REVISTA INVECOM
ISSN en línea: 2739-0063

Research skills in university students of the faculty of education

Habilidades investigativas en estudiantes universitarios de la facultad de educación

Received: 05/06/2026 - **Accepted:** 11/08/2026

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to identify and describe the research skills of students in the Faculty of Education, specifically those specializing in Primary Education. The study is notable for its methodological rigor, employing a validated instrument (Research Skills Scale), and for its practical value, guiding faculty on the need to strengthen research support. It was conducted using a quantitative, descriptive, and non-experimental design, assessing 104 students with a 36-item questionnaire. The results show that 67.3% of the students are at the beginning and developing levels in research skills. All dimensions assessed (exploratory, technological, methodological, analytical, communicative—oral and written—and cooperative) show a predominance of low and medium levels, indicating insufficient training for the proper development of scientific tasks. The study concludes that, although there is institutional interest in promoting research, significant gaps persist in the methodological and scientific preparation of both students and faculty. This reinforces the need to strengthen research training within educational practice and to consolidate strategies that enhance critical, analytical, and communicative thinking in higher education.

Keywords: competencies, university students, research skills.

Resumen

El objetivo de la presente investigación es conocer y describir las habilidades investigativas de los estudiantes de la Facultad de Educación, específicamente de la especialidad de Educación Primaria. El estudio destaca por su relevancia metodológica, al aplicar un instrumento validado (Escala de Habilidades Investigativas), y por su valor práctico, al orientar a los docentes sobre la necesidad de fortalecer el acompañamiento en investigación. Se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cuantitativo, de nivel descriptivo y diseño no experimental, y se evaluó a 104 estudiantes mediante un cuestionario de 36 ítems. Los resultados muestran que el 67,3% de los estudiantes se ubica entre los niveles de inicio y proceso en la variable habilidades investigativas. Todas las dimensiones evaluadas (exploratoria, tecnológica, metodológica, analítica, comunicativa —oral y escrita— y cooperativa) presentan un predominio de niveles bajos y medios, lo que evidencia una formación insuficiente para el desarrollo adecuado de tareas científicas. Se concluye que, aunque existe un interés institucional por promover la investigación, persisten brechas significativas en la preparación metodológica y científica de los estudiantes y docentes. Esto reafirma la necesidad de fortalecer la formación investigativa desde la práctica educativa y de consolidar estrategias que potencien el pensamiento crítico, analítico y comunicativo en la educación superior.

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Palabras clave: competencias, estudiantes universitarios, habilidades investigativas.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, scientific research has come to occupy a central place in universities, functioning not merely as an academic requirement but as a means of actively contributing to societal well-being. For this activity to unfold optimally, however, students must cultivate a specific set of qualities and skills (Carranza-Esteban et al., 2022). Several studies have found that many students face constraints in developing their research competencies, whether due to gaps in their methodological training, reflective thinking that is still taking shape, unfamiliarity with information search and management tools, or faculty mentorship that does not always suffice (Rueda et al., 2022). Regrettably, although research constitutes an essential part of the teaching role, many instructors lack a consolidated research profile and, in numerous cases, have never published a scientific article (Barruita et al., 2019).

This situation takes on added significance when viewed within the international framework. From a global standpoint, UNESCO (2021) points out that research ranks among the key targets for sustainable development, since without it neither new knowledge nor genuine social progress can be generated. In some countries, a marked weakness and limited interest in science have even been documented, reflected in output that falls short of expected levels. It is worth emphasizing that scientific research not only fosters professional specialization but also becomes a vehicle for supporting and contributing to societal improvement. As UNESCO (2022) notes, the world needs well-trained researchers capable of taking an active part in global change.

Within this context, Peru has shown considerable progress in scientific output. Gómez (2024) reports a substantial increase in the number of faculty registered with RENACYT, from 4,018 in 2020 to 6,939 in 2022, a trend that points to a rise in publications. Yet beyond how encouraging these figures may appear, one might reasonably ask whether they truly reflect solid training of faculty as researchers or whether they largely respond to administrative incentives. The Banco Mundial (2023) notes that, over the past seventeen years, most of the country's scientific publications have concentrated in the field of medicine. Public universities, for their part, account for 40% of national output, a figure that is encouraging in itself. The picture is more troubling in provincial universities, however, which generate only around 15% of research. These gaps point to a pronounced inequality in the country's scientific development and should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers to strengthen faculty training and narrow research shortfalls, both in Lima and across the regions.

At the local level, undergraduate students at a public university in Lima have been observed to face certain limitations when carrying out scientific assignments. Some are unfamiliar with information search sources, struggle to interpret relevant data, and, above all, encounter difficulties with coherence and cohesion when drafting the paragraphs of their papers, among other shortcomings. Against this backdrop, the following research question emerges: what is the current state of research skills among students in the Faculty of Primary Education at a public university in Lima?

Given these considerations, the present study is relevant and justified on three grounds. Theoretically, it offers a close look at students' actual circumstances with regard to the development of their research skills and helps identify the key dimensions underlying scientific inquiry, thereby addressing concrete training needs. Methodologically, it contributes a duly validated 36-item instrument that will facilitate data collection and provide a clearer picture of students' progress in developing these skills. Practically, it should prove highly useful to faculty, insofar as it seeks to raise awareness and prompt reflection on the professional training process with a view to its ongoing improvement.

A review of national antecedents helps to further situate this problem. Chero (2025) set out to analyze the research skills of undergraduate students at a public institution, finding that participants were neither sufficiently motivated nor well acquainted with developing these skills; their limited digital competence, moreover, constrained their ability to search for information in a thorough, critical, and responsible manner. Rueda et al. (2022), in turn, examined research skills among university students through a quantitative, non-experimental, basic-type design, surveying 88 students. Their results showed that more than 55% exhibited a very low level of research skills, 37% a low level, and only 9% a medium level.

International findings are equally telling. Tapia et al. (2025) examined the state of higher education institutions in Mexico and Argentina with respect to students' research competencies. Their results indicated that Mexican students display weaknesses in two key competencies, namely the search for and selection of scientific information, whereas their Argentine counterparts showed a high level of proficiency in literature review and in recognizing relevant aspects of scientific methodology, among other indicators. Another relevant precedent is Prudencio (2021), who sought to assess students' research skills and found that participants had not managed to

consolidate these skills, with many either unaware of or unclear about what they entail and what purpose they serve.

It is worth outlining, as part of the theoretical framework, the foundations underlying the principles of research skills. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory holds that learning occurs through interaction with the environment, since knowledge first arises in a social context before being internalized; research, accordingly, is not an isolated act but a process that demands constant exchange with one's surroundings. Within higher education, a contemporary approach consistent with this view is the Formative Research Model, which seeks to promote and strengthen the training of well-rounded professionals capable of generating knowledge and proposing solutions to the problems around them (Rosabal & Rosabal, 2025; Pastora, 2020). This model gives rise to the concept of research skill itself, understood as a set of capacities that enable individuals to conduct rigorous, high-quality research. Such skills are built up gradually through sustained practice and participation in research experiences (Barbachán et al., 2021; Turpo-Gebera et al., 2020). Casanova et al. (2020), for their part, emphasize the importance of research skills across every area of classroom instruction, given their contribution to strengthening students' overall training. This ideal, however, is not always borne out in teaching practice, since relatively few instructors effectively foster these skills.

Turning to the specific components of research skills, Chávez et al. (2023) propose seven fundamental skills that every student should strengthen when undertaking a research process. The first dimension is exploratory competence, understood as the stage in which the student explores possible research topics of interest. This requires weighing the credibility of scientific sources to ensure they are reliable and provide accurate, clear information; it is likewise conceptualized as the student's ability to identify, locate, and evaluate scientific information in order to determine its relevance to the research process (Valderrama et al., 2022). The second dimension, technological competence, has become indispensable in the current landscape: students must become acquainted with basic software tools, which facilitates their research both on the theoretical and statistical side and in the use of reference management software. Chauca-Huete et al. (2024) define this competence as command of the digital resources and tools that support the research process, noting that proficiency with tools such as Zotero, databases, and statistical analysis programs (SPSS, for instance) is essential.

Methodological competence constitutes the third dimension, in which the student carries out the research process with greater care and precision, drawing on information from scientific sources that must be analyzed, understood, selected, and properly applied to produce information of value to the study. Chauca-Huete et al. (2024) describe it as the ability to produce rigorous scientific work, whereby the researcher formulates the core methodological elements (approach, type, design, instruments, and the like) needed to obtain results. The fourth dimension, analytical and interpretive competence, involves breaking down and drawing inferences from information so as to give it meaning that allows for clear understanding and interpretation; at this stage, descriptive and inferential levels of analysis come into play, and the student develops a critical stance toward the subject under study. Valderrama et al. (2022) conceptualize it as the ability to organize, process, analyze, and critically interpret information, holding that critical reflection aimed at generating new knowledge is a defining feature of this dimension, whether the study is qualitative or quantitative.

The fifth dimension, written communicative competence, is where the student employs formal scientific language in producing texts; such writing must also be coherent and clear, in keeping with academic structure and conventions. Valderrama et al. (2022) define it, in similar terms, as the ability to write scientific papers that meet international academic standards, noting that writing, together with critical reading, forms one of the elementary competencies underlying the generation of scientific knowledge. By contrast, the sixth dimension, oral communicative competence, is the stage at which students construct arguments and ideas verbally, presenting and defending the results of a scientific undertaking through academic language and expressive resources that promote clarity and comprehension. Chauca-Huete et al. (2024) define it as the ability to present and orally defend a study before an audience, a defense that must rest on language that is clear, coherent, precise, and scientific enough to withstand questions that challenge the evidence presented. The final dimension, cooperative competence, refers to students' capacity to work as part of a group, coordinating with fellow researchers to share objectives and responsibilities in order to achieve common goals. Valderrama et al. (2022) likewise describe it as command of effective communication, which facilitates teamwork, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

In light of the foregoing, the general objective of this study is to identify the current state of research skills among students in the Faculty of Primary Education at a public university in Lima. Its specific objectives, in turn, seek to determine the current state of the main dimensions that make up research skills, namely the exploratory, technological, methodological, analytical-interpretive, written communicative, oral communicative, and cooperative dimensions.

Methodology

According to Padilla-Avalos and Marroquín-Soto (2021), variables must undergo a process of observation and measurement that ultimately allows them to be quantified. Accordingly, this study adopts a quantitative approach, seeking to determine and measure the level of development of students' research skills. It is likewise descriptive in scope, its purpose being to identify and characterize the particular features of the problem affecting students. As Ramos and Escobar (2020) observe, the primary aim of this type of study is to describe the current state of the phenomenon of interest with precision, without attempting to establish causal relationships or manipulate variables.

Consistent with this approach, the study follows a non-experimental design. Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2023) characterize this type of design by its observation of phenomena as they naturally occur, without any deliberate manipulation of variables; in the present case, the variable under study was measured as it presented itself, without intervention. The design is further cross-sectional, since its purpose was to measure and analyze the variable at a single point in time, capturing a “snapshot” of the current state of research skills among participants.

The study was conducted in the Department, province, and district of Lima between April and December 2025. This time frame allowed not only for administering the instrument but also for organizing the logistics involved and subsequently analyzing the data collected.

The population consisted of students in the fifth, seventh, and ninth cycles of the School of Primary Education enrolled during the 2025-I academic term. For Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2023), a sample is a subset of the population selected to represent its characteristics. This study used convenience sampling, drawing on participants who were readily and practically accessible based on availability and willingness to take part. The final sample comprised 104 students, 93 women and 11 men, all belonging to the school in question.

To identify the research skills of students in the Faculty of Education, data were collected using the questionnaire developed by Chávez et al. (2023), known as the “Research Skills Scale.” This Likert-type instrument comprises 7 dimensions and 36 items, each assessing a specific skill linked to students' research development. Its validity was established through expert judgment as well as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, ensuring that it adequately measures the construct of interest. Reliability, in turn, was assessed using the composite reliability Omega coefficient, which yielded satisfactory results and confirmed the scale's internal consistency.

Data collection began by informing students that a survey would be administered in person. Throughout this process, the principles and norms set out in the institution's internal regulations were observed, ensuring ethical and responsible treatment of participants. Informed consent was then obtained from each participant to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided, a step that proved essential for fostering the climate of trust and transparency needed to elicit honest, valid responses.

Results and discussion

As shown in Table 1, regarding perceptions of research skills, 39.4% of the sample obtained scores placing them at the beginning level, 27.9% at the developing level, and 32.7% at the achieved level. These findings indicate that the university must continue implementing processes to strengthen skills that are so fundamental to students' professional profile.

Table 1

Frequency distribution levels for research skills among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	41	39.4
Developing	29	27.9
Achieved	34	32.7
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.

Table 2, in turn, addresses the current state of exploratory competence and shows that 34.6% of the sample obtained scores at the beginning level, 38.5% at the developing level, and 26.9% at the achieved level. This finding reveals that a large majority of students are unsure how to begin a research project, starting with the choice of topic.

Table 2

Frequency distribution levels for exploratory competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	36	34.6
Developing	40	38.5
Achieved	28	26.9
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.

With respect to the current state of technological competence, 34.6% of scores fell at the beginning level, 42.3% at the developing level, and 23.1% at the achieved level. Although students have access to digital platforms, they have yet to master the software and applications commonly used in research.

Table 3

Frequency distribution levels for technological competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	36	34.6
Developing	44	42.3
Achieved	24	23.1
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.

As for methodological competence, Table 4 shows that 41.3% of scores placed students at the beginning level, 38.5% at the developing level, and 20.2% at the achieved level, with the large majority concentrated in the beginning and developing levels. These data indicate that a substantial share of students is unaware of the methodological path to follow given the nature of their research.

Table 4

Frequency distribution levels for methodological competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	43	41.3
Developing	40	38.5
Achieved	21	20.2
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.

Table 5 reports the percentages for analytical and interpretive competence, showing that 33.7% of scores fell at the beginning level, 40.4% at the developing level, and 26% at the achieved level. This finding points to the need for students to keep sharpening their critical capacity through reading and activities that test problem-solving skills.

Table 5

Frequency distribution levels for analytical and interpretive competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	35	33.7
Developing	42	40.4
Achieved	27	26.0
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 26.

As shown in Table 6, for written communicative competence, 35.6% of the sample obtained scores at the beginning level, 31.7% at the developing level, and 32.7% at the achieved level. These results reflect the fact that more than half of the respondents struggle to draft scientific texts according to the formats required.

Table 6

Frequency distribution levels for written communicative competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	37	35.6
Developing	33	31.7
Achieved	34	32.7
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 26.

With regard to oral communicative competence, Table 7 shows that 42.3% of scores placed students at the beginning level, 25% at the developing level, and 32.7% at the achieved level. In other words, 70% of respondents have difficulty communicating and defending their scientific work, a shortfall attributable mainly to a lack of public speaking skills.

Table 7

Frequency distribution levels for oral communicative competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	44	42.3
Developing	26	25.0
Achieved	34	32.7
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.

Regarding cooperative competence, the following table shows that 39.4% of scores fell at the beginning level and 60.6% at the developing level. Of all the dimensions assessed, this proves the most critical, as not a single student reached the achieved level, evidence that students lack effective communication skills and that instructors are not applying techniques that foster teamwork.

Table 8

Frequency distribution levels for cooperative competence among students in the Faculty of Education at a public university in Lima

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Beginning	41	39.4
Developing	63	60.6
Total	**104**	**100.0**

Note. Data processed using SPSS statistical software, version 27.

These results show that a substantial share of the sample remains at the beginning level in the development of research skills. By way of comparison, the present findings align with those reported by Rueda et al. (2022), who found that 55% of students had not achieved optimal development of these skills, a shortfall reflected in their limited ability to carry out research processes autonomously and critically.

This trend has likewise been documented in other contexts. García and Ruano (2023), for instance, identified pronounced weaknesses in the development of research skills and, in addition, noted insufficient command of the technological tools that support research work. Valenzuela et al. (2021) similarly point out that this problem is more severe in public universities, where nearly 40% of students show difficulties in developing their research skills, compared with a lower proportion in private institutions. Taken together, these results underscore the urgent need to improve and strengthen students' research training, particularly within the public sector.

Some experiences, however, point in the opposite direction. Vilcapoma (2022), for example, found that students can indeed achieve more efficient development of their research skills when appropriate pedagogical strategies are applied, which in turn supports more competent performance on scientific tasks. Along similar lines, Zavala (2022) highlights the close relationship between the application of suitable techniques and the strengthening of research skills, underscoring the importance of a solid, well-structured, and systematic training process that allows students to operate with greater autonomy throughout the research process.

Within university settings, external factors also place the development of these skills at risk. Chero (2025) notes that most students feel unmotivated when carrying out research assignments and are not particularly familiar with using ICT in their scientific work. Prudencio (2021) similarly reports that a considerable proportion of students are unfamiliar with academic repositories, which restricts their ability to access reliable, up-to-date sources of information. These findings reinforce the idea that, beyond individual capacities, the training environment and the resources available play a determining role in the development of research skills.

Conclusions

This study revealed an alarming proportion of students who lack the research skills expected for their educational level, with significant repercussions for their scientific performance. This shortfall not only hinders their ability to develop inquiry and reflective skills but also constrains their capacity to produce scientific knowledge autonomously. Such deficiencies appear to stem from insufficient schooling, during which students failed to consolidate the competencies needed for adequate academic performance at the university level. It is further observed that many students enter higher education without having had genuine opportunities to practice critical reading, academic writing, or the use of reliable sources, producing a cumulative lag that becomes increasingly apparent in the more advanced cycles.

Finally, the studies cited throughout this article point to a notable gap between public and private universities, suggesting that, in many cases, instructors may lack the necessary preparation or fail to apply effective pedagogical strategies to foster the development of these skills. This inequality reflects not only differences in institutional resources but also in the priority given to research within the curriculum and in ongoing faculty development. Against this backdrop, there is an urgent need to implement research-strengthening programs beginning in the earliest cycles, incorporating digital tools and promoting closer, more practice-oriented faculty mentorship. Only in this way can the gap be closed and all students, regardless of their institutional context, be given equal opportunities to develop into critical, competent researchers.

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