



Editorial

Implications of Academic Colonization in Brazilian Scientific Journals in Administration



Implicações da Colonização Acadêmica nos Periódicos Científicos Brasileiros em Administração

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■ ABSTRACT

My aim in this editorial is to reflect on the implications of colonization on Brazilian scientific journals in the field of administration. The contribution to the debate highlights how the adoption of publishing and evaluation standards from central countries in the Global North creates distortions in the Brazilian system, underestimating the potential of Brazilian administration journals and hindering the development of researchers in the country.

Palavras-chave: rankings; decolonialism; Qualis; open science; top journal.

■ RESUMO

O meu objetivo neste editorial é apresentar uma reflexão sobre as implicações da colonização nos periódicos científicos brasileiros em administração. A contribuição do debate está em evidenciar como a adoção da lógica de publicação e avaliação de periódicos dos países centrais do Norte Global gera distorções no sistema brasileiro que subestimam o potencial das revistas brasileiras em administração e atrapalham a formação de pesquisadores no país.

Keywords: rankings; decolonialismo; Qualis; ciência aberta; top journal.

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A BRIEF CONTEXT OF THE DEBATE

Academic practice encompasses a variety of activities. The publication of scientific articles in journals is the activity that attracts the most interest, debates, and controversies (Fernandez-Cano, 2021; Nassi-Calò, 2023), and this holds true in the field of administration as well (Barros & Alcadipani, 2023; Herman et al., 2020; Nkomo, 2009; Üsdiken et al., 2024). My objective in this editorial is to explore the implications of colonization on Brazilian scientific journals in this particular field.

When embarking on a master's or PhD program, students are promptly made aware of academia's emphasis on publishing articles, sparking interest in the subject. However, the reasons and methods for publication are subjects of debate and controversy. Questions regarding how to craft an article and where to publish it often overshadow a fundamental initial step: the rationale behind writing the article. In essence, why and when should we write an article? Ideally, a scientific article should be penned when a researcher has valuable insights to share from a scientific perspective, aiming to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge for the betterment of society. Nevertheless, in reality, many articles are crafted to fulfill academic requirements tied to the advancement of master's and PhD students, faculty selection and promotion, access to research resources, or even to bolster academic capital (Bourdieu, 2017) with the aim of enhancing prestige and influence within the scientific field.

When practical reasons override the initial purpose of writing a scientific article, a set of distortions emerge in the article publication system. One such distortion revolves around the discourse on the role of scientific journal rankings and their impact on the dynamics of publishing activities (Jaffé, 2020; Nkomo, 2009; Vogel et al., 2017; Wedlin, 2011). One perspective of understanding rankings is that “[t]hese lists serve as an indicator of the meritorious quality of the journals and, by extension, the respective scholarly publications included therein and the researchers who authored those publications.” (Herman et al., 2020, p. 136). On the other hand, a more critical look at the rankings understands them as “rhetorical devices to construct legitimacy within the field, which actors use to attempt to shape and reform the field as it develops. Rhetorical devices shape meaning, as they are used to justify practices and procedures and shape the means of comparison and assessment” (Wedlin, 2011, p. 199).

In the field of administration, the discussion surrounding journal rankings is nuanced and multifaceted, given the diverse perspectives on the topic (Barros & Alcadipani, 2023; Herman et al., 2020; Nkomo, 2009; Üsdiken et al., 2024; Vogel et al., 2017). Specifically,

the discourse on the rankings of administration journals in Brazil has unique characteristics, particularly when comparing national and international journals using the QUALIS system established by the Brazilian government in 1998 (Jaffé, 2020). QUALIS serves as a benchmark for evaluating the quality of publications by professors and students in the assessment processes of masters and PhD programs in the country. It is also instrumental in selecting professors in educational institutions and aiding researchers in securing funding for their projects. Journals listed in QUALIS are categorized as A1, A2, A3, A4, B1, B2, B3, B4, or C, with A1 journals being the most prestigious and C journals considered to have no scientific value.

In addition to assessing journal quality, QUALIS faces a significant challenge in establishing comparison parameters between Brazilian and international journals, particularly within the realm of the ‘College of Humanities’ under the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), affiliated with the Ministry of Education. This category encompasses journals in the fields of humanities, applied social sciences, linguistics, language, and arts. The complexity arises from the substantial number of Brazilian journals in these domains (including administration) that are not indexed in Scopus (CiteScore) and Web of Science (Impact Factor), which are the standard references for ranking internationally esteemed journals. Consequently, a longstanding debate has ensued since the inception of QUALIS on evaluating the quality of publications in Brazilian journals compared to their international counterparts.

However, what initially appears to be merely a challenge of scale in measuring metrics such as journals’ ‘impact factor’ encompasses a host of other issues, ranging from perennially debated topics like academic productivism (publish or perish) (Rond & Miller, 2005; Silva, 2019) to concerns regarding predatory journals (Guimarães & Hayashi, 2023; Mancía, 2018). I will not delve into these well-trodden subjects here. Instead, I will shift the focus to areas often overlooked in Brazil, specifically addressing the discourse on journal rankings as a manifestation of academic colonialism and its implications for academic practice. This includes considerations on the quality of researcher training, the significance of national academic output, and the contribution of Brazil’s journal management model to open science. The management of reputable administration journals in Brazil (non-predatory) advocates for the Diamond model of open access, facilitating the democratization of knowledge dissemination without imposing costs on authors or readers of published articles. I believe this aspect serves as the primary rationale for sustaining journals such as the *Revista de Administração Contemporânea - RAC*. This journal provides high-quality, freely accessible content to both the

Brazilian and international scientific communities through a meticulous and rigorous editorial process aligned with international editorial standards of excellence.

JOURNAL RANKINGS AS A PROBLEM OF ACADEMIC COLONIALISM

Journal rankings are not a uniquely Brazilian phenomenon. The most well-known rankings are generated in central countries in the Global North, reflecting a historical process marked by epistemic coloniality that institutionalizes scientific knowledge rooted in the Anglo-Euro-centric framework and disseminates it to the peripheries (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Rankings originating from this region hold global legitimacy, and Brazil is no exception to this dynamic (Barros & Alcadipani, 2023). In reality, the modes of scientific knowledge production, particularly in the field of administration, are subject to the regulations established in central countries, which set the standards for scientific excellence and influence academic practices in the peripheries.

One of the subtle methods used to promote and validate epistemic coloniality is through the concept of ‘internationalization.’ Internationalization is portrayed as a means of providing academics from the peripheries with access to what is frequently labeled as ‘cutting-edge knowledge’ or ‘scientific excellence.’ However, this process of internationalization ultimately serves to colonize scientific practices in the peripheries while concurrently legitimizing the dominant knowledge paradigms of institutions and academics based in central countries under the guise of consolidating global knowledge in the field of administration (Nkomo, 2009).

Doctoral education abroad provides an intensive experience whereby students from the periphery not only ‘learn’ theories and methodology but are also socialized into the predominant conceptions of research and publishing in the country where they study. So, if students who have their doctoral training abroad choose to return to business schools in their home country or in some other peripheral location, they bring with them the prevalent research approaches, theories, methodologies and publication orientations that they have been acculturated (Üsdiken et al., 2024, p. 5).

This is how the term internationalization softens epistemic and academic colonialism. Thus, internationalization ceases to be a possibility of exchange between academics and countries involved and becomes a means of legitimizing the colonial process of knowledge and ways of acting in the academic environment. In that

regard, “[i]mported rankings and impact measurements are used to qualify journals delegitimizing local content published in Brazilian journals since they do not appear or are poorly rated by systems that are part of a profitable business” (Barros & Alcadipani, 2023, p. 580). Large global publishers have billion-dollar annual profits (Amaral, 2021). Using this logic, journal rankings become a seductive power (Nkomo, 2009) and consolidate the understanding that an article published in a top journal is an article published in a top journal (Herman et al., 2020).

One of the repercussions of the pursuit of top-tier journals is that Brazilian journals often lose the attention of esteemed Brazilian researchers, leading them to mimic editorial policies that favor knowledge production norms prevalent in central countries in an attempt to gain the status of top journals. However, the international ranking system was not designed to accommodate top journals from peripheral nations.

The ethos of epistemic colonialism within journal rankings perpetuates the notion that where you publish holds greater significance than what you publish. In scholarly discourse and institutional interactions, the focus when presenting an article is frequently not on its theme or content but rather on its publication venue and ranking position. Within the context of QUALIS, the emphasis lies on exclaiming, “I published an A1 article!” rather than highlighting the article’s subject matter and its significance.

This colonial perspective embedded in rankings implies that in striving to emulate a model deemed excellent, QUALIS – which encompasses administration journals – cannot attribute the A1 classification to national journals. This occurs because the criteria employed prioritize international journals at the expense of a deeper consideration of the purpose of national journals and their contributions to academia and practitioners. Furthermore, this colonial mindset hinders alternative prospects, such as the dissolution of QUALIS itself.

Many Brazilian academics, influenced by colonial thinking due to their own education in central countries or by others who had this experience, argue against classifying national journals as A1 in rankings. Proponents of this colonial mentality aim to mirror Brazil’s ranking logic with international standards, thus perpetuating Brazilian subordination to global rankings. The abolition of QUALIS and the rejection of another international ranking system to assess the quality of national journals would need a decolonial process within the Brazilian academic community. This process would entail a reevaluation of the foundations of knowledge production and scientific article publication, steering toward an alternative paradigm of practice.

THE RESEARCHERS (DES)EDUCATION

Another crucial aspect to consider concerning the publication of articles in journals, whether national or international, is the repercussions of placing excessive emphasis on article publication, particularly in top-tier journals. The disproportionate focus on publishing detracts from the broader development of researchers in terms of honing skills related to conducting research encompassing philosophical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions. In instances where the emphasis is solely on publishing articles (preferably in prestigious journals), the scope of training becomes limited to preparing students for article publication. A distinguished researcher should be able to publish articles in respected journals, engage in theoretical discourse, and generate theories that shed light on the practices of academics and professionals.

Elaborating original theory requires from the ‘Epistemological Act’ a permanent and critical investment in the reality and in the theories available. It is urgent to reaffirm the place of theory as the objectively elaborated form of the representation of reality, as a requirement of the scientific condition beyond description, phenomenal mentions, notes, narratives, forms, assumptions, and ideological mysticism. The theory is not the dogmatic guarantee of definitive true knowledge, but of the in-depth, methodologically oriented elaboration of the ontological and epistemic condition (Faria, 2023, p. 1).

Hence, it falls upon highly trained researchers to generate novel knowledge capable of illuminating societal issues and contributing to their understanding and resolution. During my tenure as a visiting professor at the University of Kentucky (USA) from 2015 to 2016, I delved into the training of PhD students in administration in that country. In an interview with a colleague at a prestigious American university, the following statement resonated with me:

Well, in practice, we essentially train individuals in a specific [quantitative] methodology aligned with topics well-received in leading journals to secure publication in one of them and assist them [students] in securing academic positions post-PhD. We [professors] may not overtly express it this way, but that is essentially our approach.

This assertion vividly illustrates the impact of rankings on researcher training, where the emphasis on critical, comprehensive methodological skills and knowledge creation gives way to producing adept technicians focused on publishing articles in top journals.

THE RELEVANCE OF NATIONAL ACADEMIC PRODUCTION

One of the repercussions of the colonialist framework of science manifested in journal rankings is the devaluation of national research themes, steering knowledge production towards a ‘global’ administration research agenda. Numerous pertinent local topics are disregarded within this global agenda, failing to secure a place in scientific articles published in top-tier journals. This scenario often leads many academics today, influenced by an agenda primarily originating from central countries, to perceive a ‘lack of impact’ in Brazilian research. By replicating the research and publication norms of central countries, many Brazilian researchers overlook the fact that abandoning a local agenda is the root cause of the disconnect between the knowledge generated and the lived social context. Frequently, authors must be detached from the reality of their local environment to produce articles to be published in level A journals.

The significance of national academic production is intertwined with an agenda where researchers frequently grapple with determining whether the value of their work lies in where it is published or what it addresses. It is crucial to note that the issue is not a simplistic binary choice between one or the other. While the number of Brazilian administration researchers publishing on topics of national relevance in reputable international journals is on the rise, it remains true that this endeavor has its limitations, particularly in top-tier journals.

In light of this landscape, Brazil must cultivate journals with rigorous editorial processes that are on par with leading international publications. Simultaneously, national journals must retain control over their publication agenda to provide a platform for addressing national themes within a framework of editorial excellence. The editorial caliber of national journals can ensure the dissemination of high-quality knowledge aligned with local societal needs. Presently, the field of administration in Brazil boasts a collection of journals that uphold this standard of editorial excellence, such as *RAC*, the *Brazilian Administration Review – BAR*, *Revista de Administração de Empresas – RAE*, *Brazilian Journal of Public Administration – RAP*, and *RAUSP Management Journal*, among others. Despite not always being classified as level A journals by international rankings or QUALIS, these national journals present quality editorial processes able to identify and select high-level articles. However, these and other national journals must be cautious not to emulate the topic agenda favored by international level A journals, potentially relegating them to the status of ‘just another International Journal of XXX,’ a secondary status subjected to the interest of opportunistic international authors.

In this context, I diverge from the stance of my colleague Jaffé (2020) who posits that QUALIS (particularly in the humanities field) undermines the impact of Brazilian science by elevating the classification of national journals above the CiteScore or Impact Factor of international journals, attracting more Brazilians to publish in national journals. Consequently, the number of citations of Brazilian research in international databases like Scopus and Web of Science decreases, subsequently affecting Brazil's standing in global scientific production rankings. The colonial logic of knowledge dictates that my colleague's apprehension is more focused on scientific publication metrics rather than the tangible impact of publications on academics and society at large. This instance underscores my disillusionment whenever I encounter the imported and colonial discourse surrounding 'impact' (refer to Bispo, 2021; Bispo & Davel, 2021).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE JOURNAL MANAGEMENT MODEL IN BRAZIL TO OPEN SCIENCE

The final aspect I aim to discuss in this editorial is the contribution of the journal management model in Brazil to open science (Bispo, 2022; Martins, 2020). Despite the trend toward commercializing science (Oliveira, 2023), which includes open science models with article processing charges, a significant number of administration journals in Brazil receive funding from public and private educational institutions or associations like the Brazilian Academy of Management (ANPAD), which is the case of RAC and BAR. Under this model, institutional sponsorship ensures that neither authors nor readers are required to pay to publish or access published content. This funding approach, known as the Diamond model in open science (Martins, 2020), helps reduce costs for governments and individuals seeking access to high-quality scientific material while combating elitism perpetuated by financial barriers in science (Oliveira, 2023).

I believe that Brazilian academia should delve deeper into the features of the Diamond standard open access to make a meaningful national and international contribution toward alleviating the commercialization of science, where financial interests often overshadow scientific pursuits (Oliveira, 2023). In this regard, institutions such as ANPAD play a pivotal role in upholding journals with robust editorial structures that do not resort to predatory practices that compromise the quality of published content.

FINAL REMARKS

Brazilian administration journals have nurtured researchers and disseminated knowledge for decades.

Many of these journals have made strides in enhancing their editorial processes to provide more rigorous reviews, expedited editing timelines, and platforms for discussing topics of relevance within the national and international landscape.

Nevertheless, these advancements and contributions are not devoid of the dilemmas stemming from a colonial process often concealed under the guise of the seemingly noble concept of 'internationalization.' Framed as colonization rather than a reciprocal exchange, the push for internationalization poses challenges for many journals, prompting tough decisions regarding publishing in English and adopting editorial standards that may not align with the Brazilian context but are deemed necessary for acceptance by indexers to enhance journal visibility.

I am uncertain whether a government-coordinated evaluation system for national journals is imperative. Perhaps the Brazilian scientific community could leverage the ongoing discourse on 'impact' to reassess whether the replication or adaptation of editorial guidelines crafted in central countries (which may be suitable for them) should be blindly followed in Brazil. It might be worthwhile to explore alternative models. However, if the choice is to persist with QUALIS as a benchmark for evaluating Brazilian administration journals, this process must be tailored to the Brazilian context, shedding the 'stray dog syndrome' (as Brazilians refer to a certain collective inferiority complex) and acknowledging that some administration journals already meet the criteria for classification as A1.

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