



A Systematic Review of Research Trends and Managerial Functions in Educational Administration Theses

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Abstract

Despite the growing number of graduate theses in educational administration, comprehensive data on research trends, methodological designs, and the application of managerial functions remain limited. This study addresses this gap through a Systematic Literature Review with a quantitative descriptive approach, analyzing Master of Educational Administration theses from 2020 to 2024. Findings reveal fluctuating research output, the dominance of R&D and evaluative methods, and a focus on planning and control functions, with minimal attention to organizing, directing, and coordinating. The study highlights the need for greater methodological diversity and a more balanced application of managerial theory to enhance both the academic contribution and practical relevance of student research.

Index Terms- Trends, Theses..

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping human resources capable of responding to the complexities of the modern world. At the postgraduate level, students are required to demonstrate not only subject mastery but also their ability to think critically and contribute through high-quality research. One core academic requirement is the completion of a thesis, which serves as evidence of scholarly competence and the ability to produce original and relevant work aligned with societal needs (Hiebert et al., 2023).

To achieve these academic objectives, universities are responsible for establishing a research management framework that operates with both professionalism and efficiency. Central to this framework is the requirement that thesis preparation adheres to academic policies set forth by the government, which prioritize intellectual integrity, methodological soundness, and strict ethical conduct. Within this structure, students are expected to cultivate strong research capabilities—ranging from designing studies and applying theoretical concepts to analyzing data—all of which should be reflected in work that demonstrates both critical thinking and scholarly innovation.

Research methods commonly employed in educational studies include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches (Sugiyono, 2013). From a design perspective, educational research typically falls into several categories, such as action research, evaluation studies, research and development (R&D), systematic literature reviews (SLR), and ethnographic studies. Among these, SLR has received

growing attention for its ability to synthesize existing knowledge, prevent duplication, and inform the development of relevant and targeted research (Pandey, 2024).

The use of SLR not only provides a structured review of literature but also supports academic planning by identifying trends, mapping existing research landscapes, and highlighting knowledge gaps (Abuhassna et al., 2024; Basibas et al., 2021; Cerezo-Pizarro et al., 2024). These insights are valuable for informing curriculum development, guiding supervision strategies, and enhancing the overall quality of educational research. SLR also enables a deeper understanding of challenges and opportunities in post-secondary education research (Matos et al., 2023), particularly in how theories and practices evolve over time (Muspawi et al., 2024).

To further analyze thesis trends, this study employs Henri Fayol's classical management theory as a conceptual framework. Fayol (1987, as cited in Shringi & Shrivastava, 2023) outlined five key management functions—Planning, Organizing, Commanding (or Directing), Coordinating, and Controlling—that are foundational to effective managerial practice. These principles remain relevant across sectors, including education (Edwards, 2018; Karaboğa & Zehir, 2020; Voxted, 2017), and can be used to evaluate how management-oriented concepts are reflected in student research.

Fayol's framework allows for the classification of research content based on its alignment with managerial tasks. This approach supports a more structured analysis of how educational leadership and management theories are

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integrated into thesis topics, and how research outcomes may inform organizational improvement in education settings (Rodin et al., 2025; Tanti, 2024).

To deepen the understanding of academic trends, this study also incorporates knowledge mapping techniques, which aid in visualizing the evolution of key research topics and identifying underexplored areas (Kipper et al., 2021; Okada, 2022). Concept mapping, a related strategy, is useful for summarizing core themes, comparing findings, and synthesizing knowledge across multiple studies (Huck & Zhang, 2021). This analytical approach contributes to more strategic research planning and supports the long-term development of academic institutions (McAllister et al., 2022).

Understanding the focus and methods of postgraduate research helps universities improve their programs and guide students better. This study reviews recent theses to identify common themes, research approaches, and the use of management concepts. The research is framed by the following questions:

1. What are the key trends in postgraduate thesis research from 2020 to 2024?
2. Which research methods are most commonly used, and how are they distributed by topic?
3. How are Fayol's five management functions reflected in the theses?

METHOD

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to gather and analyze relevant literature in an organized way to answer the research questions (Heni et al., 2023; Mengist et al., 2020). This method was chosen to review student theses in three stages: planning, implementation, and reporting (Wahono, 2015). A quantitative descriptive approach is also used to present the data clearly (Barella et al., 2024).

In the planning stage, the research focus and questions are set, targeting thesis themes and their role in educational development. Data sources were chosen from theses published between 2020 and 2024, with a clear plan for collecting and extracting information.

During implementation, data was gathered from institutional repositories and Google Scholar using titles and author names. Relevant theses from the selected years were chosen and systematically analyzed to answer the research questions.

In the reporting stage, the results were grouped by theme to show trends in student research and their impact on education.

RESULT

Between 2020 and 2024, a total of 158 theses submitted by graduate students in the Educational Administration program were documented in the repository database. Following a selection process guided by predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 113 theses were identified as relevant and suitable for further analysis. These selected works offer valuable insights into emerging research trends and their

contributions to the development of the education sector, as illustrated in Figure 1.

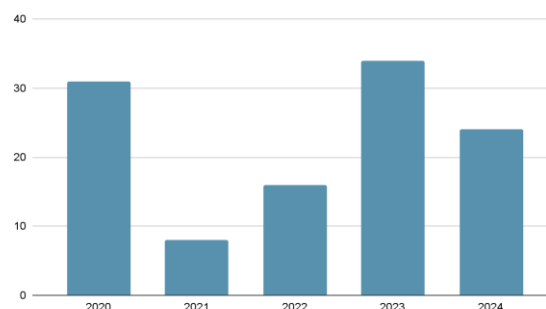


Figure 1. Number of Thesis

In accordance with the academic guidelines of the program, students typically adopt one of five main research approaches: Action Research, Evaluation Research, Research and Development (R&D), Systematic Literature Review (SLR), or Ethnographic Research. The theses were categorized based on these approaches to reveal methodological patterns over the five-year period, as shown in Figure 2.

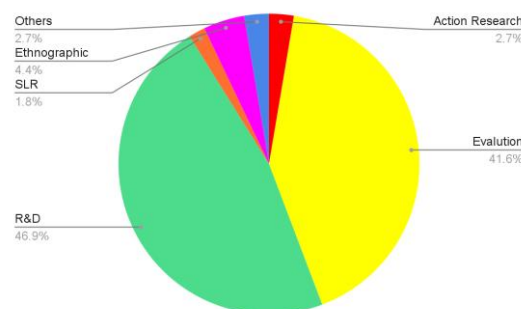


Figure 2. Percentage of Research Types

To further situate the findings within the framework of Educational Management, the research topics were also classified according to Henri Fayol's five core management functions. This additional layer of analysis highlights the alignment between student research and fundamental management principles in education, as presented in Figure 3.

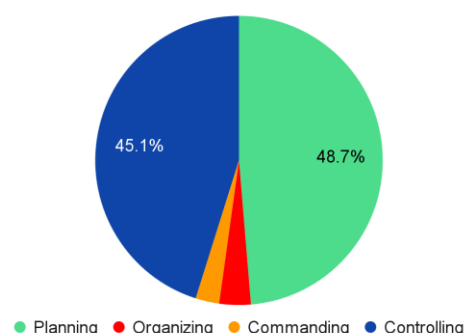


Figure 3. Research Categories based on Henri Fayol's Management Functions

DISCUSSION

Over the five-year span from 2020 to 2024, trends in thesis output among graduate students in Educational Administration displayed notable shifts, as illustrated in

Figure 1. The most pronounced drop occurred in 2021, a period that coincides with the peak disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic accelerated the integration of digital tools into educational practices ([Purnama et al., 2023](#)), it also created substantial challenges for students, particularly in conducting field-based research. Restrictions on mobility and access to educational institutions made it difficult to gather data and maintain consistent communication with supervisors ([Mudzi & Mudzi, 2022](#); [Shahab et al., 2021](#)). This disruption, which began with the official declaration of the pandemic in early 2020 ([Presidential Decree No. 11/2020, 2020](#)) and extended until mid-2023 ([Presidential Decree No. 17/2023, 2023](#)), significantly altered academic routines. A noticeable recovery began in 2023, likely reflecting improved conditions and greater adaptability among students and faculty. Some researchers have also observed that this period opened new research possibilities, particularly those related to pandemic experiences and the need for more adaptable research methods ([Uébe-Mansur et al., 2022](#)).

A closer look at the types of research students pursued reveals a strong preference for applied approaches, especially Research and Development (R&D) and Evaluation Research (see Figure 2). This trend reflects the practical orientation of Educational Administration programs, which emphasize the development of solutions that can be directly implemented in school settings. R&D projects typically aim to produce tangible outcomes, such as instructional tools, learning strategies, or assessment models, that can be used to address real-world challenges in education ([Okpatrioka, 2023](#); [Siregar, 2023](#); [Sumiati et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, Evaluation Research focuses on assessing educational programs and initiatives, offering insights that support ongoing improvement ([Aulya et al., 2022](#)). These two approaches, when used together, promote innovation that is both grounded in practice and informed by evidence ([Osman & Nura, 2015](#); [Sholikatur, 2023](#)).

On the other hand, alternative research methods such as Action Research, Systematic Literature Reviews (SLR), and Ethnographic Studies were less commonly used. Although not as popular, these approaches offer important contributions, especially in exploring reflective practices, theoretical perspectives, and cultural or social dimensions of education ([Fansury & Rampeng, 2023](#); [Messikh, 2020](#); [Oranga & Gisore, 2023](#); [Putra et al., 2024](#)). The low frequency of their use suggests an area of untapped potential. Encouraging greater methodological diversity could enhance both the academic rigor and practical relevance of future theses.

The classification of research topics based on Henri Fayol's five management functions (Figure 3) offers additional insight into how students frame their studies within the field of educational leadership and administration. The majority of theses emphasized planning (48.7%) and controlling (45.1%), which aligns with the dominant use of R&D and evaluation-based approaches. Planning-centered theses often involved the design of learning programs or curriculum tools, while controlling-focused research examined the effectiveness of

educational policies or school initiatives. In contrast, organizing (3.5%) and commanding (2.7%) were explored far less frequently. These functions, which relate to institutional structure and leadership behavior, appear to be underrepresented in student research.

Coordination, though not explicitly listed in most thesis classifications, plays a vital role in the execution of educational research. While not always documented in final reports, coordination activities—such as arranging interviews, managing schedules, and maintaining communication with stakeholders—are crucial to research success. Despite being less visible, this function supports collaboration between school leaders, teachers, parents, and students, all of whom contribute to effective school management ([Kurniawan, 2020](#); [Slabu & Lupu, 2023](#)). Prior studies highlight that strong coordination practices contribute to higher educational quality through shared leadership and stakeholder engagement ([García-Martínez et al., 2020](#); [Maula & Syafa, 2022](#); [Zahria, 2024](#)). The limited attention given to this area in current theses points to an important gap. Further research could explore coordination in greater depth, not only as a supportive function in educational programs but also as a critical component of organizational dynamics.

Overall, the findings of this review suggest that while students have met the academic expectations of their programs, there are still opportunities to improve the depth and breadth of research being conducted. Exploring a wider range of methodologies and focusing more on less-researched managerial functions could lead to more comprehensive and impactful studies. Strengthening these areas will help future researchers produce work that is both practically useful in educational settings and theoretically meaningful in advancing the field of educational management.

CONCLUSION

The examination of postgraduate theses in Educational Administration between 2020 and 2024 reveals varied trends influenced by a combination of individual readiness, institutional conditions, and global events. The sharp decrease in research output during 2021 is likely tied to the educational disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited access to research sites and delayed academic timelines. However, a notable increase in 2023 indicates a gradual recovery as students and academic environments adjusted to new modes of working. This shift not only marked a return to stability but also presented new opportunities for exploring research topics more relevant to current educational challenges.

A strong inclination toward applied research was evident, with many students opting for Research and Development or Evaluation as their primary approach. These choices reflect a practical orientation, aimed at producing innovations that can be directly applied in educational settings. Still, the limited use of alternative methodologies—such as ethnographic research, action-based inquiry, and literature reviews—highlights the need to foster greater methodological diversity. Broadening research approaches would allow for deeper

analysis and more meaningful contributions to educational theory and practice.

When the theses were examined through the lens of Fayol's management principles, most focused on planning and control, while topics related to organization, leadership, and coordination received much less attention. This indicates that certain aspects of educational management—especially those tied to teamwork, leadership roles, and institutional structures—remain underexplored. A more even distribution across these managerial functions would provide a deeper understanding of how schools operate and improve.

In conclusion, the research conducted during this period shows strong potential to contribute both academically and practically. However, a key step forward is to promote greater variety in research methods. Expanding methodological options will help students engage with complex educational issues more thoroughly, making their work not only relevant to practice but also more grounded in comprehensive academic inquiry.

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