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Changing analytical levels and methods of leadership research on university presidents

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ABSTRACT

We conducted a systematic literature review of 111 empirical studies published between 1969 and 2018. We found that research does not exponentially grow in comparison to research on higher education or leadership; empirical research emerging in the 1980s does not completely replace non-empirical inquiry. Studies from English-speaking authors predominate. Research is characterized by the qualitative studies representative of over two thirds of publications; mixed-methods and international comparative approaches are uncommon. Altogether, 80 articles approach the person, 73 the organizational level and 30 the social context. We conclude that comparative approaches, mixed methods and a major focus on the societal environment may represent promising approaches to the study of presidential leadership. Presidential leadership research may see a desideratum in analyzing the embedded character of higher education in the wider national and international context. Future inquiry could consider university presidents' leadership within the complex institutional environments in which the universities are embedded.

KEYWORDS

Leadership; presidential leadership; universities; methods; institutional research; research design

Introduction

Even though academic leadership is a common topic in the social sciences and in higher education research, research on presidential leadership is relatively uncommon. Past research has recognized a limited number of studies published on university leadership and management (Perrakis et al. 2010). The role of university presidents has been better investigated in the United States (e.g. Kezar 2008). Analysis of university presidents has also attracted the attention of scholars from other regions of the world (e.g. Ekman, Lindgren, and Packendorff 2018).

The importance of studying presidential leadership, however, increases as universities around the world find themselves under pressure to move away from the practices from medieval cultural institutions and become more like organizational actors. University leadership can be seen as a central node in a network bridging national policies, legal frameworks, internal management and organization. The interaction and charisma of presidents may change together with the new functions that presidents and academics may acquire in an increasingly shifting institutional environment. Research in the neo-institutional tradition (Ramirez and Christensen 2013) has been particularly enlightening in providing a global picture on the changing institutional frameworks that affect local university organization. Universities increasingly become integrated, goal-oriented, and competitive organizational actors in context with different higher education traditions. These new demands from the societal context multiply the tasks and activities of academics (Rawn and

Fox2018), including university presidents (Pilbeam and Jamieson 2010). As contemporary organizations, universities are expected to become more transparent and be engines of cultural rationalization (Ramirez and Christensen 2013). On the other hand, universities and their leadership are heavily embedded in a specific national settings (Green and Eckel 2010); presidential leadership can face local trends different to those of other world regions.

Diverse reviews about academic leadership have been put forward (Gardner et al. 2010; Kezar, Contreras-McGavin, and Carducci 2006) but no systematic review on university presidents can be consulted. Has research considered the multifaceted nature of university presidents' leadership? Has it linked the demands of the tradition in which the university is embedded through varied methodological approaches? A literature review on the topic is needed to offer a guiding tool for advancing future research in this area. It is unclear whether the research that has been steadily accumulating in the last decades goes beyond national boundaries and whether it approaches different levels of analysis and methodologies.

The aim of the current bibliometric review is to analyze empirically-conducted research on the leadership of university presidents. We begin by describing the categories we use to classify the study of university leadership: the focus on societal context, organization, and person. We further describe the bibliographical review method of 111 journal articles (1969–2018). We conclude by suggesting that the integration of research envisioning both social and organizational levels of analysis represents a promising area of research that may complement current emphasis in identifying psychological characteristics or organizational characteristics. Also, empirical studies in contexts where literature is scarce, comparative research and the use of mixed-methods designs may contribute in envisaging the analytic levels of societal context, organization and the person.

Studying presidential leadership

Presidential leadership refers to leadership research on university presidents. First, leadership evokes the social phenomenon that occurs when a member of a social group gains—or fails to gain—and exercises a position of power through influencing the identity, respect and promoting the performance of a group of people (Bass and Bass 2008). Second, the word president refers to the highest individual authority whose title changes depending on traditions: presidents, rectors, chancellors or vice chancellors. We use the term president employed in the United States and the most common one in the consulted literature. Also, presidential leadership should be distinguished from the broader category of academic leadership. The idea of academic leadership involves presidential leadership (Birnbaum and Eckel 2005) but includes the activities of academics working in other positions. From the above, it follows that presidential leadership evokes the social phenomenon that occurs when the highest individual authority of universities gains —or fails to gain— a position of influence with regard to other academics, students and administrative staff in everyday university life.

Presidential leadership has characteristics typical of university life. Followers are usually academics, students and administrative staff. Leaders deal with both the formal and informal expectations and behavior of members of the organization (see Hüther and Krücken 2018). The influence of university presidents also goes beyond the social context outside universities and their position requires a specific type of coordination with governments (alumni associations, foundations) and the industry; presidents have an influential position in society. Multiple, finer definitions about leadership can be found in the literature. For example, Meindl (1995) emphasizes the influence with respect to specific and organizational objectives, whereas House et al. (2004, 19) focus on the effective motivation and administration; Antonakis and House (2014) link transformation processes and organizational alignment to their definition of leadership. Among the multiple definitions of leadership, we agree with Yukl (2010) as regards influence being at the core of leadership.

As in other kinds of organizations, the study of university leadership can be divided according to different analytical levels. We follow the distinction of Krücken and Hüther (2016) between governance levels and choose the categories personal characteristics, organizational features and social

context to refer to these different levels in which studies of leadership may be categorized. According to Bass (1985), personal characteristics allow leaders to embody ideals and visions that their followers can identify with. With organizational features we refer to literature that focusses on characteristics of the universities. The complexity of the tasks of university presidents may increase considerably depending on the pressures they come under, and therefore the society in which the university is embedded is considered by some studies that reflect on how leaders and universities interact with the broader social reality. We thought that focus on analysis and types of methods used would operationalize well to investigate whether the changing institutional frameworks have been considered in the presidential leadership literature. Of course, some research may focus on different levels simultaneously, for example emphasizing both person and organization or person and the broader society.

As regards the research methods, research on academic leadership has changed considerably in recent years. Previous literature often consisted of reports written by academic presidents themselves or other academics (Washington, Boal, and Davis 2010). Also, the literature on presidential leadership developed normatively to guide future policymaking and university governance without an academic, theoretical interest. But research on academic leadership may have been influenced by the expansion of global scientism (see Meyer and Bromley 2015). In a world that expects more cultural rationalization by scholars and the heads of universities themselves, personal accounts have been displaced by systematic research based on scientific tools for the collection and analysis of the evidence that supports the claims for what constitutes leadership. Contemporary research often has interdisciplinary approaches, alternative methodologies such as cross-level and comparative studies (Gardner et al. 2010). Under this logic, the use of more elaborate research methods may be part of a broader trend in topics of higher education where the self-report of stakeholders used to serve previous peer-reviewed standards for academic publishing.

It is unknown whether changes in methods and levels of analysis can also be observed in the research on presidential leadership. Possibly, leadership research has been diversified to include more sophisticated methods and wider levels of analysis. To explore this trend, we followed the well-established division between empirical studies and qualitative, quantitative or use mixed methods. We then categorized the research design according to the methods we found in the articles.

Analyzing the literature

We conducted a bibliographical review of 111 empirical articles on presidential leadership found from 1969 to 2018. This was the time frame in which we found academic articles in the topic, although empirical research emerges more systematically since the 1980s. The number of non-empirical work such as essays and reports that still remain present is 64: about 20 articles were published each decade in the 2000s and 2010s in comparison to 10 articles each decade in the 1980s and 1990s. Only the contributions that explicitly refer to the leadership of university presidents were included because we were interested in viewing new investigation trends instead of simply visualizing discourses. Identifying presidential leadership required scanning a large body of literature given the different names of the position. We consulted the Web of Science and Scopus databases.

Figure 1 shows the number of publications in presidential leadership. The graph illustrates that there is not an increasing number of publications in the topic of presidential leadership but a fluctuation of articles between zero and eleven in the last thirty years. For example, 1999 and 2013 both had three yearly publications that went up to four in 2018. As a point of comparison, articles on 'higher education' and on 'leadership' have expanded in the same period in Scopus (929,25,494 and 11,007; and 2,298, 9,779 and 11,703). The lack of consolidation in the literature about presidential leadership is all the more striking when the exponential increase of publications in other topics in scientific databases is considered.

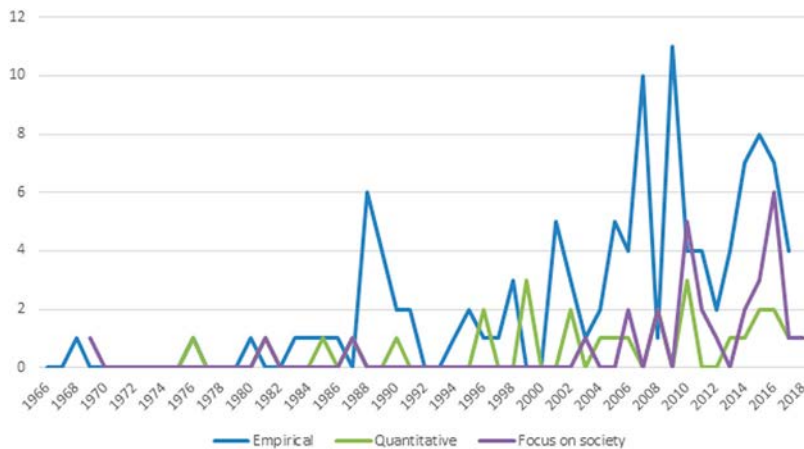


Figure 1. Number of articles on presidential leadership (1969–2018) ($n = 111$).

Higher Education, *The Review of Higher Education*, and the *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* had 15, 8 and 7 articles, respectively. *Higher Education Quarterly* and the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* had five articles, and the rest of the articles were distributed in 41 different journals. The fields of the journals in which presidential leadership research is published shows that the topic attracts scholars working on journals in higher education studies, 23; management or education management, 14; non-education management journals, 5; and other areas, 14. Altogether, journals on leadership had 13 publications, including publications focussing on leadership in general, educational leadership and leadership and organizations. After collecting the articles, we analyzed the text through bibliometric measures and content analysis of the articles according to the categories of analysis we explained above. To ensure trustworthiness, a second researcher working independently classified the studies in the same way. Interrater reliability of the articles in the focus of analysis category was 74% and in research methods was 96%. We then discussed how to classify the articles that had first been differently categorized to make a final decision.

We only used English terms in our query. Therefore, it is not surprising that articles from authors located in English-speaking countries dominate the literature (US, 66; UK, 15, Australia, 11, Canada, 3; and South Africa, 3). The only exception is Sweden, with 5 publications. We do not believe, however, that the overwhelming dominance of English-speaking literature is only related to our search query, given that many scholars now disseminate the results of research in English. Also, the Web of Science includes regional databases in other languages such as the SciELO Citation Index and the Chinese Science Citation Database which have at least the title or the abstract in English.

Rather, we think that leadership research has played a strong role in universities the United States and other countries with interconnected histories given that the power of the administration has been traditionally stronger here than in other traditions (Ben-David and Collins 1966; Ramirez and Christensen 2013). Borrowing the terms from Burton Clark's (1983) triangle of coordination, American higher education has been less centered in the academic oligarchy or the state. Therefore, the interaction of the president in their upper levels of the administration may receive more attention in terms of the expectations of finding a visionary academic leader that integrates different capacities to mobilize the professorship. The publication on the topic by Swedish scholars would exemplify how non-English-speaking countries were also in the radar of our search: perhaps the relatively higher interest in presidential leadership is more related to Swedish higher education reforms granting more authority and expectations of leadership to university presidents, as the studies of Engwall (2014) and Ramirez and Christensen (2013) contend.

Trends and research designs in the presidential leadership literature

Research designs

Table 1 shows the research design of empirical articles on presidential leadership. Most articles have a qualitative approach; the use of quantitative methods and mixed-designs was less common (75, 26, and 10). Studies using quantitative methods (28 including mixed methods) became more present after 1987. By far, the most-used method was interviews, followed by document analysis and surveys (63, 17 and 17); document and database consultations were also used to study presidential leadership (17 and 14). Focus groups, observations and application of standardized tests to measure personal characteristics related to leadership were the least used methods: 3, 2, and 2. Out of the analyzed articles, 15 used a case-study approach and six international comparisons.

Studies on presidential leadership using interviews usually had an ideographic approach that focussed on national cases (e.g. Kezar and Eckel 2008; Lopez Zarate 2007; Smerek 2011). Almost all qualitative studies are cross-sectional studies. A different type of study is the *Institutional Leadership Project* (ILP) (Neumann and Bensimon 1990) which was carried out in the 1980s with the presidents of 32 American colleges and universities. The ILP is a qualitative longitudinal analysis of the way in which individuals in formal leadership positions set goals, define agendas, communicate and interact, transmit values and assess their own effectiveness.

Presidential leadership research also shows an increase in the use of quantitative methods: 15 articles were published after 2002. Surveys and database consultation address the presentation of sociodemographic characteristics of university presidents (e.g. Breakwell and Tytherleigh 2008; Collison and Millen 1969; Muzzin and Tracz 1981; Sloper 1985). These secondary analyses also include surveys that have been combined with other instruments for measuring various aspects such as academic reputation, mentoring, etc. (e.g. McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers 1999; Sloper 1987, 1996).

Psychological tests have been implemented to measure the psychological characteristics of university presidents. For example, Dee, Henkin, and Holman (2004) used the *Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument* to measure the self-reported communication behavior of the presidents of Catholic universities and colleges in the US. In order to establish a correlation between the type of organization and the level of confidence in American universities, Jones (2002, 113 ff.) used the *Educational Questionnaire* by Higgins (1997) and the *Conditions of Trust Inventory* by Butler (1991) Al-Omari (2008, 56 ff.) developed the *Higher Education International Leadership Competencies Instrument* to measure the international abilities of the presidents of the Jordanian Universities.

Research with mixed-methods have often been used to provide different perceptions of presidents' actions as leaders. Probably the biggest study on presidential leadership, the *ACE project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation*, illustrates this point. The ACE was a five-and-a-half-year study at 23 American colleges and universities. Within the framework of this project, Kezar and Eckel (2002) investigated the transformational change in American universities through several qualitative data surveys, including field research, interviews with insiders and experts, observations, etc. Freeman. and Kochan (2012) examined the perception of university presidents on the knowledge areas and competences they acquired through their doctoral training by means of analyzing quantitative data from the *American National Council of Education* survey and interviews with presidents.

Table 1. Articles by research design and method ($n = 111$).

	Research design ^a	Interview	Focus group	Observation	Document Analysis	Questionnaire (qualitative with open-ended questions)	Survey	Standardized test	Database consultation	Case study	International comparison
Mixed methods	10	10	5		2	2	1	3	1	3	1
Qualitative	75	75	58	3	1	15	4	0			13
Quantitative	26	26						14	1	11	1
Total	111	111	63	3	3	17	5	17	2	14	15

^aThe column research design is not the sum of the other columns because one study may use more than one method.

Vinger and Cilliers (2006) examined the question of the transformational leadership style using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) from Bass, as well as semi-structured interviews with presidents and other senior leaders of South African universities. Lopez Zarate (2007) studied the career paths of Mexican university presidents on the basis of a survey, document analysis and interviews with current and former university presidents. In order to determine the impact of the charisma of American university presidents on enrollment rates, Bastedo, Samuels, and Kleinman (2014) used video analysis, statistical evaluation of a standardized survey and document analysis. Papadimitriou (2011) surveyed qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the role of Greek university presidents in the implementation of quality assurance reforms.

Case studies were a common strategy whereas international comparative studies are uncommon. Examples of case-oriented comparisons include comparisons between England and Norway or Germany (Birnbau 1986) and Great Britain (Read and Kehm 2016), Japan and the United Kingdom (Yokoyama 2006), Canada and the United States (Muzzin and Tracz 1981). In a contrasting example of a variable-oriented comparison, Goodall (2006) examined the correlation between the lifetime citations of presidents of the world's hundred top universities and the position of their university in a global ranking list.

Focus of analysis

Table 2 presents the level of analysis and focus we found in the reviewed literature. The larger amount of research on presidential leadership focused on the individual characteristics of the presidents combined with the organizational characteristics of the universities (47). Around one fourth (27) of the studies focus on the personal characteristics of the university presidents. The analysis of social conditions is peripheral in leadership research in the past decades (3). The joint analysis of individual characteristics, organizational features and the external social environment is the third most representative kind of study, followed by the analysis of organizational features (12 and 11). The joint study of personal and societal characteristics and the study of organizational features and society (8 and 7) are the least common in research with a scope of more than one level of analysis. Altogether, 80 articles involve the individual level, 73 the organizational level and 30 the social context. Studies in the social context begin to appear systematically after 2002.

In addition, we could not identify current research topics in the leadership literature. For example, we did not find research on current topics on leadership research such as the relationship of

Table 2. Focus of analysis and topic ($n = 111$).

	Orga + Society	Organisation	Person	Person + Orga	Person + Orga + Society	Person + Society	Society
Socio-demographic characteristics			1	3	1	2	
Communication skills	1			2	1		
Educational background				2			
Trait theories			3	2	1	1	
Charisma				3	1		
Behavior theories		1	3	3			
Transformational/ transactional theory		1	3	3		2	
Leadership styles		2	3	7	1	2	
Gender	1	1	4	6	3	5	
Reputation							
Mentoring		1	1	1			
Career			3	4		3	
Diversity		3	3	1	1		
Crisis	2	2	1		1		
Bureaucracy	1	2	1	2	1	1	
Entrepreneurial university	2					1	2
Total	7	13	26	39	11	17	2

leadership and welfare of the followers (Inceoglu et al. 2018) or the phenomenon of narcissism (O'Reilly, Doerr, and Chatman 2018). They seem to have not yet received attention in the context of higher education. This different thematization could be indicative of a certain separation between scholars specialized on higher education and on leadership.

The articles that emphasize the characteristics of the individual do it in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. Breakwell and Tytherleigh 2008), their educational background (e.g. Freeman and Kochan 2012), the relationship between competencies or skills with behaviors (e.g. McNair, Duree, and Ebbers 2011) or gender differences (e.g. Bagilhole and White 2008). In this kind of research, the context or the complexity of organizational relations of the university presidents are secondary.

Other studies in this same category of individuals also focus on the analysis of the career paths of university presidents (Sloper 1985). Research in this subtopic has also explored the disciplinary or their arrival as insiders or outsiders in the university (e.g. Smerek 2011), their academic reputation (e.g. Ioannidis 2010), or their work patterns (e.g. Sloper 1996). Other lines of inquiry look at educational trajectories. For example, past research has shown that most Canadian university presidents completed their studies at the University of Toronto (Muzzin and Tracz 1981). In England, studying at Oxford or Cambridge is related to becoming a president (Breakwell and Tytherleigh 2008). This is in line with Pfeffer's (1977, 108) claim that access to elite universities is influenced by social status, and both have an impact on professional careers. Another aspect studied in this framework is the impact of mentoring experiences (e.g. Schmaling and Linton 2017) or the participation in peer-network relationships (e.g. McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers 1999). This aspect can be associated with suggestions on how to promote and encourage younger academic leadership. Research on trajectories also converges with concerns for diversity. Past research has showed that American presidents belong to a certain demographic group (e.g. Gasman, Abiola, and Travers 2015) or to the career trajectories of a certain demographic group (e.g. Montas-Hunter 2012).

An additional aspect at the center of empirical research at the individual level is the study of the leadership style of university presidents. These studies analyze whether any personal characteristics such as gender (e.g. Bagilhole and White 2008), or belonging to a certain demographic group (e.g. Waring 2003) determine a specific leadership style. In the same way, these studies deal with the role of a specific leadership style in a change process in the university (e.g. Vinger and Cilliers 2006). This aspect is closely related to the transformational leadership style and is analyzed by some authors (e.g. Basham 2010). Other aspects studied in this context analyze the communication skills (e.g. Smerek 2011) or ethical values of university presidents (e.g. Garza Mitchell and Maldonado 2015). Some of these studies also refer to the perception of followers beyond studies that used to be solely based on university leaders' self-perception of their leadership style.

Studies at the organizational level focus on the strategies that presidents choose according to the characteristics of the organization in a crisis situation (e.g. Parry and Horton 1997), or the positioning of a special agenda. Among them is the implementation of the diversity agenda (e.g. Kezar 2008). Characteristics of universities are conceptualized in terms of the organizational model (e.g. Bikmoradi et al. 2010) or legal characteristics (e.g. Sloper 1989) and give meaning to and permeate the types of leadership. The ILP is a good example of the focus on the organization. Here the authors analyze according to the organizational type, different aspects such as budgeting and symbolism (Neumann 1992), the cognitive frames of the presidents (Bensimon 1989), presidents' strategies and their correlation with their term in office (Neumann 1989).

Representative of studies focussing primarily on the study of the societal context are Marginson and Sawir's (2006, 343) analysis of the impact of the global trends in comparison to the local or national realities of two universities in Indonesia and Australia. Papadimitriou (2011) analyzed how presidents in Greek universities perceived the environmental pressures of the government's quality management reforms and to what extent they adopted it in their universities. The extent impact of the 'world class university' in new leadership of universities worldwide was analyzed by Rodriguez-Pomeda and Casani's (2016) study on university presidents' discourses in various countries.

Other studies approach different levels of analysis simultaneously. The most frequent simultaneous approach to the person and organization views leadership in the light of organizational processes such as change, decision making, and strategic planning. Budros (2002), for example, explored the impact of the socio-demographic characteristics of the presidents and organizational characteristics on the faculty retirement plans in Canadian universities. Engwall, Levay, and Lidman (1999) gave empirical evidence for and discussed the correlation between university characteristics like type, age and the roles and control systems that presidents preferred. The relationship of organizational characteristics, such as organizational culture or age, on the incumbency patterns of presidents of Australian universities were studied by Sloper (1987). The identification of the presidents with the organizational change were analyzed by Levin (1998) in the context of presidential succession in American universities. Lopez Zarate (2007) drew the career trajectories of Mexican presidents, analyzing the election forms of the universities. Gearin (2017) explored how presidents try to make sense of their organizations with regards to change resistance, and how they manage the institutional dynamics and expectations in American universities. Other trend of research has focussed on efficacy. Breakwell and Tytherleigh (2010) correlated the personal characteristics of British presidents with performance data of the organization. The study from Bastedo, Samuels, and Kleinman (2014, 397) showed how the organizational identity from American universities mediates the correlation between organizational performance and charismatic leadership of presidents. For her part, Goodall (2006) documented a positive correlation between the academic reputation of the presidents, measured by their lifetime citations, and the position of their universities in the global rankings.

Next, the focus on both the person and the societal context in which the university is embedded is found, for example, in publications stemming from the study Women in Higher Education Management Network (WHEMN) on gender differences conducted in different countries. The project studied gender differences in leadership positions within the national context. Five consulted articles derive from this transnational research. White, Carvalho, and Riordan (2011) find that, in Australia, national differences lead to a centralization with the president having a position similar to a chief executive officer (CEO), whereas in South Africa there is a struggle between the managerial and collegial models; in Portugal, the collegial model remains effective. White and Özkanlı (2010) found that in Turkish universities the perceptions of leadership are more masculine and transactional, contrary to Australia, where they are more inclusive and transformational.

These studies focussing on organization and society describe how presidents respond or react to the external societal demands such as normative pressures from new public policies. For instance, Gumpert (2003) analyzed how environmental demands influence the manner in which college presidents in the US make sense of these demands alongside their organizations' objectives and activities. Yokoyama (2006) analyzed along similar lines the impact of government policies, as well as the organizational characteristics of British and Japanese universities which are engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Youtie and Shapira (2008) discussed the impact of the state efforts in the transformation of a university into an innovation-promoting knowledge hub and the importance of new institutional leadership to mediate among the different actors.

The studies approaching simultaneously the person, the organization and society have a more systemic approach on factors related to presidential leadership. For example, the exploratory analysis of Leih and Teece (2016) drew on the capabilities of university presidents, such as sensing, seizing and transforming, to maintain the viability of their universities which, in turn, had characteristics that allowed consensus on strategic goals. This dynamic is described in a societal environment-fostering entrepreneurship. Another representative study is the comparative study of gender differences from O'Connor and Carvalho (2015) in the context of the WHEM-Project. The authors drew on the national differences between Portugal and Ireland and the organizational models of the universities in both contexts, focussing on the identification and gendering of collegial/managerial characteristics. In Sweden, Engwall (2014) demonstrated how the profile of presidents has changed in the last 50

years in relation with the impact of NPM-reforms on the recruitment of presidents. External recruitment as well as the emphasis on managerial rather than academic credentials is said to have been increased.

Discussion

Our analysis has shown that the corpus of literature on presidential leadership is relatively small and does not display the exponential expansion of scientific endeavors in other topics. We did not expect to find this dynamic and think it can be partially related to the lack of attention to university governance outside the literature written by English-speaking authors. Contrary to our expectations, empirical literature has not replaced non-empirical publications. Leadership research seems to be a topic where both logics may continue to articulate. Most of the studies on presidential leadership have a qualitative nature. Research methodologies used may be loosely related to the predominance of interpretative over positivistic paradigms. Mixed-methods designs are often used when considering the complexity of leadership tasks or to triangulate opinions of university presidents with other sources of information. The joint study of individual and organizational characteristics is often the main level of analysis. What we did encounter in line with our preliminary expectations was that the analysis of the societal context in relation to other analytical levels in which the universities are embedded is increasingly present but remains as a desideratum in the literature on the leadership of university presidents.

Research may be enriched by studies that conceptualize how current changes in the institutional frameworks may be mediated by different kinds of leadership. For example, it would be interesting to find more literature on the different actions and environments related to the reforms reported in studies on higher education. It will be interesting to find investigations on the influence positions of university presidents regarding the adoption of pedagogic models such as online or student-centered pedagogies such as project-based learning; or the pressures to implement a different entrepreneurial model and culture. The explanation about changes of context in terms of pressures to become more entrepreneurial and efficient and evaluation activities of teaching and research deserve to be explained in connection with the role of presidents in the complex contexts of higher education. Also, nomothetic, theory-generating approaches that pursue broader pictures through quantitative methods have the potential of contributing to understanding how the establishment of mandatory technocratic procedures may affect leadership on certain social contexts.

Related to this, presidential leadership research and perhaps higher education research in general has much to offer when it comes to analyzing the embedded character of higher education in the wider national and international context. Comparative research that investigates the approaches of university presidents towards pressures that become sensitive such as the trend to rationalize teaching and research through teaching evaluations, bibliometrics indexes and rankings are a promising research area. Finally, we highlight that presidential leadership research is very much concentrated on English-speaking countries. This may be explained by the broader trend in which higher education research still occurs in a few number of Western countries (Kuzhabekova, Hendel, and Chapman 2015) but also perhaps because of the more sophisticated administrative apparatus that universities in the United States have developed and which indirectly puts presidents in the spotlight. Many other countries and geographical areas such as Asia and Latin America are left out of the picture. Scholars around the world could be encouraged to innovate in changing methods and levels of analysis in the study of leadership research of university presidents.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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