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LA INSPECCIÓN EDUCATIVA EN LAS TESIS DOCTORALES ESPAÑOLAS (1988-2024): ESTUDIO BIBLIOMÉTRICO DESCRIPTIVO

EDUCATIONAL INSPECTION IN SPANISH DOCTORAL THESES (1988-2024): A DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY

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Resumen

Las tesis doctorales constituyen un indicador de la actividad investigadora en las universidades y permiten identificar la evolución, los actores y las líneas temáticas de un campo de conocimiento. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar la producción de tesis doctorales españolas cuyo objeto principal es la inspección educativa. Se

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realizaron búsquedas en la base de datos TESEO, obteniéndose inicialmente 48 registros. La lectura de los textos completos permitió conformar un corpus final de 19 tesis directamente relacionadas con el objeto de estudio. Se realizó un análisis descriptivo de la evolución temporal, de las universidades productoras, de la titularidad institucional, del sexo de autores y participantes en la dirección y en los tribunales, así como una categorización temática. Los resultados muestran una producción reducida y discontinua entre 1988 y 2024, concentrada en universidades públicas, con predominio masculino en la autoría y la dirección. Las líneas más frecuentes se refieren a la historia y la configuración institucional de la inspección, así como a sus funciones, a su práctica profesional y a sus modelos de actuación. Se concluye que la investigación doctoral sobre inspección educativa presenta un desarrollo limitado, aunque se observa una progresiva diversificación hacia la profesionalización, las competencias, el género, la supervisión y la digitalización.

Palabras clave: *inspección educativa; tesis doctoral; bibliometría descriptiva; TESEO*

Abstract

Doctoral theses are an important indicator of research activity within universities and provide valuable insights into the evolution, key contributors, and thematic trends of a given field of knowledge. The aim of this study is to analyse the production of Spanish doctoral theses whose primary focus is educational inspection. A search was conducted in the TESEO database, initially retrieving 48 records. After examining the full texts, a final corpus of 19 theses directly related to the topic was identified. A descriptive bibliometric analysis was carried out, considering temporal trends, degree-awarding universities, type of university (publico or private), the sex of

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authors, supervisors, and examination committee members, as well as the thematic classification of the theses. The results reveal a limited and discontinuous research output between 1988 and 2024, concentrated mainly in public universities and characterised by a predominance of male authors and supervisors. The most common research topics concern the history and institutional development of educational inspection, together with its functions, professional practice, and models of action. The findings suggest that doctoral research on educational inspection remains limited, although an increasing diversification can be observed in recent years, particularly in relation to professionalisation, professional competences, gender, supervision, and digitalisation.

Keywords: *educational inspection; doctoral theses; descriptive bibliometrics; TESEO*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific output is one of the main indicators of research activity within universities. Alongside scientific articles, doctoral theses represent an essential output of the research system, as they reflect the generation of new knowledge, the training of researchers and the established lines of research within each discipline (Delgado et al., 2006; Mochón-Bezares & Sorli-Rojo, 2020). In this respect, the analysis of doctoral theses provides insight into the evolution of a scientific field, makes it possible to identify the most active research groups and institutions, and reveals the main research trends (Repiso et al., 2013). Furthermore, as Turner (2000) points out, doctoral theses provide a means for new researchers to enter a scientific community, fostering the development of academic networks and the continuity of particular lines of research.

Over recent decades, numerous bibliometric studies have examined Spanish doctoral theses across a range of disciplines, including medicine (Fernández-Guerrero, 2015), psychology (Agudelo et al., 2003; Olmedilla et al., 2017), economics (Bernad-Morcate et al., 2025; Ortega, 2010) and the humanities (Salgado-Orellana et al., 2021). In the field of education, several studies have also been published, both general in scope (Ferreira, 2020; Moreno-Fernández & Moreno-Crespo, 2016) and focusing on specific areas, such as mathematics education (Fernández-Cano et al., 2003), tutoring (López-Gómez, 2016), inclusive education (Suárez Lantarón & López Medialdea, 2018), gifted education (Padial & Fernández-Cano, 2019), vocational education and training (Torres Sánchez et al., 2025), and international large-scale assessments such as PISA (González-Mayorga et al., 2023).

Educational inspection is a key component of contemporary education systems, performing functions related to supervision, evaluation, advisory support and ensuring compliance with educational regulations. Although these functions vary

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across countries, there is broad agreement that inspection can improve educational quality and support schools (De Grauwe, 2007; Ehren & Visscher, 2008; Rodríguez Muñoz, 2025). In recent decades, educational inspection has undergone significant transformations as a result of administrative decentralisation, the development of evaluation systems, accountability, school autonomy and the continuous improvement of educational institutions (Casanova, 2015; Estefanía Lera, 2021; Gómez Muñoz, 2022; Tébar Cuesta, 2025a, 2025b). Consequently, research on educational inspection has broadened its scope to encompass issues related to leadership, pedagogical supervision, institutional evaluation, inspectors' professional development and the governance of education systems, as well as the presence of educational inspection in scientific output (Castán Esteban, 2021; Moreno Guerrero, 2019; Moreno Guerrero et al., 2020). Nevertheless, no bibliometric studies have analysed Spanish doctoral theses on this topic. This gap makes it difficult to determine how the field has evolved, which universities drive the most research activity, what its main thematic strands are, and the characteristics of those involved in this scientific output.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to analyse Spanish doctoral theses related to educational inspection and recorded in the TESEO database using descriptive bibliometric indicators, with particular attention to temporal trends, degree-awarding universities, authorship and supervision characteristics, the composition of examination committees, and the main thematic strands.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and longitudinal bibliometric approach to analyse Spanish doctoral research on educational inspection through indicators of research output, institutional distribution, authorship and thematic content. The main

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source of information was the TESEO database[1], managed by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, which constitutes the main official repository of doctoral theses defended at Spanish universities. Although several authors have identified certain limitations of this database, such as the lack of standardisation in some fields and differences in the way information is entered by universities (Delgado et al., 2006; González-Mayorga et al., 2023), it remains the principal reference source for bibliometric studies of Spanish doctoral theses. Nevertheless, the Dialnet Tesis database[2], which also contains information on doctoral theses defended in Spain, was used to complete data missing from TESEO records.

Records were retrieved through advanced searches of the title and abstract fields using the following search terms: "inspección educativa" (33 records), "inspección en educación" (9 records), "inspector en educación" (8 records), "inspección escolar" (6 records), "inspectora en educación" (0 records), "inspector educativo" (0 records) and "inspectora educativa" (0 records). These searches were conducted on 2 and 3 July 2026. After combining the results and removing duplicates, we obtained an initial set of 48 doctoral theses.

The content of each thesis was subsequently reviewed by reading the full text whenever available or, otherwise, the abstract provided in TESEO or in the institutional repositories of the respective universities. The inclusion criterion required educational inspection, educational supervision or the inspection function to constitute the primary focus of the research. Theses in which inspection appeared solely as a contextual element, documentary source, regulatory reference or secondary actor within the study were therefore excluded. Following this selection process, the final

[1] TESEO: https://aplicaciones.ciencia.gob.es/teseo/#/home
[2] Dialnet Tesis: https://dialnet.unirioja.es/tesis

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corpus comprised 19 doctoral theses, whose full bibliographic references are provided in Appendix I.

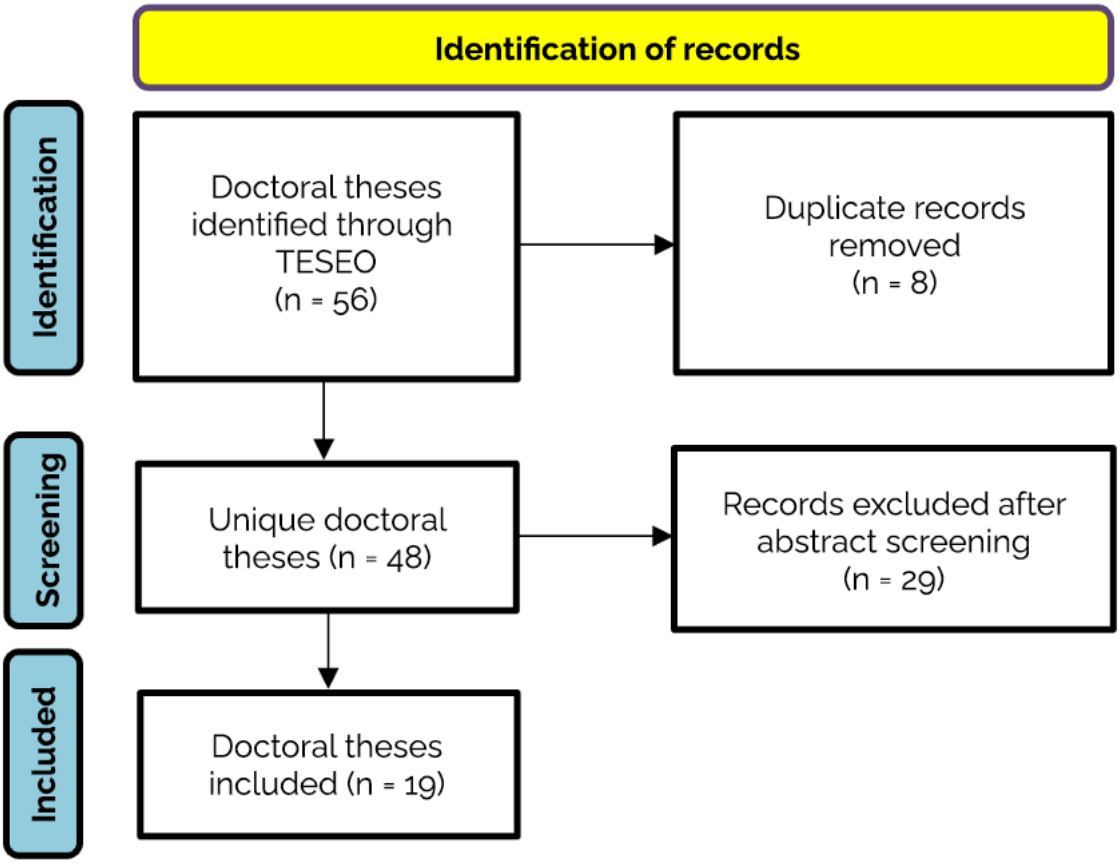
Figure 1 presents the flow diagram of the selection process for the corpus of doctoral theses included in the study.

Figure 1.

Flow diagram of the doctoral thesis selection process

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For each selected thesis, a database was created in Microsoft Excel containing the following variables: year of defence, university, type of university (public or private), authorship, thesis supervision, number of supervisors, sex of the author, sex of the supervisors, composition of the examination committee (chair, secretary and committee members), sex of the examination committee members, international distinction and thematic category of the doctoral thesis. The complete dataset is available in the Zenodo research data repository (González-Mayorga, 2026), thereby complying with the provisions of Article 37.2 of Law 17/2022 of 5th September, amending Law 14/2011 of 1st June on Science, Technology and Innovation.

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The thematic classification of the theses was conducted through content analysis of their titles, abstracts, and, where necessary, full texts to determine the primary focus of the research. This process produced seven mutually exclusive thematic categories, defined according to the principles of exhaustiveness and exclusivity (Bardin, 2002), so each thesis was assigned to a single thematic category corresponding to the predominant focus of the research. The categories identified were:

- History and institutional development: includes research focusing on the historical evolution of educational inspection, its regulatory development, institutional organisation, and the role it has played at different stages of the education system.
- Functions, practice, advisory support and inspection models: encompasses theses analysing the functions attributed to educational inspection, models of intervention, inspectors' professional practice, and advisory and support activities provided to schools.
- Profession, competences and training: comprises research addressing the professional development of educational inspection, the professionalisation of the inspection function, the competences required for its performance, and inspectors' initial and continuing training.
- Supervision and pedagogical improvement: includes studies examining the supervision of teaching and learning processes, educational guidance, and the contribution of inspection to improving teaching practice and schools.
- Legal framework and education policy: comprises theses focusing on the regulatory framework governing educational inspection, its legal regulation, and the analysis of education policies related to the inspection function.

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- Comparative and international inspection: includes research analysing educational inspection from a comparative perspective across countries or education systems, as well as research with an international focus.
- Gender and equality: encompasses studies addressing educational inspection from the perspectives of gender, equal opportunities, and the participation of women and men in the inspection function.

Finally, the data were analysed using descriptive statistics (absolute frequencies, percentages and temporal distribution). Flourish produced the figures, except for the PRISMA flow diagram presented above. Given the small size of the corpus and the aims of the study, neither bibliometric analyses of author productivity nor collaboration network analyses were conducted.

3. RESULTS

3.1. TEMPORAL EVOLUTION OF DOCTORAL THESIS OUTPUT ON EDUCATIONAL INSPECTION

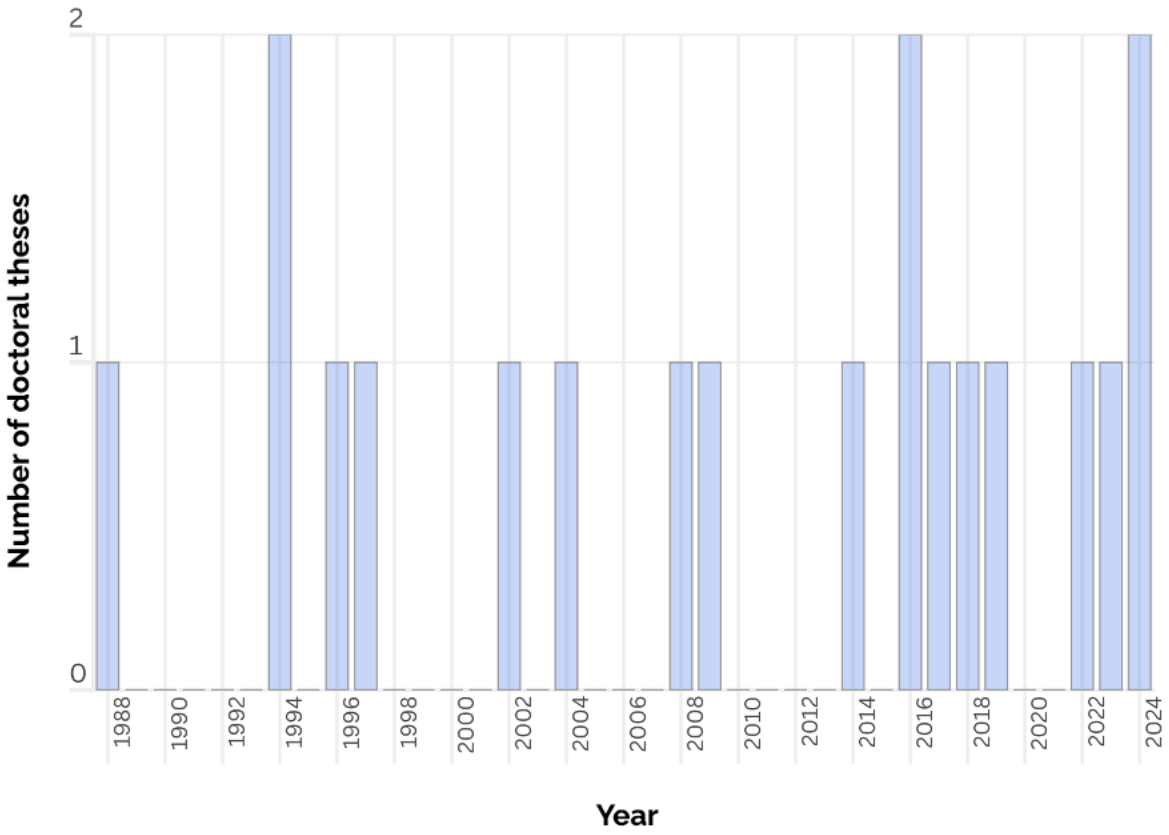
Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the final corpus comprised 19 doctoral theses defended at Spanish universities between 1988 and 2024. Figure 2 shows the annual evolution of this output.

Figure 2.

Evolution of doctoral theses on educational inspection (1988-2024)

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Research on educational inspection through doctoral theses remained quantitatively limited throughout the period analysed. Between 1988 and 2024, an average of 0.53 theses were defended per year, indicating that this field of research remains relatively underdeveloped within the Spanish university context. Furthermore, the temporal distribution of the theses was discontinuous, with years in which one or more theses were defended alternating with periods in which no theses were recorded.

During the first two decades analysed, research output was particularly limited and consisted mainly of isolated studies. From the 2010s onwards, doctoral thesis completion shows greater continuity. However, this increase does not indicate a

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sustained growth trend, but rather a moderate consolidation of research interest in educational inspection.

To facilitate the interpretation of temporal trends, the study period was divided into four chronological intervals (Table 1). The largest number of theses corresponds to the 2010–2019 period, followed by 2020–2024, whereas the previous decades show considerably lower levels of research output. Overall, these findings indicate that doctoral research on educational inspection has developed slowly and progressively, without yet reaching the level of consolidation observed in other areas of educational research.

Table 1.

Distribution of doctoral theses by period

Period	No. of doctoral theses	%
1988-1999	5	26.3
2000-2009	4	21.1
2010-2019	6	31.6
2020-2024	4	21.1
Total	**19**	**100**

3.2. SPANISH UNIVERSITIES AWARDING DOCTORAL DEGREES ON EDUCATIONAL INSPECTION

The 19 doctoral theses in the corpus were defended at twelve Spanish universities, indicating considerable institutional dispersion in research on educational inspection. However, research output was uneven: only five universities produced more than one doctoral thesis, while each of the remaining institutions contributed a single thesis.

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As shown in Table 2, the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid recorded the highest output, with three doctoral theses each, followed by the Universidad de Barcelona, the Universidad de Jaén and the Universidad de La Laguna, with two theses each. Together, these five universities accounted for 63.2% of doctoral thesis output, while each of the remaining institutions was represented by a single thesis.

Table 2.

Universities awarding the doctoral degrees[3]

University	No. of doctoral theses	%
UNED	3	15.8
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	3	15.8
Universidad de Barcelona	2	10.5
Universidad de Jaén	2	10.5
Universidad de La Laguna	2	10.5
Universidad Complutense de Madrid	1	5.3
Universidad de A Coruña	1	5.3
Universidad de Córdoba	1	5.3
Universidad de Deusto	1	5.3
Universidad de Santiago de Compostela	1	5.3
Universidad de Zaragoza	1	5.3
Universitat de València (Estudi General)	1	5.3
Total	**19**	**100**

[3] The names of the universities are those listed in the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities: https://www.educacion.gob.es/ruct

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Regarding institutional status, almost all the theses were defended at public universities, with only one being defended at a private university. This distribution is consistent with the historically prominent role of public universities in doctoral training and educational research in Spain.

3.3. DISTRIBUTION BY SEX OF AUTHORS, SUPERVISORS AND EXAMINATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The 19 doctoral theses analysed were written by 15 men (78.9%) and four women (21.1%), revealing a clear predominance of male authors in research on educational inspection during the period analysed. A similar distribution was observed among thesis supervisors, with men accounting for the majority (n = 18, 72%). Furthermore, most theses were supervised by a single person (n = 13, 68.4%), while co-supervision was less common.

The composition of examination committees likewise shows a greater presence of men, although differences can be observed by role (Table 3). Examination committees were predominantly chaired by men (17 of 19; 89.5%), while women chaired only two committees (10.5%). Male representation was also predominant among committee members, with 30 men (73.2%) and 11 women (26.8%).

Table 3.

Distribution by sex of authors, supervisors and examination committee members

Variable	Men	Women	Total
Authorship	15	4	19
Supervision	18	7	25
Examination committee chair	17	2	19
Examination committee secretary	8	11	19

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Examination committee member	30	11	41

The only exception to this pattern was found among examination committee secretaries, where female participation exceeded male participation. Eleven women (57.9%) and eight men (42.1%) served in this role, making it the only area in which women were more highly represented.

These findings reveal an unequal distribution of men and women in the production and evaluation of doctoral theses on educational inspection, with notable differences by role within the doctoral process.

3.4. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DOCTORAL THESES

The thematic classification of the 19 doctoral theses identified seven broad lines of research, reflecting the evolution of scholarly interests surrounding educational inspection (Table 4). Despite some diversity of approaches, most research output concentrated in three areas: the history and institutional development of educational inspection; inspection functions and professional practice; and the study of the profession, competences, and training of inspectors.

Table 4.

Thematic distribution of doctoral theses on educational inspection

Thematic category	No. of doctoral theses	%
History and institutional development	5	26.3
Functions, practice, advisory support and inspection models	5	26.3
Profession, competences and training	4	21.1
Supervision and pedagogical improvement	2	10.5

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Legal framework and education policy	1	5.3
Comparative and international inspection	1	5.3
Gender and equality	1	5.3
Total	**19**	**100**

The most prominent categories were history and institutional development and functions, practice, advisory support and inspection models, with five doctoral theses each. The former examine the historical evolution of the institution, its regulatory and organisational development, and the transformations undergone by the inspection function during different periods of the Spanish education system. The latter address aspects relating to the performance of the inspection function, models of intervention, advisory support for schools and the professional practice of inspection services. The prominence of these categories highlights interest in both the historical reconstruction of inspection and its role in shaping educational administration, and the analysis of professional practice and the functions performed by inspection services within education systems.

The third most prominent thematic strand, profession, competences and training, comprised four doctoral theses. These studies focus on the professionalisation of educational inspection, the competence profile required to perform the inspection function, and processes of initial and continuing training, reflecting a growing concern with the professional development of inspectors.

The remaining categories were less frequently represented. Supervision and pedagogical improvement comprised two doctoral theses, while legal framework and education policy, comparative and international inspection, and gender and equality each had a single thesis. Despite their lower quantitative weight, these strands show the field gradually broadening toward legal, comparative, and social perspectives, incorporating new approaches into the traditional study of educational inspection.

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Overall, the thematic distribution shows that doctoral research on educational inspection has evolved from a focus on the institution and its functions to greater attention to the professional dimension of inspection and to emerging challenges arising from educational improvement, the internationalisation of education systems, and social transformations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To the best of our knowledge, this study constitutes the first descriptive bibliometric analysis of Spanish doctoral theses whose primary focus is educational inspection. The findings provide an overall picture of the development of this field of research, the institutions where it has been conducted, the characteristics of those involved in producing and evaluating doctoral theses, and the main thematic strands addressed.

First, the small number of doctoral theses identified indicates that educational inspection has occupied a relatively limited position as a specific research topic within Spanish universities. Unlike other areas of Educational Sciences, doctoral research on this topic has been scarce and its development has been characterised by slow and discontinuous growth. Although greater continuity in the completion of doctoral theses can be observed over the past decade, the data do not yet support the conclusion that this constitutes a fully consolidated field of research.

From an institutional perspective, doctoral thesis output is notably dispersed across Spanish universities. Although some institutions account for a larger number of theses, research is distributed across a broad range of universities, with no small group of institutions clearly leading this line of research. This distribution suggests that research on educational inspection has largely depended on initiatives promoted by individual researchers or specific research groups, rather than on established lines of

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research devoted to this field. Furthermore, the clear predominance of public universities confirms the role they continue to play in doctoral training and in developing educational research in Spain.

Regarding thesis authorship and supervision, the greater presence of men likely reflects the historical composition of both the educational inspection profession and the university academic staff associated with this line of research during much of the period analysed. Nevertheless, the steady increase in women's participation as thesis authors and, particularly, their greater presence in certain areas of academic evaluation, such as serving as secretaries of examination committees, suggests a move toward greater balance that may continue in the coming years.

Thematically, the findings reflect a development consistent with the transformation of educational inspection itself. Early research focused mainly on the institution's history, its regulatory and administrative development, and the traditional functions of inspection. More recent theses, however, incorporate new research topics related to professionalisation, inspectors' competences, supervision and pedagogical improvement, advisory support for schools, gender equality and digital transformation. This development reflects a shift from a predominantly administrative conception of inspection to one in which support, evaluation, advisory, and educational improvement functions have gained greater prominence.

Overall, the findings indicate that doctoral research on educational inspection has evolved in parallel with the changes the institution has undergone in recent decades. Although it remains a relatively small field of research, the progressive diversification of its thematic scope demonstrates growing interest in examining educational inspection from increasingly broad perspectives aligned with the current challenges facing education systems.

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This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. Using the TESEO database entails accepting limitations arising from the coverage and standardisation of its records, and the search strategy may have omitted theses in which educational inspection was a relevant element but was not explicitly mentioned in the title or abstract. In particular, the use in some records of terms conceptually related to educational inspection but not included in the search strategy—such as "supervisión educativa" or "supervisión escolar"—may have resulted in the non-retrieval of theses directly related to the topic under study. Expanding the search terms could therefore increase the comprehensiveness of future studies. Furthermore, although the thematic classification followed systematic content analysis criteria (Bardin, 2002), any categorisation process inevitably involves some degree of researcher interpretation. Nevertheless, reviewing the full texts where necessary helped to minimise this risk and strengthen the consistency of the thematic classification process.

Finally, this study seeks to contribute to understanding the scientific development of educational inspection in Spain and to provide a reference point for future research. In this regard, it would be valuable to extend the analysis to scientific output published in specialised journals and to conduct comparative studies with other countries to situate Spanish research on educational inspection within an international context.

Beyond the bibliometric characterisation of the corpus, the findings highlight the value of doctoral theses as an indicator of the scientific and institutional development of educational inspection in Spain, as they reflect changes in its functions, priorities, and research approaches.

Ultimately, the evolution of doctoral theses on educational inspection largely reflects the evolution of the inspection function itself within the Spanish education system: from an institution centred on control and administrative supervision towards

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a model oriented towards advisory support, evaluation and the improvement of educational quality.

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