critical analysis, and even publish a scientific article.

Key words: Emotions; students; nursing; research; teaching (DeCS).

Resumen

Introducción: El programa de maestría en enfermería que oferta la Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa a través de la Facultad de Enfermería Culiacán, contempla que los egresados desarrollen competencias, que den respuesta a problemas relacionados con el cuidado enfermero. **Objetivo**: Describir las experiencias del egresado de la maestría en enfermería de la Facultad de Enfermería Culiacán. **Metodología**: Estudio cualitativo, descriptivo, fenomenológico e interpretativo, empleando la técnica de entrevistas a profundidad, con apoyo de guía semiestructurada, bajo consentimiento informado a seis egresados del programa de maestría en enfermería. Datos procesados a través de análisis de contenido tipo temático por de Souza Minayo en 3 etapas: ordenamiento y codificación abierta, clasificación de datos, análisis horizontal y transversal, obteniendo una categoría y dos subcategorías, análisis final a través de inflexión de empírico a teórico y viceversa. **Resultados**: En las experiencias vividas por los egresados se identificaron emociones vividas durante el desarrollo de competencias en investigación, donde las emociones afectaron su proceso cognitivo al vivir con estrés, desesperación, temor o depresión y en competencias en investigación los llevaron a ser competentes, al realizar búsqueda en bases de datos, uso de software, y habilidad para publicar. **Conclusiones**: Los egresados evidenciaron tras sus experiencias en la maestría en enfermería haber vivido emociones que afectaron su salud mental, al enfrentar problemas fisiológicos y emocionales derivados del estrés experimentado, al desarrollo de competencias en investigación refirieron ser capaces de realizar una búsqueda en bases de datos, un análisis crítico, hasta lograr publicar un artículo científico.

Palabras clave: Emociones; estudiantes; enfermería; investigación; enseñanza (DeCS).

Abstrato

Introdução: O programa de mestrado em enfermagem oferecido pela Universidade Autônoma de Sinaloa, por meio da Faculdade de Enfermagem de Culiacán, contempla que os graduados desenvolvam competências que respondam aos problemas relacionados ao cuidado de enfermagem. **Objetivo**: Descrever as experiências da egressa do mestrado em enfermagem da Faculdade de Enfermagem de Culiacán. **Metodologia**: Estudo qualitativo, descritivo, fenomenológico e interpretativo, técnica: entrevistas em profundidade, com apoio de roteiro semiestruturado, sob consentimento informado a seis egressos do programa de mestrado em enfermagem. Dados processados através da análise de conteúdo temática de Souza Minayo em 3 etapas: ordenação e codificação aberta, classificação dos dados, análise horizontal e transversal, obtenção de uma categoria e duas subcategorias, análise final através da inflexão do empírico para o teórico e vice-versa. **Resultados**: Nas experiências vividas pelos egressos foram identificadas emoções vivenciadas durante o desenvolvimento das competências de pesquisa, onde as emoções afetaram seu processo cognitivo ao conviver com estresse, desespero, medo ou depressão e nas

competências de pesquisa os levaram a serem competentes, realizar banco de dados pesquisa, uso de software e capacidade de publicar. **Conclusões**: Os egressos evidenciaram após suas vivências no mestrado em enfermagem que vivenciaram emoções que afetaram sua saúde mental, ao enfrentarem problemas fisiológicos e emocionais derivados do estresse vivenciado, para o desenvolvimento de habilidades de pesquisa que relataram ser capazes de realizar uma busca em bases de dados, uma análise crítica, até a publicação de um artigo científico.

Palavras-chave: Emoções; alunos; enfermagem; investigação; ensino (DeCS).

Introduction

The Master's Degree in Nursing offered by the Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa (UAS) through the Culiacan School of Nursing [1] is based on a pedagogical approach of integrated professional competencies to promote and prioritize meaningful learning, paradigms on which the educational model based on competencies is pedagogically based and to which the higher education institutions in Mexico adhere their undergraduate and graduate educational programs. This model provides for students to acquire knowledge and develop specific professional competencies useful in their training, with emphasis on the practice of their profession or scientific research, so that such knowledge is essential in academic training as it generates skills and competencies that contribute to the resolution of health problems associated with the epidemiological and demographic transition [2].

In order to ensure that students develop the competencies required within the master's program, each student will be assigned a thesis director, whose main function will be to provide academic support throughout the entire training process, thus becoming a guide during the four semesters. In addition, students are advised by a tutorial committee that, during the presentation of their thesis research progress in the seminars designed for this activity, provides students with recommendations or suggestions that contribute to the improvement of their academic work [3].

The research competencies of students are the skills, knowledge, and proficiency in the use of technological tools, databases, software, in addition to the practice of values such as honesty,

responsibility, teamwork, leadership and organization of resources, focused on the development of research. Such competencies make it possible to publish papers in an indexed journal, since they have become a requirement for obtaining an academic degree [4].

According to the UAS 2022 educational model, the university unites generic and specific competencies, which are referred to as "UAS seal" competencies by integrating them into the syllabus to cover theoretical, practical, and attitudinal knowledge. This makes them ideal for defining the profile of the graduate and the purposes of the learning units that make up the syllabus of a degree or postgraduate program, since they not only imply possessing diverse knowledge, but above all, being able to apply it and operate with it in the face of a problem in a specific context [5].

Under the constructivist theory, students are considered proactive builders of their own training and knowledge in a dialectical relationship whose main component is co-responsibility and the personal search for self-improvement and the acquisition of knowledge in an autonomous and, sometimes, even self-taught manner [6]. Thus, the educational model with integrated professional competencies is constructivist, and in spite of its longevity (more than 30 years), it is still in force and growing in the Mexican educational sector.

With respect to postgraduate studies in Mexico, "professional postgraduate programs represent 77 % of the total, corresponding to 8,123 programs, while research postgraduate programs account for 2,453, which represents 23 %" [7]. These data show that the majority of postgraduate programs operate in line with the demands of the labor market, emphasizing the specific and operational skills or knowledge that professionals require in the exercise of their professions. Postgraduate programs with an emphasis on research are not only a minority but also reduce the possibilities of generating and publishing scientific knowledge, which is useful for each discipline and for the growth of the sciences in general.

Regarding the educational level, specifically at the postgraduate level, the offer of master's degree programs in México is 72 % (7,780 programs), followed by specialties, with 18 % (1,905 programs), and, finally, doctoral programs, with the remaining 10 % of the total offer (1,051 programs) [7].

According to the Consejo Nacional de Humanidades Ciencia y Tecnología (CONAHCYT) [8], a professionalizing master's degree in nursing is a relevant master's degree applied to the development and progress of a professional career, where research and technological development and innovation projects are carried out in the communities or in the work sites through case studies, diagnostics, and professional practices supervised by a representative of a public health institution or of the educational institution offering the master's degree program. The foregoing serves to consolidate links with various sectors of complex societies such as the Mexican society, which facilitates the graduates to have a personal or professional development, as well as better competencies for professional growth or the integration into public and private health institutions. The educational context where this research was developed included the students of the first generation of the UAS 2020 Master's Degree in Nursing [3] which was composed of 16 students (14 females and 2 males), who (like the rest of the students in the program) were required to complete the 111 credits necessary to graduate from the Master's Degree in Nursing. These credits obey the logic of generic and specific professional competencies and are divided into 66 credits of the fundamental axis of nursing care, 25 of nursing research development and the remaining 20 are optional; in addition, attendance or participation in national and international academic events, publication in indexed or refereed journals, research or academic exchange stays within and outside México, and collaboration or participation in faculty research are also considered [3].

In addition to the above, the defense of the research thesis is also a requirement for obtaining the degree, as well as the completion of a scientific article related to the thesis to be published in a

journal preferably indexed or refereed and recognized within the field of nursing or health. Based on the above, the following objective is proposed: To describe the experiences of the graduate of the master's degree in nursing of the Culiacan School of Nursing.

Methodology

The research design is qualitative, descriptive and with a phenomenological approach, which aimed to determine the meaning and interpretation of the participants' discourse (9). The participants of the research were 6 graduates (5 women and 1 man), with ages between 27 and 49 years old, of which, 2 worked as nurses, who graduated as regular students fulfilling the credits requested by the master's program in Nursing of the 2018-2020 generation of the Culiacan School of Nursing, in Sinaloa, Mexico. The entire period of the research was from January to December 2021.

The sampling was non-probabilistic, until reaching the theoretical saturation necessary to establish inferences and correlations. The data collection technique used was the in-depth interview and the field log, where the observations were recorded by the researchers. The audio recordings ranged from thirty minutes to one hour in length, and due to the conditions caused by the Sars-Cov2 pandemic, 2 interviews were conducted face-to-face in an office of the school of nursing and 4 were conducted virtually (via the Zoom platform) in the participants' home and free of distractions. With the information obtained, the data analysis was carried out through Souza Minayo's [10] operational proposal, in 3 stages: a) Data classification; the transcription of the recorded interviews was carried out in a faithful and complete manner, to finally produce a stenographic version of each one of them. Subsequently, the information gathered in the interviews was systematized and classified by level of importance according to the requirements of the research, this work was complemented with the re-reading of the discourses in search of thematic units. b) For the classification of the information, a horizontal reading was carried out, in order to construct empirical categories that were compared with the theoretical categories in search of correlations

and interconnections between them. Next, a cross-sectional discourse analysis was carried out to classify, separate, regroup and reduce them by similarities and connections between these categories. c) The final analysis was carried out through a profound inflection on the empirical material, nourished by a permanent and deductive dialectic that turned from the empirical to the theoretical and vice versa.

The category that emerged from the research was: Emotions experienced during the development of research competencies, whose disaggregation allowed the establishment of two complementary subcategories: emotions and research competencies.

This research received the authorization No. 001-21 from the Ethics and Research Committee of the School of Nursing; a letter of informed consent was obtained from the participants; and the intimacy, privacy, and confidentiality of the interviewees were protected in accordance with the regulations of the General Health Law on Health Research [11] and the Declaration of Helsinki [12].

Results

Based on the category "emotions experienced", during the development of the research competencies, the emotions that the students experienced were fundamental, because they evidenced the emotional and neurophysiological component of the students' mental health, which allowed the implementation of actions aimed at improving their emotional stability, (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Category 1: Emotions experienced during the development of research competencies.
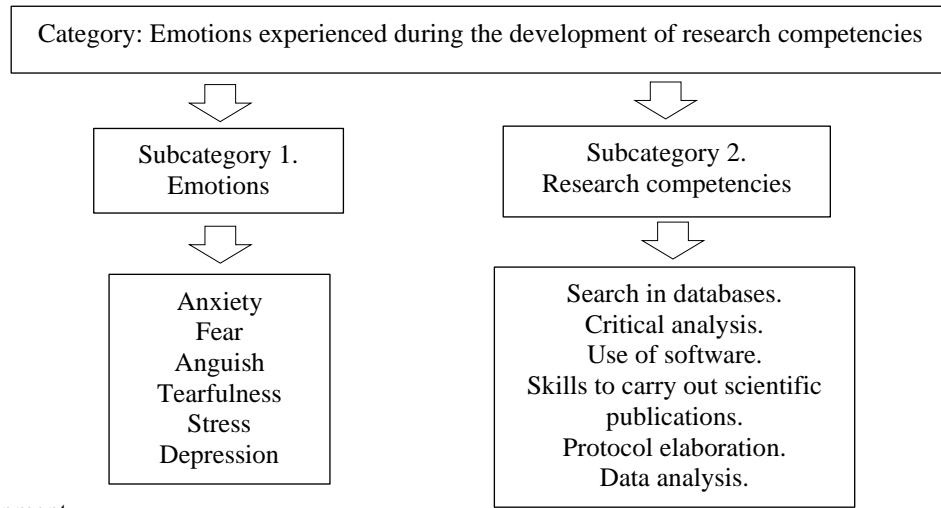
Source: Self-development.

Category: Emotions experienced during the development of research competencies.

Subcategory 1- Emotions: The main emotions unveiled by the live codes according to the interviews of the participants ranged from feelings of pressure, fear, dread, anguish, uncertainty, unhappiness, nervousness, loneliness, crying, insecurity, panic, worry, rejection and stress, even they considered that they live with depression and doubts; however, they also recognized that they lived moments of acceptance and happiness.

Of the following discourses we disaggregated the concept of emotion and, as will be analyzed later in the discussion section, three fundamental components that are related to the cognitive and behavioral aspects of the interviewees are revealed:

"During the development of the master's program, when I was told that I had to publish a research paper I felt afraid, because of the great commitment it represents and because I did not foresee it, since at that time I did not have the knowledge and skills necessary to publish something" (E1).

"At the beginning of the master's degree, I felt under pressure because of the number of hours I had to be in person in the classroom, in addition to having other responsibilities such as my job, or my family" (E2).

"When I started the master's program I felt happy, then I began to feel fearful, full of doubts and uncertainty, not knowing if I could advance; I also experienced exhausting and distressing moments, in which I was not interested in the Master's program and felt unhappiness, hopelessness and stress, I even lived with depression" (E3).

"I remember that at the beginning of the program I was afraid, and I felt very nervous when I was asked questions in the seminars, and I didn't know what to answer. During my training I had significant losses and suffered the lack of support from my partner, I even faced loneliness due to the long working days without being able to sleep all night because I was working or preparing assignments that I had to present. It was exhausting, I remember coming home and telling myself I can't take it anymore and crying. When I felt the lack of support from my partner, my morale went down, I felt alone, I took refuge in the master's program, I told myself, I am here, and I have to get ahead" (E4).

"During the first seminar, I felt insecure, with stage fright for having to present my progress to the teachers and students, I felt afraid, I said to myself what am I doing here, I felt that I might not be able to advance, I did not know if my assignment was properly completed". "Later, during the second seminar I felt more confident, since I already knew more about my research. In the third seminar and finally in the colloquium I had mastered the topic and I felt I was ready to defend my work by answering any question, I was ready to present my degree examination" (E5).

"When I was studying for my master's degree I felt varied emotions, sometimes they were of rejection, acceptance or support. It was a catastrophe so to speak, because I was very nervous and with a lot of concern, I felt trapped in the first semesters. I really felt that my opinion did not matter when my colleagues with work experience in a hospital told about their experiences in the care of critical patients, I said to myself, they come super prepared" (E6).

Subcategory 2 - Research competencies: The competencies that students developed were centered on the acquisition of skills for conducting database searches, critical analysis of information, as well as having the tools to publish a scientific article, and to grow as a teacher and as a professional in the area of nursing at the different levels of healthcare.

The graduates mentioned having developed skills to search for information in indexed databases, to perform critical analysis for the construction and publication of scientific articles, to acquire theoretical knowledge and philosophical and epistemological foundations related to research, but above all, to grow as teachers and professionals in the area of nursing at the different levels of healthcare.

According to the aforementioned, the graduate students experienced emotions that encouraged the development of competencies that currently allow them to perform better as nursing professionals, since they developed skills to conduct scientific research in the hospital, community and educational environments (depending on the topics and interests of each thesis), and by demonstrating that the object of study of the nursing profession is the care of the human being, whether healthy or sick, regardless of specific and eminently social environments or the place where they live and develop, as they state below:

"As the semesters passed, I acquired competencies that allowed me to grow as a nursing professional, by acquiring skills to search in databases, integrate a critical analysis of information and above all for having scientific bases to identify an indexed journal and be able to publish my experiences of the professional practice or the result of my research work" (E1).

"During the progress of the master's degree, I acquired knowledge about theoretical aspects related to research, and the philosophical and epistemological foundations, which allowed me to develop the necessary skills to be able to present my research work at national and international congresses, or to publish my experiences from the professional practice" (E2).

"This experience brought with it rewarding lessons that allow me to advance in the area of research, by being able to publish in indexed journals and evolve in my work life, which allows me to be a better person, and a better prepared nurse, teacher and researcher" (E3).

"The competencies I have acquired related to research allow me to be a better teacher, knowledgeable in the area of research, able to perform in a group and to speak in public" (E4).

"I learned many things that will allow me to become a teacher in the future. When they accepted my first research paper I almost celebrated with a party, this experience makes me feel confident that I will be able to publish some more variables from my thesis" (E5).

"During the master's program, I learned first to select the method, it was very difficult at the beginning because I did not have that approach, actually it was very complicated for me to understand when I should use phenomenology, action research or a different one" (E6).

"Everything I have learned is useful for my work in the hospital. The competencies corresponding to qualitative research have opened great opportunities for me in the field of psychiatry, I believe that much of what I do is thanks to the research, because I get close to the patients and that is when the in-depth interview begins, from when they start taking vital signs to when I ask them questions, and they answer me; it is at that moment when I interpret according to symbolic interactionism, or phenomenology; it helps me understand and analyze what my patients experience on a daily basis" (E6).

In the discourses related to research competencies, it can be observed that the participants revealed knowledge of qualitative and quantitative research, by identifying the different research designs as well as the techniques and instruments of the different approaches, which will allow them to participate in the labor market in the future.

Discussion

With the objective of describing the experiences of the master's degree in nursing graduate of the Culiacan School of Nursing, the students experienced emotions during their training that included neurophysiological components such as fear, despair, sadness or stress, which made them doubt their cognitive abilities, and there were even cases of depression. Similarly, some studies [13-15] report in their findings that emotional expression and perceived health was also impaired, due to the fact that the mood was mainly stress and anxiety during the preparation of the thesis.

Regarding the intellectual component, the individuals under study showed a theoretical learning that allowed them to develop competencies that facilitated them to publish the results of their research, conclude their thesis work and feel satisfied with the skills acquired during the training process, as well as to meet the expectations of the master's program, as illustrated in the discourse made by the students interviewed. Concurring with one researcher [16] who showed that the main stressors in graduate students came from the work, academic, family, and financial fields, the research findings indicate that the master's or doctoral student must have the ability to cope with various stimuli that may arise simultaneously if the student is to achieve success academically and in other aspects of life.

In the discourses made by the participating graduates, a transversal thematic axis was found, which referred to the emotional factor experienced during their formative phase and which, at the end of it, led them to be better professionals as well as to successfully venture into scientific research and the publication of research results. Additionally, the promotion and application of the competencies have an impact on the professional development of each student by improving their capacities and abilities, both occupational and intellectual, which also benefits the workplace, whether it is a hospital or a university classroom. According to Tobón in 2010 [17], "the emotion concept is interrelated with three components: neurophysiological, behavioral and cognitive". The latter is

essential in the formative process of the students of the master's degree in nursing because it allows detecting an emotional state, naming it, qualifying it and attending to it, which is fundamental for an emotion's intervention.

Based on the aforementioned, the participants lived experiences related to emotions, mentioning that these constitute a primary motivational system of human behavior. This allowed them to strengthen the acquired knowledge by assimilating it and integrating it into the cognitive process, thus organizing their personality and behavior, and succeeding in each of the research seminars until the culmination of their educational process.

The acquisition of competencies in the use of digital media during the training process allows the student to approach the phenomena of study through online access, demonstrating that it is possible to build academic production by accessing information on computer networks, which helps to improve searches in databases; in addition, it allows identifying reliable digital sources, so that the research project has scientific rigor and is attractive to the academic community [18]. In addition, from the nursing profession and as stated in the study entitled "Nursing and Research" [19], the competencies of the nursing professionals allow them to develop research studies that respond to the care needs of the subjects of study within their work.

It is pertinent to establish that in the analysis of the discourse of the interviewees, the functions and social representations of the perceptions shown above are evident, which according to one researcher [20] can be established as a fundamental characteristic of the discourse, and can be institutional (hospital or school), and also, the different sectors of social activity are associated. Therefore, seen from the unit of discourse analysis, the interviews revolved around specific training and professional activities, but with emphasis on the psychosocial and emotional sphere, which the author [20] called a correlation between the discourse and the way individuals act.

Another researcher [21], an expert in discourse analysis, established that most social dimensions are constructed or reconstituted through discourse, which is responsible for reproducing these social norms, ideologies or values among the members of a particular social group. As a result, discourse regulates and controls the acts and interactions between the members of all social groups.

Therefore, the in-depth and cross-sectional analysis of the interviews was fundamental for the research, because it not only showed the emotionality or psychological conflict surrounding the study of a postgraduate degree, but also the expectations of society regarding the study of a master's degree, or regarding the work or continuous preparation that a professional in the health sciences should have in order to be updated, to do their job properly or as part of their self-improvement.

Most of the responses coincided in that sense, showing a social trend that would surely be replicated in other geographical areas, as long as they meet the contextual characteristics mentioned in this article. If so, then a generality could be established, but not in discursive terms, but in the way graduate studies involve emotional efforts that cause the student, after completing the program, to acquire emotional intelligence that directly influences academic performance; therefore, students who need to improve their academic performance do not only need to be intelligent in cognitive aspects, they must also understand and manage emotions efficiently [22] and they must also develop the essential characteristics of emotional intelligence, in order to acquire and develop those competencies that allow them to do meaningful work in accordance with the acquired emotional and personal competencies related to the work area [23].

Furthermore, a study [24] mentions the importance of nursing personnel in Mexico being able to conduct research to develop, evaluate and expand knowledge within universities and health institutions, by training competent graduates who can publish the results of research work to contribute to the solution of problems that prevail in the individual, the family and the community. In addition, we agree with one author on the importance of having a guide or mentor so that the

student can learn from his experience, not only to perform practical care activities, but also to acquire competencies in the research area, especially for graduate students and thus give them the opportunity to publish their experiences related to patient care [25].

The Official Mexican Standard 019-SSA3-2013 [26], for nursing practice in the National Health System, highlights the importance of conducting research as a substantive function of nursing professionals with master's and doctoral studies. One of the many challenges currently facing educational institutions is to achieve high-quality learning with the support of committed teachers and to ensure that pedagogical competencies are developed for the benefit of students so that they can assimilate new knowledge and, in turn, integrate meaningful learning into the cognitive process, enabling them to make decisions in a reflective, flexible and autonomous manner [27].

In order to have the competencies required in the professional field of health education and research, it is urgent to work in interprofessional collaboration with the fields of assistance and primary health care, and also to participate in the implementation, development and control of health care routes in coordination with educational institutions, to seek strategies so that from the postgraduate level nurses graduate with real competencies that allow them to grow as people and professionals in the healthcare areas [28].

The limitation of this study was the beginning of the epidemiological contingency, which did not allow a face-to-face meeting with all the participants.

Conclusions

As their studies progress, the students experienced a significant reality that compromises the relevance of the accompaniment and support they receive from their professors, but, above all, that of the thesis advisor or director. The purpose of this supervision should also focus on reducing the physiological and emotional problems caused by academic stress, so that students can enjoy their

professional growth and generate significant learning that will strengthen them as health professionals and in the area of research.

Accompaniment should be based on assertive and empathetic communication so that the teacher can guide and allow the student to develop critical, reflective, and autonomous thinking, thus improving the mental and emotional health of the students.

As mentioned in the analysis of the subcategory "emotions", the students faced situations that affected their mental health at the time, when confronted with situations of stress, anguish, anxiety or depression, until they overcame these episodes by carrying out punctual and assisted interventions with the support of their thesis directors or teachers. The students developed research skills and were able to achieve the objectives set by the master's program, as well as to autonomously acquire competencies that will allow them to grow in their professional development.

Regarding the subcategory "research competencies", the participants recognized through their understandings the importance of theory and practice by interconnecting the knowledge that allowed them to acquire the ability to perform meaningful searches in databases, as well as the skills to formulate a scientific problem, in addition to the background, the theoretical framework, and the analysis of data and results for qualitative, quantitative, or mixed research.

Regarding opportunities for scientific publications, four of the six participants were able to publish the results of their research, and two commented that they are awaiting the opinions of indexed journals specialized in the field.

In this research, it was found that it is imperative to reinforce the promotion and training for the publication of research results in master's students so that they feel confident that they can write a scientific text and eventually publish it in a journal with high indexing standards.

Conflict of interest

The authors stated that there is no conflict of interest.

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