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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors involved in the Decision of whether to do or not a Thesis in Psychology Students

Factores implicados para realizar o no realizar tesis en estudiantes de psicología

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Summary

Despite the need for scientific research in psychology to solve the different psychosocial problems of the country (family violence and corruption, for example), studies in this area are not still enough. One of the ways to encourage research is by doing a thesis. However, many students opt for other types of jobs for that purpose. The objective of the study is to identify, describe and explain those factors that influence the undergraduate Psychology students' decision to do or not a thesis in order to obtain the professional degree. A qualitative methodology and the Grounded Theory design were used. We conducted 7 individual interviews and 2 focus groups of a total of 28 university students (20 women and 8 men), living in the city of Lima, 2 of them from public universities and 3 of them from private universities and who were in the last semesters of the Psychology specialty. The results suggest that there are psychological, circumstantial, family, university-related, social and cultural factors, complex interaction of which affects the psychological processes of the student to decide to do or not a thesis, representing the student's belief system in itself and in relation to the research activity, a main psychological factor.

Keywords: Psychology, thesis, university, belief system.

Resumen

A pesar de la necesidad de investigaciones científicas en Psicología para dar respuesta a los diferentes problemas psicosociales del país (violencia familiar y corrupción, por ejemplo), los estudios en esta área son aún insuficientes. Una de las formas de incentivar las investigaciones es a través de la realización de tesis. Sin embargo, muchos estudiantes optan por otro tipo de trabajos para tal fin. El objetivo del estudio es identificar, describir y explicar aquellos factores que influyen en la decisión de realizar o no realizar tesis para obtener el título profesional en estudiantes de pregrado de la carrera de Psicología. Se empleó una metodología cualitativa y el

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diseño Teoría Fundamentada. Se realizaron 7 entrevistas individuales y 2 grupos focales a un total de 28 estudiantes universitarios (20 mujeres y 8 varones), residentes en la ciudad de Lima, de 2 universidades nacionales y 3 particulares, que cursaban los últimos ciclos de la carrera de Psicología. Los resultados sugieren que existen factores psicológicos, circunstanciales, familiares, relacionados a la universidad, sociales y culturales cuya compleja interacción influye en los procesos psicológicos del estudiante para tomar la decisión de realizar o no realizar una tesis, representando el sistema de creencias del estudiante respecto de sí mismo y en relación con la actividad de investigación un factor psicológico central.

Palabras clave: Psicología, tesis, universidad, sistema de creencias.

Introduction

A thesis is understood as the product of a process of scientific, empirical and/or theoretical research on a particular phenomenon, which is obtained through the development of a work involving information collection, analysis and knowledge development for a significant period (Montemayor-Borsinger, 2005). It suggests a creative, original, thorough work that is orderly in form and content (Sabino, 1998). And it is aimed at obtaining an academic degree or a professional qualification (Arias, 2006).

According to the last recorded study in Peru, the II National University Census 2010 (National Institute of Statistics and Information [INEI, for its Spanish acronym], 2011), simultaneously done in 100 Universities (35 public and 65 private) across the country, reported that, out of a total of 20,642 public university students, 45% earned their professional degree through a thesis, while 55% earned it through other modalities (professional experience, examination, professional development course and/or magisterial classes). Moreover, out of a total of 24,601 private university postgraduate students, 40% obtained their academic degree through a thesis, while 60% obtained it through other modalities (INEI, 2011).

In this context, it should be noted that University Law (Law 30220, 2014), in Chapter V of Academic Organization, Article 45. Obtaining Academic and Professional Degrees, states that academic and professional degrees are earned by fulfilling the academic requirements established by each university in its internal regulations. Approval of a research project, among others, is required to obtain the bachelor's degree, and approval of a thesis or professional proficiency work is required to obtain the Professional Degree. Although the law states that accredited universities can establish modalities additional to those referred to, research projects have priority and ensure a leading country in science, technology and innovation as its professionals are qualified to conduct studies and contribute to the country's economic, social and cultural growth.

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On the other hand, in Peru, there are many mental health problems which cause damage to individuals and families, besides the economic and social consequences involved (Peru's People's Defender's Office, 2008). Some of these problems are family violence, feminicide, school bullying, sexual harassment on public transport, high levels of corruption, self-injury and suicidal behaviors, inappropriate health habits linked to physical problems and accidents. Thus, it is necessary to conduct psychological research, in all its areas, to contribute with scientific knowledge on its effects, perceptions and/or risk factors of these problems, so as to have an empirical basis to develop and implement specific intervention proposals, and assess impact over time, as suggested by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) and Peru's Health Ministry (MINSA, 2014).

As asserted by Hernández (2014), Peru continues to be among the countries in the region with the lowest scientific productivity, both in relation to its population and with respect to its wealth. Despite the need for psychological science research studies to address these problems, the number of studies in this area are insufficient. In observing one of the most visited world research rankings, such as the one proposed by the SCImago Research Group (2016), it is noticed that there is not any Peruvian journal of psychology with scientific impact.

It is also observed little interest in developing this science since, as indicated by UNESCO (2010), in many countries, Natural Sciences, as compared to Social Sciences, continue to attract exclusive attention in terms of funding. In Peru, the few existing economic incentives for research granted by public institutions, such as the National Council for Science, Technology and Technological Innovation (CONCYTEC, for its Spanish acronym), are more focused on Biological, Computing or Technological Sciences, in detriment to the progress of Social and Health Sciences, like Psychology.

According to UNESCO (2009), Universities should be responsible for undertaking social leadership in terms of creating global knowledge through research to address world challenges such as public health. Thus, Psychology

Departments and/or Schools of the different Peruvian universities (public and private) should contribute to this aim by encouraging research in their classrooms, creating study groups, promoting interdisciplinary studies, and above all, encouraging graduates to earn their professional degree through a thesis, a reality still too far from reach.

In this context, one may wonder: what are the causes or factors which influence in the decision of psychology undergraduate students to do or not to do a thesis to earn their professional degree? In this respect, some international background was found, but dealt with in students of Master's Degree and/or Ph.D. programs of specialties other than Psychology. Thus, Ochoa (2011) found that activities like delimiting the subject matter, developing the status of the issue and the theoretical framework, designing the methodology, and writing a research report are the most complex ones and, consequently, need further mentoring support. It was also indicated that personal factors like attitude and motivation (like cognitive and methodological aspects) are influential and necessary to do research (Rietveldt & Vera, 2012). The professor's role as a motivating agent, permanent assessment and, in general, institutional support/assistance also have an effect on the conduction of research work (Magaña, Aguilar, Pérez, Quijano & Argüelles, 2014; Rietveldt & Vera, 2012).

Other study groups found some psychological factors which influence research activities. Thus, evidence of the mediating role of self-efficacy in this type of activities (Alegre, 2014; Balloo, Pauli & Worrell, 2016; Chumwichan & Siriparp, 2016; Lambie, Hayes, Griffith, Limbert & Mullen, 2013; Mohamed & Nordin, 2013; Reyes & Gutiérrez, 2015); motivational processes, mainly intrinsic (Kozlova & Atamanova, 2013; Rietveldt & Vera, 2012); expectations on research results (Chumwichan & Siriparp, 2016); attitudes towards research (Rietveldt & Vera, 2012) were found.

In Peru, the subject matter was studied using students of different professional specialties other than Psychology. Aspects which influence the realization of a thesis, such as the feeling of not being capable or not being

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sufficiently qualified, the desire of having a perfect theoretical framework, being afraid of fieldwork, the type of thesis supervisor, the social recognition (by professors and mates), and the critical attitude of professors were evidenced (Portocarrero & Bielich, 2006). For their part, Alarco, Aguirre-Cuadros, Aliaga-Chávez and Álvarez-Andrade (2010) concluded that factors like existing tiresome proceedings, poor knowledge on research methodology, lack of economic resources, and lack of time are associated with the failure to do a thesis.

As it can be seen, in the Peruvian context, there are very few empirical studies on this problem and none of them addressed the realization of a thesis in the Psychology field. Consistently, the aim of this study is to identify, describe and explain those factors which influence the decision of Psychology undergraduate students to do or not to do a thesis to earn their professional degree.

Methodology

Study Approach and Design

The research study falls within the constructive research paradigm. In this sense, the used approach is qualitative. This methodology was selected as the aim of this study is to identify the causes expressed by the same actors of the process -in this case, undergraduate students- as perceived by them. Thus, there is a significant interest in their experiences, opinions and attributions on the fact of doing or not doing a research work to earn their professional degree.

Likewise, the selected design or tradition to study this subject matter is the Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 2002) as this method is appropriate to inquire into and understand processes, interactions among constructs which influence others, so that comprehensive

theories on a specific matter emerge from the data, such as the decision to do or not to do a thesis.

Techniques and Instruments

The used techniques were individual qualitative interviews and focus groups. The instruments used to collect information were interview and focus group guides. The central themes of these guides were: *modality to earn the professional degree, importance of the realization of a thesis, reasons for the realization of a thesis, reasons for the non-realization of a thesis.* A digital audio recorder, mobile video recorder equipment, paper sheets, and pencils were used for information recording.

With respect to the validity of the techniques, it should be noted that the aim of the qualitative interview, as a data collection technique, is to ensure that participants feel free to question and, if necessary, to correct the researcher's suppositions on the studied meanings, expressed in the questions of the interview guide during the same data collection process. (Kvale, 2011). Likewise, the information was collected in the participants' real settings like the settings where they study or where they do their professional practice, meaning that such studies have greater ecological validity (Willig, 2013).

Participants

Participants were selected according to non-probabilistic criteria, using an intentional sampling method (Flick, 2015). Thus, the participants of the study were a total of 28 undergraduate students (20 women and 8 men), aged between 20 and 52, from different socioeconomic levels, currently residing in the city of Lima, and who are in the last semesters of the Psychology specialty of 5 universities (two public universities and three private universities). Out of the total number of participants, two indicated that they had not yet selected the modality to earn their professional degree, nine stated that they were interested in completing their degree through a thesis, and seventeen

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expressed their desire to obtain their professional degree through another modality like a course or exam.

Procedure

The data collection process was carried out gradually, between November 2014 and April 2015, due to some inconveniences regarding the availability of the research team members.

As first activity, the research team prepared the interview guide (individual and group) with the central themes related to the aim of the study. At the same time, informed consents, and participant invitation and thank you cards were prepared. Each team member made the respective arrangements to get the participants. With respect to individual interviews, students were invited orally, either at their workplace (where they did their professional practice) or in the facilities of their university. Focus groups were coordinated with the professionals responsible for the psychological service of two institutions (a national health establishment and a university clinic), where the students did their internship (credited pre-professional practice). The place, date and time of the interviews were set.

Individual interviews were conducted in the facilities of the participants' university, specifically in classrooms. The focus groups (a group consisting of 9 people and another group consisting of 12 people) were carried out in the establishment where the participants did their internship. For this, the rooms used as meeting center by the professionals of that area were employed, prior coordination with the Psychology service chiefs.

Adequate physical contextual conditions in the different settings where data was collected were guaranteed. The same instructions were given and the necessary materials were provided. Thus, most of the informants answered the questions in a spontaneous, cooperative manner. Only in the first focus group, one participant expressed her annoyance because the person responsible for the service had not informed her about the content

of the meeting. In spite of this, during the session, this participant seemed accessible and participated in an active manner, showing her interest in the subject matter.

Once the information was obtained from the participants, interviews were transcribed into text format, and were edited with full respect, at all times, for the original utterances of their authors. Finally, the data was processed.

Data Processing

It should be noted that the qualitative data processing is based on processes and analytical inductive logical operations (Gibbs, 2012). The recommended strategies of the method of the *Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were used in the study. Thus, the obtained information was segmented into *analysis units* (data portions or segments), considering the *theme unit* (text segment dealing with a specific content or theme) as segmentation criterion. Then, the *first level categorization* was performed. This process involves the creation of concepts or categories, which represent the content of the utterance expressed by the participants, by continually comparing the analysis units. Codes were assigned to the categories. Thus, a first system of descriptive categories from the participants' utterances was obtained in this first stage of analysis.

Once the information was processed, *more analytical and interpretative categories* were created through the *second level categorization* process, by continually comparing the *primary categories* (the concepts obtained in the previous step), so that some of them were integrated into more abstract and explanatory concepts. Thus, for example, categories like *time required to research, employment to meet a financial need* and *economic expense* for the realization of a thesis were grouped into *circumstantial factors* since all of them refer to situations or events experienced by the student during his/her decision to do or not to do the thesis. Then, the final categories were related to each other to obtain theme patterns (main categories which have

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cause-effect relations to each other, implication, concurrence, etc.) in order to develop comprehensive models on the studied phenomenon through visual representations. The Nvivo version 10 software was used for data management and organization.

Quality Criteria

In order to ensure the credibility and confirmability of the study, the participants' answers were recorded in audio format, and were then transcribed so that the text reflected the participants' utterance. Moreover, this research used the triangulation of data collection techniques like individual qualitative interview and focus group, which can be verified in the recovered analysis units in which there are examples of utterances of the individuals and of the focus group. The study aso sued the triangulation of researchers, so that the research team members analyzed the data individually, and the resulting categories were then compared. Although there were some differences in the primary categories (for example *time to do a thesis, time as a cause or time required to research*), the central themes (psychological, circumstantial, university-related, family and sociocultural factors) coincided.

The reliance of the study was achieved by developing interview and focus group guides. These guides contained the main themes or questions of the study and were used with the participants without significant changes. Another strategy employed to this end was that the research team ensured the similarity of both the context and the way such instruments were applied.

The detailed description of the participants' characteristics, the context of the study, and the used data collection procedure are some strategies that the research team considered appropriate to optimize the transferability of the study.

Ethical Aspects

This study meets the ethical aspects specified in the basic principles of the American Psychological Association (2010) and the Code of Professional Ethics of the Peruvian Psychologists Professional Association (s.f.). Thus, the obtained results are the product of a systematic, critical and empirical process carried out by the research team. Other researchers' contributions relevant to the development of this study have been duly quoted and appear in the list of references, preventing thus the antithetical act of plagiarism. The protection of the participants' welfare and dignity was guaranteed with the oral and/or written informed consent and confidentiality. It is worth mentioning that all participants consented to be recorded in audio, so that the collected information is as faithful as possible to their utterances.

Results

Circumstantial Factors

These factors are defined as the current events or situations experienced by the participants of the study. The *time required to research*, the *employment (job)* they perform or want to perform to meet an *economic need* were the said reasons which influence the decision to do or not to do a thesis. It should be noted that these categories were found both in the individual interviews and in the two focus groups.

> *"If I had time available, I wouldn't work. I would like to do a thesis" (S1).*
>
> *"It would be unlikely for me because I don't have much time. I have to work and pay for my university studies" (S2)*
>
> *"The economic factor, too. To start working right away. To generate income ..." (S3).*

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"...I thought to do a thesis, but I believe it is going to be very difficult due to my work and my time available" (Focus group 1).

"I agree with the benefits for other people. I even did two qualitative research works. But I opted for the exam due to time and other issues" (Focus group 2).

The *economic expense* involved in the conduction of a research project is also indicated by the participants as a factor which reduces the intention to do a thesis.

"I guess that in order to do a good research study, you would have to have economic resources to even travel or do some external research" (S2).

"Investment could be also another aspect because in order to do a research study, in this case a thesis, besides guidance, you need to have a budget to do it" (Focus group 1).

"I think that yes [in reference to the economic expense] because when you make surveys, you have to make copies or go to the library. These activities involve to incur expenses" (Focus group 2).

Psychological Factors

Psychological factors are defined as a set of psychological, cognitive, affective and behavioral components or personality traits of the individual -in this case, the student- which facilitate or hinder the realization of a research study. These components like processes are in continuous interaction each other (Figure 1).

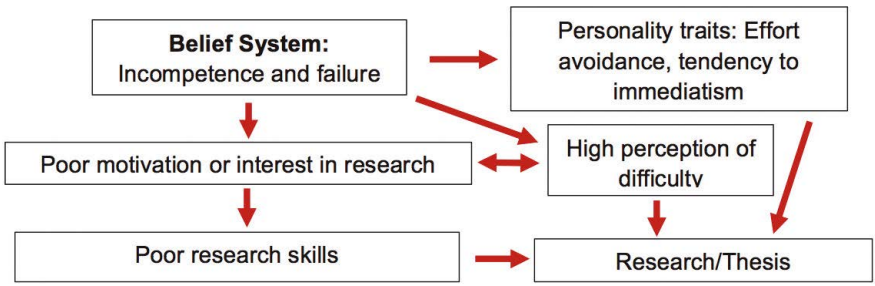

Figure 1. Influence of psychological factors in the decision to do or not to do research/thesis.

A first component is the belief system. This system is built throughout a person's life and is the product of the interaction of many factors. In the context of the study, the content adopted by this system on oneself or on the research activity influence the decision to do or not to do a thesis. If there are unrealistic contexts, it is likely to opt for other options, instead of doing a research study.

> *"Every week, the professor told me that I have to review it* [research work course]. *And I do not know. I have felt that I am not doing it right. Imagine if I have to do it for the professional degree and I am told that it has not been approved or something like that. I cannot imagine another year preparing another thesis. It makes me feel a little scared more than anything" (S4).*

> *"Imagine that you do your thesis, and what happens when you present it and you are afraid that your thesis has not been accepted" (S1).*

> *"...and if I don't do it right, if my work is rejected, if I don't have a thesis supervisor. I don't know, I've never learnt" (S5).*

The personality traits *effort avoidance* (tendency to avoidance of activities involving cognitive efforts) and *tendency to immediatism* (desire to obtain or achieve goals immediately) are the patterns found in the study.

> *"...As my mates have told me, time. I want to earn my bachelor's degree quickly and obtain my professional degree quickly" (Focus group 1).*

> *"I want to obtain my professional degree as soon as possible to work. And I can earn it in just 6 months" (Focus group 2).*

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Likewise, the student's *perception of difficulty* with respect to do a research study will determine his/her decision to do or not to do a thesis.

> *"Or some people also say that it is very difficult and they prefer easier things. They say 'I don't care. I will expend more, but I won't have to do a thesis" (S5).*

> *"It seems important to me because it is a research, but it is a little tiresome since it will lead you to collect information, research, data, and I think it is very complicated for me" (S1).*

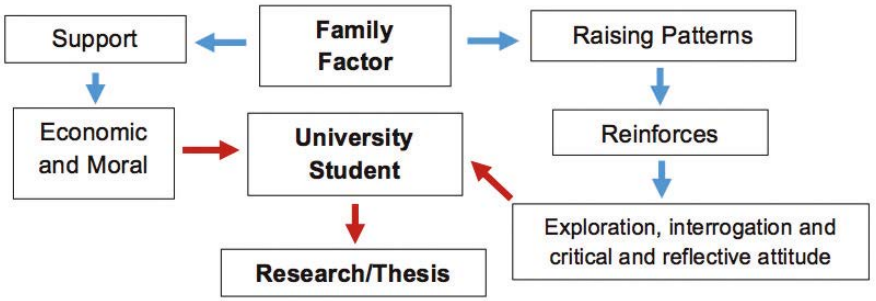
> *"Currently, from my position, it would be more likely for me to obtain my professional degree through a professional development course. Based on experiences, I think it is a bit easier" (S2).*

Family Factor

Figure 2 shows the family factors resulting from the analysis. Thus, the strategies used by the family to raise children, the *raising patterns*, particularly the ones related to the learning process, as well as the *family support*, understood as economic and/or moral support, to cover education expense and to emotionally encourage to continue studying during the academic learning process are the two family factors which influence the realization or non-realization of a research work.

> *"...From my memories, I have no much limits at home, so that if I had the chance to disassemble an alarm clock or a telephone, I did it. I explored it and destroyed it, and I had the satisfaction of researching, and there was nobody yelling at me 'what have you done" (Focus group 2).*

> *"I think that my parents' support is important ...My parents help me economically and emotionally, too. I think that family support is also important" (Focus group 1).*



University-related Factors

This factor makes reference to the *support* received from the Higher Education Institution or University, represented by the authorities of the Psychology Departments and/or Schools, which, through its professors, processes and strategies, facilitate or hinder their students to research and do a thesis to earn their professional degree (Figure 3).

It was found that the structure and content of the University's *curriculum*, including research activities, and the *fulfillment* of such curriculum influence the conduction of scientific studies by the students.

> *"*[Referring to some universities]*…They are limited in learning, knowledge, research. Teaching is very basic" (S1).*

> *"I think it would be very important that certain universities change their curriculum …On the other hand, we only had three* [research] *courses in my university, if I am right. Thus, let's say that they* [mates from another university] *have more opportunities and more abilities to do a thesis as compared to other universities" (Focus group 1).*

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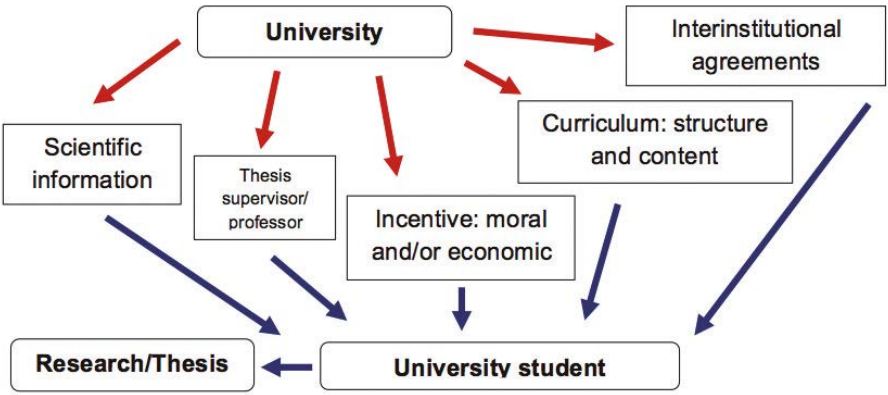

Figure 3. University-related factors which influence the decision to do or not to do a research study/ thesis.

In that same way, the University's *interinstitutional agreements* with entities like companies, health establishments, education institutions, etc., represent, for students, a very important support to do a thesis.

> *"I prefer the organizational area …, and, currently, I don't have any professional practices which can show me how the organizational area is and what tangible problems are near me. Since I don't have this, it is difficult for me to think about a thesis at this time" (S4).*

> *"…I actually didn't have any topic which really called my attention, which motivates me …I asked myself why this was happening. In my case, this had happened because the majority, at least the people in my profession, had been in contact with professional practices through voluntary service, so that this had raised their interest...In my case, it wasn't like that. It is the first time that I'm in contact with the professional practice, with people. And I think that it's here where I'm actually going to find a topic that is indeed of my interest" (Focus group 2).*

The University's *economic and moral incentive* also came out as a significant aspect in the analysis process. The participants perceive that the University's external motivation contributes for its students to prefer research

activities. Moreover, it was found that even though there is a moral incentive by the authorities and professors to do a thesis, the economic support or incentive in this area is scarce or null.

"Besides, there is no much motivation. We always hear that we have to do a thesis, but students are not supported" (S6).

"I realized that the university doesn't give us any support. Rather than presentation letters, the university's economic support will further help research" (S1).

"Talking to my mates, I haven't heard any of them saying that their research projects are supported by the university. I, particularly, haven't heard that ..." (Focus group 1).

The University's *scientific information*, expressed in duly equipped libraries, scientific productions (theses or articles) which are contained in its own scientific journals and affiliations to international databases with relevant information, represent an additional support for the student.

"To do my last research or works, I didn't go to the library, because when I asked for a dictionary, they had a psychoanalytical dictionary only. I asked for other things and they had very basic and limited things. So, I didn't look further" (S5).

The thesis supervisor/professor, as the University's direct representative, is identified as an important factor by the participants. It was found that the thesis supervisor's/professor's *didactics*, *mastery of the subject matter*, *teaching style*, *research experience* and *interest in teaching to research*, are characteristics desired by the students.

"I think there are excellent professors who know too much, have good knowledge, but unfortunately they don't know how to express it, how to help. That's the problem. I happened to me" (S7).

"I think that the thesis supervisor/professor has to know a lot about the subject matter" (S3).

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"I don't know if there are here, but in other universities there are thesis supervisors who don't research, they are just thesis supervisors" (S5).

"Well, in my university, there were problems with the thesis supervisor because they have no time. You have to look for them, bother them …, even go to their house …Some of them don't take interest" (Focus group 1).

Sociocultural Factors

The *sociocultural factors* make reference to a group of research-related entities, policies, situations and/or social representations which influence the decision to do a thesis. In this sense, the *regular basic education system* is identified as *insufficient or deficient* to encourage research from an early age since it follows a *traditional educational model* which does not favor the development of critical thinking and inquiry.

"Children should be encouraged from an early age, from the science or biology courses; to give them that motivation so that they look for by themselves, increase such curiosity awaken at an early age" (Focus group 1).

"[Regarding critical thinking]*...I think that it comes from before university, from school. Sometimes the professors come, lecture, and say the date of the exam and that's all. In public schools, they don't go deepen to seek such critical sense so that you can continue to do it in the university period. Because I have seen that, in the first semesters of the university, during such period it is hard for students to succeed or adapt" (Focus group 2).*

It is also mentioned that the changes in the *higher education policies* made by the Government a few years ago, were unfavorable for doing a thesis to earn the professional degree.

> *"I had the opportunity of studying at university several years ago now, before such gap generated by the automatic obtainment of the bachelor's degree and everything automatic. The value then given to research work was something natural, tacit, implicit in the specialty." (Focus group 2)*

Furthermore, the participants perceive that *their society and culture*, as a built entity, do not *value the research development*, and there are not any comparative advantages for those who earn their professional degree through a thesis.

> *"Thus, doing a research project gives you a bit more level, but the professional degree itself is the same; it doesn't change." (S2)*

> *"In the employment arena, [doing a thesis] has no influence" (Focus group 2).*

> *"We don't have the culture of doing research projects. And this comes from before" (S6).*

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify, describe and explain those factors which influence the university student's decision to do or not to do a degree thesis. The results suggest that there are psychological, circumstantial, family, university-related, social and cultural factors, which complex interaction influences the student's cognitive and reflective evaluation process to make this decision, representing the student's belief system with regard to himself/herself and in relation to the research activity, a central psychological factor.

The circumstantial factors like time, economic need (Alarco et al., 2010), desire to work and research-involved expenses, are factors advised by the participants without much effort, and appear as the most urgent ones in the evaluation process to make a decision and opt for not to do a research project (CONCYTEC, 2014). Although these factors would explain the decision made, there are additional factors which require substantial effort to be

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recognized as such. They are those processes which emerge in the student's psychosocial development and are still valid. These processes have been automated to such extent that it is hard to raise awareness of their effects on the decision to do or not to do a research, and gain a fundamental role in the evaluation.

Thus, there are psychological factors which directly influence the decision to do a thesis. From these factors, a student's *belief system* with regard to himself/herself (in this case, in the academic context), his/her research-related skills and his/her ideas on the research activity, becomes a *central factor* and is the core in the evaluation process carried out. Some approaches on the matter can be seen in Portocarrero and Bielich (2006) and in self-efficacy studies (Alegre, 2014; Balloo et al, 2016; Chumwichan, & Siriparp, 2016; Lambie et al 2013; Mohamed, & Nordin, 2013; Reyes & Gutiérrez, 2015).

Beliefs with irrational contents develop poor adaptive personality traits (Dryden, David & Ellis, 2010) like the *effort avoidance* and *tendency to immediatism* traits. Thus, it will be likely to opt for easier alternatives or solutions to prevent such beliefs and the consequent emotional discomfort from coming true. In turn, such beliefs will bias the *perception of difficulty* on the research activity and it will be concluded that "doing a thesis is very difficult" or "complicated". The student's self-concept of himself/herself, as a product of his/her belief system, influences his/her academic motivation (Carranza & Apaza, 2015), in this case, *motivation and interest in research*, both being relevant aspects to do a research project (Kozlova, & Atamanova, 2013; Rietveldt y Vera, 2012), and causes that the student does not develop *research skills* like reviewing literature, delimiting a subject matter or designing the methodology (Ochoa, 2011). All this will have an effect on the decision to research or not to research.

Meanwhile, the students built such system during their socialization process, and will continue to build it as they interact with the different

socializing agents. Thus, this system is dynamic and its contents are liable to change or perpetuation.

Family, as the first social group, is the first socializing agent which will influence the process of belief system building by students, with the consequent limitation of its exploration scope, its curious impetus and its natural disposition to research. To prioritize raising patterns oriented to momentary calm or just because automatic messages received by them are reproduced, mother and father transmit emotionally-charged messages which prohibit to explore the means, leaving the questions that their children are formulating regarding their environment without response. This causes insecure thoughts, fear to new things, decreased behavioral activity, lack of interest in answering their own questions and, thus, decreased self-formulation of questions regarding the unknown. The importance of parental guidance on the consequences of this type of raising patterns is necessary for its effects on the development of their competences not only academic, but also emotional and social.

The second socializing agent, the regular basic school, also contributes to calming down a human being's impetus to inquiring by developing irrational contents of thinking on research. The current education system still has traditional and out-of-date teaching-learning systems, in which a teacher is the one who knows and nobody should question the information they provide. In this context, learning acquired by students will be biased by their vision. Learning is not built; it is just replicated. And this happens not only in many public institutions, but also in private and religious schools.

Thus, it is necessary to develop a quality regular basic education system since it will have the potential to develop in students, in the first instance and as a core component, a belief system with rational contents on learning and research, and based on such beliefs, it will promote appropriate academic and socio-emotional skills. One of these skills, critical thinking, acquires particular relevance (López, 2012). If the teacher encourages it, it will be more likely for the student to research, because they will want to confirm

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whatever they are told, look for information in different sources, formulate assumptions and develop explanatory systems about a phenomenon. Thus, the way to prepare them for higher education and scientific production is opened up. If such skills are not started at a proper age in regular basic education, they cannot be equally attained in higher education (National System for Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification of Educational Quality [SINEACE, for its Spanish acronym], 2013; Segrera, 2016).

The education scenario previously discussed is not much different at University level, since many universities still use vertical and authoritarian teaching models, obsolete, expository and little innovative learning systems (Hernández and Alberto, 2012), many times, aimed at instructing their students in certain ways of thinking and acting. Critical judgment is not developed under these conditions as it is believed and it is learned to not to think independently, not to innovate and not to research. Old thinking patterns and contents regarding research are consolidated, and as a final consequence, the option of not to research will be taken as it is believed that everything is true and the psychosocial reality cannot be changed.

In this same line of analysis, the situation or context related to the university's academic and scientific information, also influences the student's belief system and this, in turn, conditions the perception of difficulty for researching. When the student does not find resources available in the university, besides the fact that the facilitators (professors) have not taught them to look for them, irrational thought contents are reinforced, like *"doing a thesis is difficult"*. Thus, if the University does not invest in resources for research, it cannot expect its students to graduate by doing research work. In this sense, the limited scientifically-produced texts, as an effect of such lack of interest, also affect the perception of difficulty. In finding few models of people who have done and published research studies, it is believed that it is unlikely.

Moreover, as the Universities can create agreements with serious institutions relevant to the development of the Psychology specialty (in its clinical, psychological, organizational, community and other areas), students will be able

to have more contact with the reality, perceive closely the different problems or subject matters that need to be addressed, to be studied and to be researched. Thus, there is available a variety of potential subject matters for research, from which solution alternatives can be derived, and eventually to create new programs or instruments which can be patented by Peruvian psychologists. Otherwise, it is possible that students do not have any ideas relevant to their study, and if any research is done, its results will not address to the country's needs (CONCYTEC, 2016), increasing the gap between the professional practice and the scientific production observed in the Peruvian Psychology. In line with what is manifested by UNESCO (2009), universities should look for research and teaching areas to address such subject matters relevant to people's welfare and, above all, to create firm bases for local science and technology.

A fundamental aspect in this context is the *role of the thesis supervisor/ professor* (Portocarrero and Bielich, 2006; Magaña et al. 2014) since they, first of all, represent the University and have a direct and close relationship with the student. As a thesis supervisor and through their practice and guidance, they can detect and modify the student's belief system content with regard to his/her competence as a researcher. To this end, the thesis supervisor should keep continually updated not only with regard to theoretical content, but also concerning didactic and cooperative strategies to transmit and train his/her students (Sayós, Pagés, Amador and Jorba, 2014; Abadía et al., 2015), so that they transform the class in a teaching-learning community (Roselli, 2016). More importantly, the thesis supervisor should do research projects as they will be able to identify only in the practice those main themes of the process that will be necessary for optimal teaching (García-Gallego, Georgantzís, Martín-Montaner & Pérez-Amaral, 2015).

Also, in relation with the University, its faculty and administrative staff should provide students appropriate guidance on how to do a thesis. Other strategies can be reducing, speeding up and/or simplifying the administrative proceedings involved, as well as continually encouraging to choose this degree award modality. Thus, the student's myths or ideas with regard to

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the thesis ("it is tiresome", "it is complicated", "it requires time", etc.) are corroborated with the reality and are modified.

Likewise, the sociocultural factors have the property of being the root context which supports the other identified factors which influence the student's belief system with regard to himself/herself / in relation to research and, consequently, the decision to do a thesis. As mentioned in the first part of this discussion, these factors are hardly identifiable as it seems that they are very far from the students' reality.

The improvised *education policies and regulations*, a *traditional educational model* and *insufficient research incentive policies,* in general, and psychological research, in particular, incite a *deficient regular basic education*, an *inadequate quality university system,* some oriented to purposes other than education, in which quality and research fall to a secondary priority and it is opted for easy strategies to generate graduated professionals, resulting in a society which does not research and a culture which is not interested in science. These conditions have the potential to influence the university student's belief system and, therefore, the research activity.

As a consequence, scientific research in psychology will be limited as it seems that this type of studies is indifferent. Since, in the study carried out by CONCYTEC (2014), it was observed that the Health science and Psychology areas are disciplines in which there are less students interested in doing research work. Investing in activities related to subsistence economy, oriented to export of raw material (Maguiña-Vargas, 2013) seems to be more important than investing in research activities to improve psychological and social health conditions.

As it can be noticed during the discussion, the transit from the circumstantial and psychological factors which directly affect the participants to the social and cultural factors which operate rather as determinants, evidenced the complex and dynamic nature of this problem as it implies the interaction among systems. Likewise, UNESCO (2010) identifies three levels of ability in the research

process: individual, organizational and systematic, concluding that "in order to develop research ability, governments, and international organizational, and assistance agencies should finance research institutions and individual education (p. 22)".

The authors of this study consider that the changes made by the higher education reform in Peru, in the research field, ordered by New University Law (Law 30220, 2014), do not guarantee an improvement or development of research by itself, it can be rather construed as a requirement to the Universities to have professionals graduated through research work. If such instruction is given separately, without the changes that are necessary in the other factors involved, as indicated in this study, it is likely to commit antithetical research acts like having a thesis done by people or organizations for profit-making, or that the psychology schools in the different universities of Peru lower their quality standards to approve a thesis.

Naturally, it should be noted that the study results represent only the participants' experiences, and, in that sense, the opinions and experiences of students of other universities or regions, or of other actors of the university community, are unknown. In spite of this, the findings obtained will contribute to understanding the studied problem as it is an explanatory approach based on the data. In this sense, it is recommended to compare the obtained models, broaden them or improve them in studies considering different Psychology undergraduate students, in different university contexts, either public or private, from Lima or province, in order to identify and understand the interaction of those factors which influence the student's decision to research, and, consequently, to decide whether to do a thesis or not.

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