

The modern Prometheus in education: a doctoral thesis quest for innovative knowledge

**El moderno Prometeo en la educación: una tesis doctoral en busca de
conocimiento innovador**

Ángel Téllez Tula

angel12.tellez@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7925-9271>
Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de
Puebla
México

Benjamín Gutiérrez Gutiérrez

gutierrezgutierrezbenjamin@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2716-9108>
Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de
Puebla
México

Norma Elena Mendoza Zaragoza

normaelena.mendoza@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9214-5082>
Universidad de Colima
México

Laura Herrera Corona

laurahc32@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8572-0383>
Universidad Anáhuac Campus Querétaro
México

Tutaleni Asino

tasino@andrew.cmu.edu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9667-8603>
Carnegie Mellon University
México

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56712/latam.v7i2.5763>

Artículo recibido: 23 de diciembre de 2025.

Aceptado para publicación: 28 de abril de 2026.

Conflictos de Interés: Ninguno que declarar.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56712/latam.v7i2.5763>

The modern Prometheus in education: a doctoral thesis quest for innovative knowledge

El moderno Prometeo en la educación: una tesis doctoral en busca de
conocimiento innovador

Ángel Téllez Tula

angel12.tellez@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7925-9271>

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

México

Benjamín Gutiérrez Gutiérrez

gutierrezgutierrezbenjamin@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2716-9108>

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

México

Norma Elena Mendoza Zaragoza

normaelena.mendoza@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9214-5082>

Universidad de Colima

México

Laura Herrera Corona

laurahc32@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8572-0383>

Universidad Anáhuac Campus Querétaro

México

Tutalení Asino

tasino@andrew.cmu.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9667-8603>

Carnegie Mellon University

México

Artículo recibido: 23 de diciembre de 2025. Aceptado para publicación: 28 de abril de 2026.

Conflictos de Interés: Ninguno que declarar.

Abstract

This article reflects on the importance of dissertation writing, drawing parallels between the writing process and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The author compares educational systems to Prometheus, suggesting they should illuminate knowledge for the sake of democracy. The dissertation writing experience resembles a creative struggle, like the creation of *Frankenstein*, emphasizing both the challenges and the rich connections between literature and academia. Despite the pressures that generate stress and emotional exhaustion among doctoral students, the author argues that this struggle is intrinsically linked to academic systems in general. Ultimately, the work advocates for the recognition of the scientific contributions present in classical literature as a means of addressing the demands of research

Keywords: doctoral thesis, academic identity, innovation, knowledge, ethics

Resumen

Este artículo reflexiona sobre la importancia de la redacción de una tesis, estableciendo paralelismos entre el proceso de escritura y Frankenstein de Mary Shelley. El autor compara los sistemas educativos con Prometeo, sugiriendo que deberían iluminar el conocimiento para la democracia. La experiencia de escribir una tesis se asemeja a una lucha creativa, similar a la creación de Frankenstein, enfatizando tanto los desafíos como las ricas conexiones entre la literatura y el mundo académico. A pesar de las presiones que generan estrés y agotamiento emocional entre los estudiantes de doctorado, el autor argumenta que esta lucha está intrínsecamente ligada a los sistemas académicos en general. En última instancia, el trabajo aboga por el reconocimiento de las aportaciones científicas presentes en la literatura clásica como un medio para afrontar las exigencias de la investigación.

Palabras clave: tesis doctoral, identidad académica, innovación, conocimiento, ética

Todo el contenido de LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, publicado en este sitio está disponibles bajo Licencia Creative Commons.



Cómo citar: Téllez Tula, Ángel, Gutiérrez Gutiérrez, B., Mendoza Zaragoza, N. E., Herrera Corona, L., & Asino, T. (2026). The modern Prometheus in education: a doctoral thesis quest for innovative knowledge. *LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* 7 (2), 1785 – 1794. <https://doi.org/10.56712/latam.v7i2.5763>

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a personal reflection on the significance of composing a thesis. Throughout my PhD studies and two master's theses, I have recognized that several forms of art, including literature, share commonalities with academic research when viewed from a broader perspective and analyzed comprehensively. Moreover, I have had the privilege of collaborating with all the researchers associated with this publication. Some PhD teachers and current colleagues have likened the thesis writing process to constructing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in a laboratory setting. This prepares us for the first question. Can the education system of a country not be perceived as a modern Prometheus? Every educational system should serve as a Prometheus, responsible for imparting the fire of knowledge to its citizens to enhance democracy. We imply that a specific education system should not be regarded as a singular component of a puzzle, but rather as the configuration of multiple puzzles. Moreover, an inquiry is posed for scholars. Why can a doctoral thesis not be conceptualized in certain ways as the creation of a *Frankenstein* due to the arduous procedure it entails in its development? This reflective research aims to elucidate the similarities and limitations inherent in both processes, despite one being a fictional novel and the other requiring more analytical reasoning associated with a PhD.

Mary Shelley's seminal work was composed in 1818 by a young woman and has endured as a classic, inspiring adaptations in theater, film, and literature. The significance of establishing an analogy between the modern Prometheus and the composition of a doctoral thesis lies in highlighting the parallels shared by literature and science. Ultimately, the pressures associated with being a PhD student or researcher led us to overlook the scientific insights present in classic literature. According to Nicholls et al. (2022), recent studies reveal that PhD students and academic researchers face considerable stress stemming from employment uncertainty, elevated performance expectations, competitive research environments, and extended working hours. These systemic disorders lead to increased stress, emotional fatigue, and diminished mental well-being. The results indicate that the strain faced by PhD researchers is not merely personal but is intricately woven into academic frameworks and expectations.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative reflective technique based on interpretive textual analysis to investigate *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818/2003) as a metaphorical framework for comprehending doctorate research, academic authorship, and ethical responsibility in knowledge production. Reflective research was chosen for its capacity to foster critical interaction with texts, experiences, and meanings, framing knowledge as dynamic, contextual, and socially accountable rather than static or merely technical.

Research Design

The study is positioned within an interpretivist and reflexive framework, highlighting the researcher's participation in meaning-making and seeing academic research as a dynamic process influenced by intellectual effort, ethical considerations, and personal involvement. This methodology corresponds with modern perspectives of research as a dynamic social practice rather than a finished result (Darian-Smith, 2024).

Data Sources

The primary data were meticulous analyses of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, supplemented by reflective analytical writing that links the literary themes of creation, responsibility, imperfection, and autonomy to doctoral research methodologies. Secondary sources encompassed contemporary scholarship on responsible research, the development of academic knowledge, and doctorate education.

Data Analysis

Data were examined through reflexive thematic analysis, according to an iterative process of familiarization, coding, theme development, and critical interpretation. This approach facilitated the recognition of conceptual similarities between Shelley's tale and the experiential realities of doctoral study, acknowledging both coherence and "living scars" inside academic endeavors (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Ethical and Scholarly Considerations

This reflective study prioritizes epistemic and academic responsibility over participant ethics, highlighting the researcher's accountability in the construction, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge within the academic community. This corresponds with modern views on responsible research and innovation, emphasizing conversation, reflexivity, and societal significance (Ferrández-Berrueto et al., 2023).

DEVELOPMENT

Framework

Academia Glory

Victor Frankenstein, the scientist, aspired to attain grandeur by pioneering scientific exploration, delving into the enigmatic forces of natural philosophy, and encroaching upon a domain traditionally reserved for the Almighty: creation itself. Victor Frankenstein's desire to achieve scientific greatness and uncover the hidden powers of nature reflects an Enlightenment faith in human mastery over the natural world, a pursuit that ultimately collapses under its ethical weight (Ketterer, 1979). To be specific, PhD students believe that their doctoral theses will change educational matters in a 360-degree way. Many PhD students hold the conviction that their doctoral theses will bring about comprehensive, system-level improvements in educational theory and practice, reflecting idealized and transformative expectations of doctoral research (Diogo et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Victor Frankenstein, the scientific creator referred to as the "modern Prometheus," sought recognition and glory through his scientific discovery. The scientist pursued discovery with the intention of achieving recognition and prestige, reflecting the Romantic period's anxiety surrounding ambition and scientific hubris (Butler, 1979). In the same manner, a PhD student can visualize recognition by their professors, colleagues, and society itself. However, some of these could have the possibility of having areas of opportunity for their development; however, such expectations often coexist with evolving areas of opportunity that support academic identity formation and professional development throughout the doctoral journey (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011).

The process of the creation

The creation of Victor Frankenstein's creature commences with the gathering of distinct anatomical components, meticulously arranged from head to toe. Each component is essential and irreplaceable, constituting a cohesive entity that ultimately allows the organism to think, reason, and communicate autonomously. Victor Frankenstein's creation is grounded in anatomical assembly, foregrounding the idea that cognition and agency emerge only through the integration of indispensable bodily parts into a coherent whole (Ruttkay, 2020).

Conversely, developing a doctoral thesis necessitates the compilation of criteria that define a PhD thesis, including the title, research questions, objectives, methodology, hypothesis, theoretical framework, data analysis, discussion, results, and conclusion, among other components. Nonetheless, there exists the presumption that a thesis must generate original and novel information with concrete societal implications, a notion that imposes significant pressure and elevated stakes on PhD candidates under the evaluation of their committees. This reflects a dominant expectation in doctoral education that the dissertation must demonstrate originality and innovation as a meaningful contribution to knowledge, a requirement that places high evaluative stakes on PhD candidates during committee assessment (Ngulube, 2025).

In Pursuit of Knowledge

Victor Frankenstein, a young science student from Shelley's novel, was in his twenties when he created the creature. Victor was obsessed on entering the realm of the divine. His pursuit developed to reveal the most profound mysteries of existence, merging scientific exploration with divine ambition, reflecting a dangerous conflation of scientific inquiry with godlike aspiration. Victor's obsessive desire to uncover the deepest secrets of life reflect a transgressive scientific ambition that positions him as a figure who seeks to overstep natural and divine boundaries (Cambra-Badii et al., 2020). A PhD student is largely focused on investigating a well-defined research subject, together with ancillary questions, or on evaluating a specific hypothesis. Specifically, doctoral research is a structured process aimed at addressing a specific research question, subsidiary questions, or testing a clearly formulated hypothesis through systematic inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Developing the literature review in a PhD dissertation and the cemetery of citations.

Specifically, it is important to state that Dr. Victor Frankenstein did not create life only by its own will. He commenced direct involvement in the creation process; he started to dig into the graveyards, charnel houses (vaults for storing dead bodies), dissecting rooms, and slaughterhouses. His pursuit of life is thus grounded in physical intervention and transgressive practices, not abstract intention. Victor's act of creation is grounded in bodily intervention and anatomical labor rather than mere intention; his work as a scientist-anatomist requires engagement with graves, dissecting rooms, and other sites of death (Ruttkay, 2020).

Extending this parallel, a PhD student allocates considerable effort to collecting references from specialists in particular domains, as well as data and theoretical frameworks sourced from both modern research and historical texts. The challenge lies in the work of the novice researcher, who must assemble these existing academic ideas originating from multiple researchers and thinkers and carefully stitch them together into a functional, coherent, and original scholarly text. Doctoral writing requires the careful integration of existing theories, data, and scholarly perspectives, demanding that novice researchers synthesize multiple academic voices into a coherent and functional text (Swales & Feak, 2022).

The isolation of PhD candidates and the solitude of Victor Frankenstein

Frankenstein's narrative indicates that Victor confines him within his laboratory in Ingolstadt, Germany, for the purpose of study. The young scientist nearly descends into madness to animate his creature. He isolates himself from his family, friends, and society. Victor's obsessive scientific ambition forces him into extreme isolation, causing both physical exhaustion and psychological instability during his time in Ingolstadt (Mellor, 1988). On the other hand, a young researcher may feel overwhelmed by the demands of a PhD program, including coursework, multiple assignments, social expectations, and the continuous advancement of the dissertation. The extensive time devoted to academic responsibilities can lead to feelings of isolation, distancing the researcher from friends, family, and society itself. It can

be stated that, “Doctoral students’ feelings of loneliness are significantly predicted by ‘fear of missing out’ (FoMO), which fosters reduced social connectedness and heightened exclusion, illustrating how academic pressures and lack of social integration contribute to isolation (Zhou et al., 2025).”

The defense of the doctoral dissertation and the creation of the creature

In Mary Shelley’s famous novel *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein successfully animated his creation on a tempestuous night in November, following months of solitary labor in his laboratory beneath a tower. The creature awakens and starts to breathe, although Victor is instantly appalled by the outcome of his experiment and flees the laboratory in fear. At this moment, the creature is unable to produce any articulated words. However, it is only after several months of observation and imitation that the creature gradually learns to speak and understand human language (Shin, 2019).

At the conclusion of the official coursework phase of a PhD program, the doctoral candidate is often afforded several months to prepare for the dissertation defense. Nonetheless, a pivotal concern during this phase is not solely revision or correction, but the endeavor to articulate the idea effectively. Consequently, by the time of the defense, the dissertation should have undergone significant intellectual development, enabling it to emerge as a cohesive, meaningful, and compelling scholarly work. However, an essential issue during this stage is not merely revising or correcting the text, but making the thesis speak, as the dissertation gradually acquires coherence, authorial voice, and intellectual maturity through the doctoral writing process (Othman & Lo, 2023).

The ambition of Prometheus and the ambition of a PhD thesis

In Greek mythology, Prometheus transgresses the gods by appropriating fire, the essence of life and knowledge, to serve humanity. Nonetheless, his endeavor to share divine power surpasses his ability to manage its repercussions, resulting in his eventual punishment for the infraction. Similarly, when PhD candidates commence doctorate programs, they frequently anticipate effecting significant changes in education or developing information that can affect society. Doctoral study is frequently associated with ideals of innovation, emancipation, and social contribution. Nevertheless, in practice, and due to multifactorial constraints such as institutional regulations, epistemological norms, disciplinary traditions, and power relations within academia, the doctoral thesis often becomes a stabilized and highly regulated product rather than a transformative intervention (Othman & Lo, 2023; Tian & Liu, 2024). As a result, many dissertations come to feel “written in stone,” reflecting processes of academic socialization and identity formation that privilege conformity and legitimacy over risk and disruption (Tian & Liu, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The preceding sections have examined the parallels between a PhD and the creation of Frankenstein. A doctoral thesis is meticulously developed over several years and comprises the integration of components such as theories, data, citations, and methodologies. Moreover, it entails solitude, significant time investment, and frequently, obsessions themselves. Ultimately, it may even seem alien to the inventor themselves. Doctoral research is widely acknowledged as a prolonged and psychologically demanding process that involves sustained solitude, emotional investment, and the gradual assembly of complex scholarly components, often leading candidates to feel distanced from their own work (Aitchison & Guerin, 2020). In comparison, Victor Frankenstein assembles components from various origins, labors in isolation, and engages in obsessive fervor throughout the endeavor. Victor Frankenstein’s creative process is characterized by isolation, obsessive scientific curiosity, and intense emotional investment, which ultimately leads to ethical and psychological consequences (Oulam, 2023).

In conclusion, when regarded as a psychological metaphor, the analogy between the two processes effectively conveys their common challenges and intensity. Unlike Victor Frankenstein's creation, doctorate students do not aim to violate ethical or epistemological boundaries. PhD students generate conventional and well-organized research rooted in recognized academic traditions and procedures. This doctoral research directly or indirectly benefits society by producing knowledge intended to enhance fairness, education, and social well-being, so promoting a more informed, equitable, and peaceful society. Contemporary doctoral education emphasizes the production of rigorous, ethically grounded research that contributes directly or indirectly to society by generating knowledge aimed at social improvement and public benefit (Cardoso et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Despite potential similarities and the researcher's aim to draw an analogy from a classical novel, a thesis is logical and intentional; it yields a constructive contribution to humanity. A PhD thesis does not transgress ontological limits; it critically examines the prevailing knowledge. The young scientist, Victor Frankenstein, transgresses natural order, and a PhD student bears a moral obligation; the criteria he selects must be self-evident, thereby binding the creator to accountability.

Mary Shelley's book reminds us that academic innovation is a true act of responsibility. A PhD thesis is not a cemetery of scholars, but rather a living contribution to society, to advance in human condition, and the proof of research learning. "Responsible research and innovation require interacting with society, listening to its needs, promoting its development and strengthening its capacity for autonomous progress." (Ferrández-Berruero et al., 2023, p. 1)

Moreover, a PhD student adheres to a systematic approach to develop his thesis and bears the ethical responsibility for ensuring that the faculty comprehends the research. Conversely, the young scientist inadvertently produced the creature and subsequently disregarded any moral responsibilities following its inception. Ultimately, this work aims to remind PhD students and the academic community that research is an art like writing a novel, a young researcher can trace similarities, learn, and find gaps in art. The community perceives research as an art form akin to novel writing, enabling a young researcher to identify parallels, acquire knowledge, and discover deficiencies in phenomenon. The important concern is to make a positive contribution to academia, ensuring it influences society, and that it should have an impact in society.

To conclude, it is important Frankenstein's book teaches us that a doctoral thesis, as a PhD thesis, is a perfect assembly of parts, which could later become academic living research. However, it may have flaws and areas of opportunity, even after arduous, lonely, and dedicated nights; the creation will have living scars. Once completed, the PhD thesis is no longer a static document but a living organism, open to interpretation and critique, and carrying ethical responsibility beyond its creation (Darian-Smith, 2024). The PhD thesis, after its arduous work, is now a living organism and has its own creator like Mary Shelly's iconic book, it could call Victor Frankenstein, my creator.

LIMITATIONS

Frankenstein's act of creation can be likened to the protracted and fragmented nature of PhD research; nevertheless, this analogy ultimately falls short. A doctoral thesis is a systematic contribution situated within established academic traditions, governed by methodological precision, ethical responsibility, and epistemic caution, rather than an act of ontological violation. Ultimately, academic research is produced by altering existing knowledge, identifying similarities, and uncovering research gaps; at times, a researcher resembles a miner, delving into the profound depths of intellectual inquiry. As Creswell & Creswell (2022) mention, academic research advances by refining existing knowledge,

tracing theoretical and conceptual links, and identifying gaps in literature, a process that often requires researchers to delve deeply into the scholarly terrain.

REFERENCES

- Aitchison, C., & Guerin, C. (2020). Writing groups, pedagogy, theory and practice: An introduction. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(3), 441–445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1692877>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Butler, M. (1979). *Romantics, rebels and reactionaries: English literature and its background 1760–1830*. Oxford University Press.
- Cambra-Badii, I., Guardiola, E., & Baños, J.-E. (2020). The ethical interest of Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus: A literature review 200 years after its publication. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 26(6), 2791–2808. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-020-00229>
- Cardoso, S., Santos, S., Diogo, S., Soares, D., & Carvalho, T. (2022). The transformation of doctoral education: A systematic literature review. *Higher Education*, 84(5), 885–908. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00805-5>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Darian-Smith, E. (2024). Knowledge production at a crossroads: Rising antidemocracy and diminishing academic freedom. *Studies in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2347562>
- Diogo, S., Gonçalves, A., Cardoso, S., & Carvalho, T. (2022). Tales of doctoral students: Motivations and expectations on the route to the unknown. *Education Sciences*, 12(4), Article 286. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12040286>
- Ferrández-Berruero, R., Moliner, O., Sánchez-Tarazaga, L., & Sales, A. (2023). University responsible research and innovation and society: Dialogue or monologue? *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, 10(1), Article 2272331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2023.2272331>
- Ketterer, D. (1979). *Frankenstein's creation: The book, the monster, and human reality*. University of Victoria, English Literary Studies.
- McAlpine, L., & Amundsen, C. (2011). Making meaning of diverse experiences: Constructing an identity through time. *Higher Education*, 62(4), 411–429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9392-3>
- Mellor, A. K. (1988). *Mary Shelley: Her life, her fiction, her monsters*. Routledge.
- Ngulube, P. (2025). Exploring originality in postgraduate education in context: A decade of academic excellence. *Discover Education*, 4, Article 573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-025-00997-3>
- Nicholls, H., Nicholls, M., Tekin, S., Lamb, D., & Billings, J. (2022). The impact of working in academia on researchers' mental health and well-being: A systematic review and qualitative metasynthesis. *PLOS ONE*, 17(5), Article e0268890. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0268890>
- Othman, J., & Lo, Y. Y. (2023). Constructing academic identity through critical argumentation: A narrative inquiry of Chinese EFL doctoral students' experiences. *SAGE Open*, 13(4), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231218811>
- Ruttkay, V. (2020). Anatomy of tragedy: The skeptical Gothic in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 7, Article 35. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0408-5>

Shelley, M. (2003). *Frankenstein; or, The modern Prometheus*. Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1818)

Shin, H. J. (2019). The monster's language acquisition in *Frankenstein*: Access to community and identity. Murray State University Digital Commons. <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/scholarsweek/Spring2019/SeniorLiterature/1/>

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2022). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills* (4th ed.). University of Michigan Press.

Tian, Y., & Liu, D. (2024). A bibliometric study of identity construction in English writing for academic purposes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1499917. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1499917>

Zhou, L., Li, X., & Wang, F. (2025). Fear of missing out predicts loneliness through psychological and social pathways among doctoral students. *Scientific Reports*, 15, Article 42804. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-27037-2>

Todo el contenido de LATAM Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, publicados en este sitio está disponibles bajo Licencia Creative Commons .