

Original article

## Student Empowerment in Learning Assessment and Social Justice in Higher Education

Empoderamiento estudiantil en la Evaluación del aprendizaje y la justicia social en Educación Superior

Empoderamento estudantil na avaliação da aprendizagem e justiça social no ensino superior

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### ABSTRACT

As a result of the 2020 pandemic, an unexpected change occurred in university teaching, which mobilized higher education institutions to make a change in the way in-person teaching was conceived and consequently mobilized institutions towards a new educational paradigm, moving from face-to-face models to hybrid

teaching and learning models with synchronous and asynchronous classes. This study aims to describe and analyze the impact of the implementation of evaluation strategies based on the empowerment and active participation of students. The methodology addressed complies with a qualitative approach with case studies. The results obtained show that the commitment of the students, from an evaluation process, which required them to make decisions, has a positive impact showing their expectations of academic achievement. Therefore, it is concluded that the possibility of generating and agreeing with the evaluation students in accordance with the learning results formally established in the program and the syllabus, promoting social justice at the time of evaluation, having each and every possibility to achieve the expected learning, it mobilized them towards a collective commitment among their peers, as well as the confidence of achieving the expected performances. The possibility of going beyond traditional tests, giving space to the generation of other products or evidence that confirms the achievement of learning implied placing students at the center of their own learning.

**Keywords:** learning; assessment; student empowerment; social justice.

### RESUMEN

A raíz de la pandemia del año 2020, se produce un cambio inesperado en la docencia universitaria, que movilizó a las instituciones de educación superior, a realizar un cambio en la forma cómo se concebía la docencia presencial y en consecuencia movilizó a las instituciones hacia un nuevo paradigma educativo, pasando de modelos presenciales a modelos híbridos de enseñanza y aprendizaje con clases sincrónicas y asincrónicas. Este estudio tiene por objetivo analizar el impacto de la implementación de estrategias de evaluación basadas en el empoderamiento y participación activa de los estudiantes. La metodología abordada cumple con un

enfoque cualitativo con estudios de casos. Los resultados que se obtienen dan cuenta que el compromiso de los estudiantes, desde un proceso de evaluación, que les demandó la toma de decisiones, impacta de manera positiva mostrando sus expectativas del logro académico. Por lo tanto, se concluye que la posibilidad de generar y acordar con los estudiantes de evaluación conforme a los resultados de aprendizaje formalmente establecidos en el programa y el syllabus, promoviendo en ello la justicia social en momento de evaluar, teniendo todos y todas las posibilidades de lograr los aprendizajes esperados, los movilizó hacia un compromiso colectivo entre sus pares, así como también en la confianza de lograr los desempeños esperados. La posibilidad de ir más allá de las pruebas tradicionales dando espacio a la generación de otros productos o evidencias que confirme el logro de aprendizajes implicó situar a los estudiantes en el centro de su propio aprendizaje.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje; evaluación; empoderamiento estudiantil; justicia social.

## RESUMO

Em consequência da pandemia de 2020, ocorreu uma mudança inesperada no ensino universitário, que mobilizou as instituições de ensino superior para uma mudança na forma como o ensino presencial foi concebido e, consequentemente, mobilizou as instituições para um novo paradigma educativo, passando do presencial para o presencial. modelos presenciais até modelos híbridos de ensino e aprendizagem com aulas síncronas e assíncronas. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar o impacto da implementação de estratégias de avaliação baseadas na capacitação e participação ativa dos estudantes. A metodologia abordada obedece a uma abordagem qualitativa com estudos de caso. Os resultados obtidos mostram que o comprometimento dos alunos, a partir de

um processo avaliativo, que exigiu deles a tomada de decisões, tem um impacto positivo mostrando suas expectativas de desempenho acadêmico. Portanto, conclui-se que é possível gerar e pactuar com os alunos avaliados os resultados de aprendizagem formalmente estabelecidos no programa e no plano de estudos, promovendo a justiça social no momento da avaliação, tendo todas e cada uma das possibilidades de alcançar a aprendizagem esperada. , mobilizou-os para um compromisso coletivo entre os seus pares, bem como a confiança para alcançar os desempenhos esperados. A possibilidade de ir além dos testes tradicionais, dando espaço à geração de outros produtos ou evidências que confirmassem o alcance da aprendizagem implicava colocar os alunos no centro da sua própria aprendizagem.

**Palavras-chave:** aprendizagem; avaliação; empoderamento estudiantil; Justiça social.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, there has been an unexpected change in university teaching, which mobilizes higher education institutions, has made a change in the way in-person teaching is conceived and consequently mobilizes institutions towards a new educational paradigm, moving from face-to-face models to hybrid teaching and learning models with synchronous and asynchronous classes.

This new connectivist social constructivist educational model that educational institutions assume deeply impacts both teachers and students. Indeed, the confusion and anguish involved in planning, implementing and evaluating student learning in virtual mode, highlights the need to promote collaborative work between teachers and students, as well as generate and promote resilient pedagogical

leadership within the institutions. educational institutions , promoting co-education in all its expression.

It is precisely in this scenario that the present study addresses student evaluation procedures based on an evaluative model that promotes social justice from the empowerment of students. The concept of social justice challenges all areas and contexts, including education. Indeed, the social justice construct is multidimensional in nature, deepening from the evaluation of student learning regarding the redistribution of power, the active participation of students and decision-making. Referring to social justice in the evaluation of learning is moving towards processes of equity and equal opportunities for all students. In this way, social justice from a commutative and distributive approach requires that there be greater alignment of evaluations with the individual needs of students, with their own idiosyncrasies, origins, and requirements.

Teaching and evaluation are processes that are closely linked to each other, therefore, undoubtedly, what and how we teach determines the way in which we evaluate our students. Indeed, educational evaluation in a context of social justice is one that has the potential to reduce the effects of a set of disadvantages that students may experience due to their lack of social and cultural capital, their economic situation, ethnicity, ability , sex, mother tongue and sexual identity. Therefore, what is expected from the evaluation is that it contributes to better education, and that it effectively addresses issues of social justice.

This approach is based on the assumption that educational evaluation, and particularly learning evaluation, can become critical elements that contribute to increasing, deepening and perpetuating the inequalities of the most vulnerable students, which increases social inequality, ultimately translating into a highly fragmented educational system, as it is currently in Chile. In this way, an unfair

evaluation increases social injustice, inequity, inequality, lack of opportunities, and frustration, since students who have not had privileged conditions due to their social condition are the most affected and vulnerable. at the time of evaluation.

Evaluation is a dynamic and contextualized process, which collects valid and reliable information, to then make informed judgments and subsequently make relevant decisions. However, evaluation has been one of the most critical aspects of teaching work both at the school and higher levels. According to research carried out in recent decades, it is noted that teachers who have inadequate knowledge of classroom-level assessment or measurement for accountability to the system, in turn have less effectiveness in their teaching practices, which results in lower quality learning in its students. (Förster, 2017).

In the same way, research regarding evaluation has been generating a more precise conceptualization of it in educational contexts. This is how some authors such as Heitink, Van der Kleij, Veldkamp, Schildkamp and Kippers (2015) specify that evaluation in a learning context must focus on evaluation for learning and evaluation as learning, where both concepts express the need to offer greater usefulness to evaluation based on of learning, redirecting evaluation from the search for evidence on the achievement of learning, towards evaluation as an instance of learning itself, therefore, encouraging it to become a resource for learning and not an end of it.

It is precisely from this approach that the concept of learning evaluation, according to the times, has been varying over time. The authors Deneen and Brown (2016) and Förster (2017) identify three temporal stages of this concept: in the first, prior to the 90s, teachers' conception of evaluation was mainly directed towards educational measurement, focusing, therefore, in a learning evaluation. A second stage, recognized between the 90s

and the beginning of the 21st century, the conception of the teaching staff was oriented towards an evaluation for learning, providing a balance between formative and summative evaluation, but with a clear negative predisposition towards the latter. Finally, the authors identify a third stage, currently represented, where teachers rescue elements from the two previous stages, understanding it as evaluation of and for learning, but which requires high literacy in evaluation, that is, high mastery. and evaluation knowledge, which would impact efficient and quality pedagogical practices.

The impact of assessment on students in the long term; reveals the importance of evaluation activities, the promotion of self- and co-evaluation, along with the active participation of students in peer feedback processes; For his part, Whitelock (2010) refers to the need to add the use of virtual platforms to the evaluation processes. In this way, the theoretical references that cover the student evaluation processes show some contributions, but there is incipient information on how students perceive the interaction between the different components of the evaluation.

For their part, Rodríguez-Gómez and Ibarra- Sáiz (2015) approach evaluation as a learning and empowerment approach, which refers to three challenges that evaluation must consider, namely: student participation, feedback effectiveness and the quality of evaluation activities and tasks, emphasizing ten principles and statements that guide and regulate evaluation, with actions that collaborate in teaching action.

All in all, research suggests that participation should be used throughout a course to empower students and therefore improve their ability to shape their own learning experiences ( Baron and Corbin , 2012). Based on the contributions of Freire (2012), we conceive empowerment as the opportunity to encourage discussion, reflection, and actions with transformative potential that require the active

participation of students (Fangfang and Hoben 2020).

Specifically, from the context of assessment, empowerment is conceived as "students sharing, if they wish, in decisions about assessment" (Leach, Neutze, and Zepke 2001, 293). Empowerment in evaluation requires enabling spaces that allow students, as individuals and as social beings, separately and in groups, to take control and value their work and that of their classmates, debate and criticize the evaluation system and be able to suggest and negotiate different evaluation practices.

According to the approaches of Wandersman, Snell-Johns, Lentz, Fetterman, Keener, Livet, Imm, and Flaspohler (2005), empowerment-based evaluation is an evaluation approach that aims to increase the probability of achieving success in the proposed task, since it provides students with precisions and tools, such as the rubric so that students can make decisions and organize themselves with the purpose of meeting the proposed challenges.

Empowerment in evaluation involves working with critical and reflective students regarding their learning process, becoming an active actor. Taberneiro (2015) points out that by empowering themselves with the evaluation process, the student body is able to establish and understand the objectives, develop a plan to achieve them, use strategies and evaluate them, thus promoting autonomy and personal development.

This approach generates that both teachers and students are responsible for learning and evaluation, as well as rethinking the evaluation process, moving from a traditional evaluation to one that incorporates other agents.

This is an evaluation for transformative empowerment, Fetterman (2015), who highlights the psychological, social and

political power of liberation, where students were able to make decisions about how to organize themselves, what is the best technological tool or tools to use, which script they will formalize in the case of the requested evidence, be it multimedia, videos, infographics, graphic organizers; what is the order of participation between them; The decisions were made jointly and democratically in accordance with the evidence requested from the evaluative point of view. In this way, students problematize and propose changes, taking responsibility for their process and that of their classmates.

This approach implies that students acquire a series of skills that allow them to have autonomous learning and a self-regulation process, through evaluation.

According to Taberneck (2015), evaluation from an empowerment approach implies that teachers delegate responsibilities for their evaluation to students. This is how students are given power and authority to feel owners of their own work, which will allow them to achieve the goals and objectives they have set and recognize the weaknesses they have presented. To achieve this, it is essential to develop effective feedback throughout the process.

This implies that the teacher begins to leave their heteroevaluative practices and begin to incorporate self-assessment and peer-assessment processes, as well as collaborative evaluations. This allows, through interpersonal relationships, learning to deepen, as Úcar (2014) says, "people learn with others and through others, who can become mediators of our learning" (pp. 16).

Empowering students means that they are given a set of tools to improve their capabilities (Asunción, S. 2019). Teachers must give the spotlight and time to the students, thus promoting more participatory contexts. According to what was pointed out by Morales, M., Balcazar, C., Priego, H., and Flores, J. (2021), it has been shown that students learn more when

they develop reasoning and problematize situations close to their context. This allows us to strengthen relationships between teachers and students, since the latter feel confident to express their opinion regarding their learning and evaluation process.

The empowerment of students generates, on the one hand, processes of autonomy and freedom, which, explained from the theory of self-determination (SDT), implies the need to feel that they can choose and implement their own strategies, also assuming the consequences of these decisions, and on the other hand, promoting collaborative work, generates links between them, promoting mutual care and affection (Stover, J., Bruno, F., Uriel, F. and Fernández, M., 2017).

In this paradigm shift, the conception of evaluation has implied the incorporation of new evaluative agents in the process, focused on an evaluation for learning and how learning, integrating students as active participants in their own learning and evaluation, being responsible, developing metacognitive skills and the need to implement a dialogic and collaborative model (Förster, 2017).

In the present study, the evaluation of the students is articulated as one of the components of the Educational Model (EM) of the University of the Americas (UDLA), in its pedagogical dimension, particularly with regard to the evaluation of the student learning results, considering conceptual, procedural and attitudinal aspects.

Indeed, as established in the ME of UDLA, it is necessary for the teaching staff to consider, for the implementation of the curricular design by Learning Results (RA), processes of reflection, planning and implementation of a set of strategies and evaluative procedures, that objectively account for the results of student learning and achievements.



The study carried out aims to analyze the impact of the implementation of evaluation strategies based on the empowerment and active participation of students.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research is assumed from an intrinsic case study, following the postulate of Sandín (2003), with the purpose of describing the implementation of collaborative evaluation processes and based on the empowerment of students where social justice is protected in the evaluation process. Stop this, through inquiry and deepening from the perception of the undergraduate students of Pedagogy in the Differential Education career at the University of the Americas.

The sample was intentional and was made up of eight first-year students, second semester of school, who agreed to participate and who were part of the subject of Sociocultural Fundamentals of Education EDU117 with four credits, in which education and its sociocultural context ; sociological theories of education; contexts and challenges of education today and the Chilean educational system . The students expressed their opinions voluntarily, freely and in a relaxed manner, being able to intervene and express their ideas whenever they required, their contributions were explained to them and their contributions were requested in a context of continuous improvement of the subject and their opinions were not were binding to the results reflected in their academic performance, it was explained to them that they did not expose potential risks, since none of the three questions asked to the students caused them any discomfort, rejection or unnecessary risks, in terms of the potential benefits. of the study, the opinions expressed by the students made it possible to transfer them to the educational practices of the subject corresponding to the first semester of the 2022 academic period.

However, with the purpose of going deeper into the study, and into the collaborative evaluation procedures implemented in the subject, which considers four Learning Units (UA), namely:

- Epistemological foundations of education.
- Contemporary pedagogical theories.
- New conceptions and approaches to learning.
- Current educational system.

Nine learning outcomes (RA) established in the subject were taken into consideration, as indicated:

- RAA1: Identify the relationships that the educational phenomenon has with culture and society, the current development of education and its local manifestation for the Chilean case, with theoretical premises that allow the analysis of its development, current situation and future challenges.
- RAA2 Identify the main concepts used to define society, culture and education.
- RAA3 Describe the main sociological theoretical postulates of education.
- RAA4 Identify the main links between society, culture and education, from various sociological approaches.
- RAA5 Describe the main social milestones in the historical evolution of education.
- RAA6 Describe the context of current global and national society, with the challenges it poses to education.
- RAA7 Identify the main components of the new educational challenges.
- RAA8 Classify the main historical and political pillars that strengthen the Chilean educational system.

- RAA9 Characterize the current state of the national educational system and its challenges in the short and medium term, identifying its problems under theoretical support and practical cases.

Regarding the collaborative evaluation procedures implemented in accordance with the UA and RA, the following should be noted:

- Exercise 1: UA1: RAA1, RAA2, RAA3.
- Exercise 2: UA2: RAA4.
- Exercise 3: UA4: RAA7, RAA8, RAA9.
- Chair 1: UA1, 2: RAA1, RAA2, RAA3, RAA4, RAA5.
- Chair 2: UA3, 4: RAA6, RAA7, RAA8, RAA9.
- Exam:UA1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9: RAA1, RAA2, RAA3, RAA4, RAA5, RAA6, RAA7, RAA8, RAA9.

The data collection was carried out in the month of May of this year and for this, the ALEQ Questionnaire - Evaluation Climate as learning and empowerment in Higher Education by Ibarra- Sáiz, María Soledad, & Rodríguez-Gómez was applied in the first instance, Gregorio EVAL for Research Group (SEJ509) Evaluation & Assessment in Training Contexts, considering dimension number five and six referring to student empowerment in evaluation processes.

This dimension considers ten structured questions distributed in two dimensions, namely, with a Likert scale of five options:

- 1: Strongly disagree
- 2: Disagree
- 3: Okay
- 4: Strongly agree
- 0: Not applicable

Along with this, an individual interview was used, with six initial guiding questions directed at the students, using the Google digital forms. The students expressed their opinions voluntarily, freely and in a relaxed manner, being able to intervene and express their ideas whenever they required, their contributions were explained to them and their contributions were requested in a context of continuous improvement of the subject and their opinions were not were binding to the results reflected in their academic performance.

The qualitative information collected through the interviews with the students was transferred literally, the analysis was carried out from an inductive approach, through the constant comparison method Glaser and Strauss (1967), using qualitative analysis software. Atlas T, following the proposal of Huberman and Miles (1994), safeguarding the criteria of credibility, transferability and confirmability.

In addition to sending the five questions to the students through Google Forms , some open questions were incorporated, as indicated below: the following statement was sent to the students through the application of

Based on the evaluation procedures implemented in the subject. You:

- Have you been able to enhance your problem-solving skills?
- Has your self-confidence increased?
- Have you expanded your capacity for self-determination within your academic field?
- Have teachers reviewed your work and activities and given you feedback to help you learn better and make appropriate decisions for better learning?

- How has the implementation of evaluation strategies where you actively participate, become empowered by the evaluation processes, work with other colleagues, make decisions regarding the achievement of your learning impacted your learning?
- Do you consider that the evaluation processes implemented have been fair?

## RESULTS

The subject (EDU117) under study considered the implementation of three applied exercises with a relative weight of 20%, two lectures with a relative weight of 30% and a subject completion exam with a relative weight of 30%. Of the descriptive aspects of each evaluation strategy, as established by the Academic Coordination of the subject, details are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1-** Evaluation strategies implemented in the Educational Theory subject

	development of between 3 to 5 questions (60 to 70% of the evaluation), and item 2 of application (30 to 40% of the evaluation). The integration of cases must be sought.
Chair 2	Individual written lecture with 2 items: item 1 of development of between 3 to 5 questions (60 to 70% of the evaluation), and item 2 of application (30 to 40% of the evaluation). The integration of cases must be sought.
Exam	Individual written exam, possible to work in pairs in the current context, with 2 items: item 1 of development of between 3 to 5 questions (60 to 70% of the evaluation), and item 2 of application (30 to 40% of the assessment). The focus is the application of what was seen in the course, through resolution or analysis cases where the key elements seen in the course are applied.

Source : Own elaboration, (2022)

Evaluation strategy	Descriptor
Exercises 1, 2 and 3	Collaborative work, formalization of glossaries of terms, analysis and synthesis of the most relevant aspects of suggested reading and case studies. Exercise 1 pays taxes to chair 1, exercise two pays taxes to chair 2 and exercise 3 consolidates and pays taxes for the exam. Preparation of 10 structured-based questions and 5 developmental questions, of which three structured-based and one developmental questions would be considered in classes 1 and 2 respectively.
Chair 1	Individual written lecture with 2 items: item 1 of

Each of the evaluation strategies was developed from the respective tables of specifications and rubrics that were delivered to the students, who worked in groups and collaboratively, organizing themselves by personal affinities and motivations.

From the quantitative analysis of the responses given by the students, it can be noted, as illustrated in Table 2, that the average of the responses shows that all the indicators are above the average of 3.5, that is, towards the positive direction. agree and strongly agree with the statement. For their part, according to the decisional criteria and the average achieved, the students recognize that through the evaluation they have been able to enhance their problem-solving skills; They have increased their self-confidence



and developed as people; they have expanded their capacity for self-determination; Their teachers have reviewed their work and activities, as well as being able to jointly review the work and evaluation results with their classmates; They have managed, with the help of the teachers, their classmates and their own actions, to identify their errors in the evaluation; They have had access to all evaluation instruments and procedures, in addition to evaluation guidelines through analytical rubrics.

**Table 2-** Average responses to the empowerment dimension of the ALEQ Questionnaire

Empowerment Dimension	Average of responses
I have been able to enhance my problem-solving skills.	3.7
I have increased my self-confidence.	3.7
I have increased my ability to learn and develop as a person.	3.8
I have expanded my capacity for self-determination within my academic and extra-academic life.	3.6
Teachers have reviewed my work and activities and provided feedback to help me learn and improve	3.8
The review by my colleagues of my work and activities has helped me improve my work and my learning.	3.6
I have received information from my teachers and classmates that has helped my progress and results.	3.6
I have had access to all the evaluation instruments (scoring criteria, rubrics, etc.) before conducting the evaluations and this has been very valuable.	4
The mistakes that my colleagues and I have made have helped me improve my work and learning.	3.6
I have marked my own work and that of my classmates using the assessment criteria and	3.6

guidelines, which were available in advance.	
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Source : Own elaboration, (2022)

From the interview carried out with the students during one of the class sessions of the subject, with those students who voluntarily participated, three large descriptive categories of analysis and 28 units of meaning emerge, namely, as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3-** Descriptive Categories of Analysis

Descriptive Categories	Description	Number of Units of meanings
Category 1: Implementation and impact of collaborative evaluation processes.	This category refers to the perception that students have regarding the impact on their learning when incorporating collaborative evaluation processes with their peers.	12
Category 2: Empowerment	This category refers to the perception that students have regarding active participation in the design, implementation and suggestions regarding how to approach the evaluation processes of their learning.	10
Category 3: Social justice	This category refers to the perception that students have regarding the objective, transparent and fair nature of the learning evaluation processes that	6

	were implemented in the subject.	
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Source : Own elaboration, (2022)

### Category 1: Implementation and impact of collaborative evaluation processes

*"... in the collaborative evaluation. I found it interesting to be able to argue my answers and based on this agree on a score and then a grade ."*

*"... by considering from a new perspective, how to construct assessments in a way that is constructive and primarily beneficial for students ."*

*"... There is an environment of trust that allows the resolution of doubts and analysis of cases ..."*

*"... being able to organize ourselves as a group, decide how we face the evaluation, distribute tasks and deadlines seems very good to me..."*

*"...taking charge of the process helped me lower my anxiety levels regarding the evaluation, above all..."*

### Category 2 : Empowerment

*"...they facilitated my own understanding, I quite liked the way the course was constructed..."*

*"...yes, from the teacher and assistant. They give real and close examples. They answer questions in a timely manner..."*

*"...yes we have had, they have allowed us to deepen the learning, by testing and having an opportunity to correct, improve, one ends up understanding much better..."*

### Category 3 : Social justice

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained, the findings of Gómez and Quezada (2020) can be confirmed regarding the need for greater student participation, which promotes autonomy and responsibility. This, without a doubt, mobilizes more inclusive, empowered and democratic evaluative processes, as stated by Segura (2018). Giving students the possibility to make value judgments and commit to their own learning through self-assessment promotes lifelong learning, as pointed out by Tai, *et.al*, (2018).

The incorporation of new evaluative agents, mainly the students, assumes an active role in their own learning and evaluation, confirming the findings of Förster (2017), in terms of a greater feeling of responsibility for their learning and, in turn, greater progress in the same.

Vicarioli (2019) are confirmed, regarding the impact on the modification of roles in the evaluation process, which causes the students to become empowered, not only becoming an active actor, but developing the self-regulation of their learning. Both individually and in groups, they will be able to assess their own work, question evaluation practices and offer alternatives different from those proposed by Ibarra-Sáiz, *et al.*, (2020).

The need for students to have a clear learning path is confirmed, as well as objectivity in the evaluation processes and

what is expected of them according to Förster (2017) and Ruíz (2019).

It can be concluded that there is a need to continue delving into evaluation procedures with a transformational approach. Participatory and where student empowerment is promoted, catalyzing processes that allow students to self-regulate their own learning through evaluation, the challenge is not minor since in higher education traditional evaluation procedures persist where the role, power and Legitimation lies in the teachers.

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The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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The author participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.

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