

The Influence of Positive Accounting in Postgraduate Programs in Accounting: a bibliometric analysis of Brazilian academic production from 2002 through 2005

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the influence of positive accounting theory on the scientific output of postgraduate accounting programs in Brazil, by examining the scientific production reported by these programs to the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES), an arm of the Education Ministry that works to improve the quality of college education. We only considered works published in periodicals and annals of scientific events classified by CAPES as “National A” or “International A”. We employed the descriptive documental method and then applied statistical tools commonly used in bibliometric studies to evaluate the authors’ productivity and the level of concentration of the works on the positive accounting approach. The results show that there was undeniable growth of positive approach research in Brazil during the period studied (2002-2005), but that this research was mainly concentrated in only two postgraduate programs, those of the University of São Paulo (USP) and of FUCAPE. The results also show a high concentration among authors.

Keywords: positive accounting, bibliometrics, accounting research

Received in 05/13/2007; revised in 05/05/2007; accept in 05/30/2007.

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Editor’s note: This paper was accepted by Alessandro Broedel Lopes.

1. INTRODUCTION

As observed by Martins and Silva (2005), accounting research in Brazil has grown substantially in the past decade, a period in which many new postgraduate accounting programs and specialization courses have been created. Besides this, the means of disseminating the scientific output of these programs has also expanded, through seminars, congresses and other events, along with publication in a growing number of scientific periodicals.

Recent studies, such as those of Theophilo (2004) and Mendonça Neto, Riccio and Sakata (2006), into this production reveal that a paradigm shift is occurring in accounting research in Brazil. The normative approach that predominated from the 1950s, when the American school overtook the Italian in the formation of Brazilian accounting thinking, and reached its apex with the enactment of the Law of Corporations in 1976, has been overtaken in recent years by the positive approach. This approach was popularized by Friedman (1967) in the 1950s in economics and started to be used by accountancy at the end of the 1960s with the pioneering work of Ball and Brown (1968). These concepts were then systematized and served as the basis for formulation of the positive theory of accounting by Watts and Zimmerman (1986).

This growth of the positive approach in Brazil follows a global trend that started in the United States at the end of the 1960s, where as observed by Martins (2005, p.3) it has predominated now for many years, the same as has occurred in Europe, as shown by the results of a recent survey carried out by Fülbier and Sellhorn (2006).

The aim of this work is to evaluate the level of use of positive accounting theory in the scientific production of postgraduate programs in accounting recommended by CAPES, as published in periodicals of disseminated at congresses and other scientific events, classified by CAPES as “National A” or “International A”.

This evaluation is based on the results obtained in a descriptive documental survey of this production, also considering the bibliometric aspects related to the degree of concentration of Brazilian accounting research based on the positive approach.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Positive Approach

Watts and Zimmerman (1986) systematized the positive theory approach in accounting research and stated that the objective of this theory is to explain and predict accounting practice – explain in the sense of evidence the reasons for the practices observed, and predict in the sense of anticipating accounting trends, with these predictions being testable. This theoretical view is denominated in economics as **positive theory** to distinguish it from normative prescriptions and arguments.

Friedman (1967) observed that the term **positive** was introduced by the English economist John Neville Keynes, father of John Maynard Keynes. In discussing the distinction among positive and normative science and art, Keynes (1891, p.21) illustrated his argumentation with an analysis of tax regulation. He observed that the investigation of the incidence of taxation is a positive inquiry, the determination of the ideal level of taxation belongs to normative (or regulative) science, while the way to reach this ideal level is not a science at all, but an art.

1.2. Studies of Brazilian Scientific Production in Accountancy

One of the first works to address the subject of Brazilian scientific output in the field of accounting was Germano (1982). This study classified the theses and dissertations produced in the postgraduate accounting program of FEA/USP in the 1970-1988 period, according to the theme covered. In this same line, but encompassing a much broader universe and using a multidimensional analysis, Riccio, Carastan and Sakata (1999) examined the tendency of all theses and dissertations presented in Brazilian postgraduate degree programs between 1962 and 1999, covering a total of 386 works.

Regarding Brazilian accounting periodicals, Oliveira (2002) examined the published output of an intentionally selected sample covering the 1990-1999 period. The results indicated that the majority of authors were faculty members, which in the author's opinion suggests that accounting research is carried out inside universities and reflects the relative lack of accounting research centers, the absence of incentive mechanisms and the pressure exercised by the postgraduate programs to publish research. Another author who studied the accounting research published in scientific periodicals is Martins (2002), who analyzed over a 12-year period (1989-2001) the production published in the then entitled *Caderno de Estudos* and current *Revista Contabilidade e Finanças USP*. Based on an analysis of the bibliographies referenced in the articles, the author concluded there is "a certain accommodation" of the researchers, characterized by the use of only a few common bibliographical sources, the predominance of bibliographical studies and the small participation of empirical studies.

Cardoso, Pereira and Guerreiro (2004) analyzed the scientific production in management and cost accounting of the works presented at the *Encontros Anuais da Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Administração – ENANPADs* (Annual Meetings of the National Association of Postgraduate Study and Research in Administration) in the period from 1998 to 2003. The results indicate a sharp increase in the themes related to accounting in general and management and cost accounting in particular. The authors stress that this quantitative growth was not accompanied by qualitative growth.

A detailed analysis of Brazilian scientific production in accountancy is presented by Theóphilo (2004) in his doctoral thesis. In this work, which is a sequence to his earlier studies (Theóphilo 1998 and 2000), the author examines the theses and dissertations submitted in postgraduate accounting programs along with works published in the annals of scientific events and specialized periodicals, finding a favorable evolution in the methodological quality of the works over the period analyzed (1994 to 2003). These results suggest there was a paradigm shift starting at the end of the 1990s, when works began to predominate with an empirical focus.

Using an essentially bibliometric approach, Cardoso, Mendonça Neto, Riccio and Sakata (2005), analyzed Brazilian scientific output in accountancy published in periodicals classified as A level by CAPES in the period from 1990 to 2003. The study concludes by pointing out the low output by Brazilian researchers in accounting when compared with authors publishing in English and when compared with Brazilian authors in the area of finance.

Batista da Silva, Oliveira and Ribeiro Filho (2005) analyzed the transformations occurring in the *Revista Contabilidade e Finanças USP* since the study conducted by Martins (2002). They found authors from a greater diversity of institutions and also growth in the 2001-2004 period in articles published of an empirical nature.

Also using a bibliometric approach, but focusing on the participation of studies with a positive approach, Mendonça Neto, Riccio and Sakata (2006) reviewed the production in accountancy presented at the ENANPADs during the 1981-2005 period. The authors affirm that the works using a positive approach made up 79.14% of the total, while those using a normative approach accounted for 20.86%. Their results also show that starting in 2002 the participation of the positive approach was never below 80%. These results are in line with those obtained by Theóphilo (2004) for the Brazilian case and by Fülbier and Sellhorn (2006) in a similar study of works presented at the annual congresses of the European Accounting Association (EAA).

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY

2.1. Programs Selected

To carry out the study, we chose all the postgraduate programs having in their denomination the terms Accounting Sciences, Accountancy or Control and that are authorized and evaluated by CAPES (according to its site, accessed in January 2007). We relied on the information available from CAPES in the item on program results, which reports the scientific output declared by each institution.

The programs analyzed are listed in Table 1 below. This table also shows the result of the CAPES evaluation of each program. The CAPES ranking scale is 1 to 7 and the minimum grade for continuing recommendation is 3. Of the programs recommended by CAPES, the only one omitted is that of Rio de Janeiro State University, for lack of data.

The period studied is 2002 through 2005, the latter year being the last one with available data at the time of conducting this study, in early 2007.

Table 1. Master's and Doctoral Programs in Accounting Recommended by CAPES.

PROGRAM NAME	INSTITUTION	STATE	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	START	CAPES SCORE
ACCOUNTING SCIENCES	UNB	Federal District	FEDERAL	2000	4
ACCOUNTING SCIENCES	FUCAPE	Espírito Santo	PRIVATE	2001	3
ACCOUNTING SCIENCES	UFRJ	Rio de Janeiro	FEDERAL	1998	3
ACCOUNTING SCIENCES	UNISINOS	Rio Grande do Sul	STATE	2000	3
ACCOUNTING SCIENCES	FURB	Santa Catarina	PRIVATE	2005	3
ACCOUNTING SCIENCES	UNIFECAP	São Paulo	PRIVATE	1999	3
ACCOUNTING AND ACTUARIAL SCIENCES	PUC/SP	São Paulo	PRIVATE	1978	4
ACCOUNTING	UFPR	Paraná	FEDERAL	2005	3
ACCOUNTING	UFSC	Santa Catarina	FEDERAL	2004	3
CONTROL	UFC	Ceará	FEDERAL	2002	3
CONTROL AND ACCOUNTING	USP	São Paulo	STATE	1970 (Master's) 1978 (Doctoral)	5
CONTROL AND ACCOUNTING	USP/RP	São Paulo	STATE	2005	3

Source: CAPES, 2006.

BBR, Braz. Bus. Rev. (Engl. ed., Online), Vitória, v. 4, n. 2, Art. 5, p. 149-161, may.-aug. 2007

The option to use the declared production of each program is justified since the academic institution of the authors is not always specified in periodicals. Therefore, reservation made for the starting date of each program, as well as the limitation of access to the documentation on the scientific output of the program, the period analyzed of each program is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Programs and Production Analyzed in the 2002-2005 Period.

Institution	2002	2003	2004	2005
UNB	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
FUCAPE		Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
UFRJ	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
UNISINOS	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
FURB				Analyzed
UNIFECAP	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
PUC/SP	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
UFPR				Analyzed
UFSC				Analyzed
UFC		Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
USP	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed	Analyzed
USP/RP				Analyzed

2.2. The Scientific Production Analyzed.

The scientific output analyzed is that indicated by the programs to CAPES and published in periodicals and annals of selected congresses and other events. The selection criterion for these periodicals and events was relevance and recognition by CAPES. Thus, we selected *Revista Contabilidade e Finanças USP* (“USP Accounting and Finance Review”), *Anais do ENANPAD* (“ENANPAD Annals”) and *Anais do Congresso USP de Controladoria e Contabilidade* (“Annals of the USP Congress on Control and Accounting”), classified by the Qualis System of CAPES as National or International A, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Scientific Periodical or Event Chosen

Periodical or Event	Producing Institution	CAPES Qualis
<i>Revista Contabilidade e Finanças USP</i>	FEA/USP – Accounting and Actuarial Department	National A
ENANPAD	ANPAD	International A
USP Congress on Control and Accounting	FEA/USP – Accounting and Actuarial Department	National A

There are some works by co-author from different programs. In these cases we decided to consider the participation of each individually, that is, each participation was considered for the institution to which the particular co-author belonged. Given the objective of this work and the small number of these occurrences, we believe this does not greatly affect the evaluation.

In the analysis of the works from event annals and the periodical indexes, there were cases where authors indicated they belonged to a certain program, but the work was not on the list reported to CAPES. In these cases, we decided not to consider the work, except in some cases of works disclosed at the USP Congress where the author’s link to a certain program was evident and in some works published in the *Revista Contabilidade e Finanças USP*.

These small adjustments were made aiming to give a better picture of the scientific output of the postgraduate accounting programs, which can be identified by the production of the program's students and faculty members. The need for these adjustments indicates that some programs do not correctly report their output to CAPES.

2.3. The Methodology of Analysis

The analytical procedure consisted of the following steps: (1) obtaining the list of declared production; (2) searching through and separating out for further analysis the works identified in the previous step based on the title; (3) classification of the approach (positive or normative) based on reading the work's abstract; (4) in case of doubt, reading the entire article to judge its emphasis (positive or normative).

Through these steps we identified 156 references, of which 8 were written by more than one author and 7 were published in more than one source, leaving a total of 140 works. As normal, the works were presented first at events and then accepted for publication in periodicals. This is perfectly logical, because scientific meetings have the role of generating criticisms of the works presented, which are often adjusted before final publication. We also noted that many works used the same database, but analyzed other aspects not included in the initial work.

2.3.1. Classification of the Methodological Approach Taken by the Authors

To classify the methodological approach (positive or normative), we used the same criterion employed by Mendonça Neto, Riccio and Sakata (2006) and by Fülbier and Sellhorn (2006), based on the explicit intention of the author, i.e., we considered as normative those works where the author declared the implications or relevance of the results obtained for the improvement of accounting practice, and as positive those where the author declares the results obtained contribute to the understanding of a determined accounting phenomenon.

2.3.2. Quantitative Analysis of the Scientific Production in Accountancy

For quantitative analysis of the scientific production in question, we used the model of Lotka. This model, widely used in the area of bibliometry and scientometry, permits evaluation of the productivity of authors and the degree of concentration of the knowledge in a given field of science.

According to Egghe and Rousseau (1990, 293), Lotka in analyzing the cumulative index of authors listed in *Chemical Abstracts* (1907-1916) and in *Auerbach Geschichtstafeln der Physik* (1910) found the following regularity:

$$a^n = \frac{C}{n^c}$$

where a^n is the number of authors with n publications and $c \approx 2$ but not necessarily 2.

If $c = 2$, by Euler's Theorem $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^2} = \frac{\pi^2}{6}$ and the total number of articles $T = C \times \frac{\pi^2}{6} \rightarrow C = T \times \frac{6}{\pi^2} \rightarrow C \approx 0,6079T$. So, $a = \frac{0,6079T}{1^2}$. This means that the number

of authors who publish a single time ($n=1$) corresponds to 60.79% of the total number of authors. This being the case, one can write:

$$a_n = a_1 \cdot \frac{1}{n^2}$$

where a_1 denotes the number of authors with a single publication.

Subsequently this law was generalized to:

$$a_n = a_1 \cdot \frac{1}{n^c}$$

where instead of using the exponent 2, a generic exponent c is used, to be estimated case by case.

In works related to finance and accounting this model has been used by, among others, Chung and Cox (1990) and Chung, Cox and Pak (1992). In the Brazilian case, the work of Urbizagastegui Alvarado (2002) stands out. He applied this methodology to Brazilian scientific output in 10 fields. Leal, Oliveira and Soluri (2003) used this method to analyze the productivity of Brazilian authors in the finance area, and Cardoso et al. (2005) and Mendonça Neto, Riccio and Sakata (2006) did the same in the accounting area.

Just as mentioned above, in this work we used the general law of Lotka, expressed by:

$$a_n = a_1 \cdot \frac{1}{n^c}$$

where the coefficient c can be estimated by a linear regression, as follows:

$$\ln\left(\frac{a_n}{a_1}\right) = -c \ln(n)$$

An estimated coefficient c greater than 2 reveals that the number of authors with a single publication is greater than that established in the Lotka's law. This means smaller author productivity on the one hand, but less concentration of knowledge on the other, and vice versa as c becomes smaller than 2.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

3.1. Results of the Analysis of Scientific Production with a Positive Approach from the Programs Chosen

The results of the analysis, reported below in Table 4, reveal a concentration of output with a positive approach in the programs of USP and FUCAPE, since together these programs were responsible for 59% of such production in the period.

Table 4. Summary of Production with a Positive Approach in the 2002-2005 Period

Program	State	Quantity	%
USP	São Paulo	48	31%
FUCAPE	Espírito Santo	43	28%
UNB	Federal District	25	16%
UNISINOS	Rio Grande do Sul	19	12%
USP/RP	São Paulo	6	4%
PUC/SP	São Paulo	5	3%
UFSC	Santa Catarina	5	3%
UFRJ	Rio de Janeiro	2	1%
FURB	Santa Catarina	1	1%
UNIFECAP	São Paulo	1	1%
UFC	Ceará	1	1%
UFPR	Pernambuco	0	0%
	TOTAL	156	100%

Other programs that deserve mention are those of UNB and UNISINOS, the former showing steady growth since 2004 and the latter with constant output at satisfactory levels for the program's size, since 2003. This evolution of production of the four programs with highest production can be observed in Table 5.

Table 5. Evolution of Production with a Positive Approach – Programs with the Four Largest Outputs

	2002	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL
USP	9	12	16	11	48
FUCAPE		13	8	22	43
UNB	3	2	10	10	25
UNISINOS	4	5	5	5	19
TOTAL	16	32	39	48	135

Table 6 below shows the evolution of production by periodical/event, where a consistent growth in works with a positive approach can be noted.

Table 6. Annual Production by Periodical/Event

	2002	2003	2004	2005	TOTAL	%
ENANPAD	12	20	14	25	71	46%
USP Congress	4	8	22	26	60	38%
<i>Revista Contabilidade e Finanças USP</i>	3	5	7	10	25	16%
TOTAL	19	33	43	61	156	

It should be pointed out that in the study period covering four years, the production of works with a positive approach tripled, from 19 in 2002 to 61 in 2005. As would be expected,

events are responsible for most of this output, since they are where the works are first presented while still in preliminary form, to be discussed and improved for later publication in periodicals. This suggests that in the next few years, there will be an impressive volume of articles with a positive approach published in accounting periodicals.

3.2. Results of the Analysis of Scientific Production with a Positive Approach by Author

The 156 works analyzed had participation of 152 authors. Of these, only 29 works (18.6%) were by a single author, while the remaining 127 (81.4%) had more than one author. Regarding these authors, 86 of them appear a single time, as author or co-author. In all, the 156 works had 359 author participations, either individually or together with other authors. These figures can be seen in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Number of Participations by Author

Number of Participations	Number of Authors	Total Number of Participations
1	86	86
2	26	52
3	19	57
4	1	4
5	8	40
6	4	24
7	1	7
8	1	8
9	1	9
10	0	0
11	1	11
12	0	0
13	2	26
14	0	0
15	0	0
16	1	16
17	0	0
18	0	0
19	1	19
Total	152	359

Applying the Lotka's law to these data in the form presented before, namely $a_n = a_1 \cdot \frac{1}{n^c}$, and estimating the coefficient c through a linear regression of the form $Ln\left(\frac{a_n}{a_1}\right) = -cLn(n)$, produces the results presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Estimation of the Coefficient c by Linear Regression

C	r	R^2
1.792798	0.864467	0.747304

The results above differ substantially from those obtained in previous bibliometric studies reported regarding Brazilian output in accounting and finance and approach that obtained by Chung, Cox and Pak, (1992) for output in English.

A comparison between the values estimated for the coefficient c in the present study and those obtained in previous studies is shown in Table 9.

Table 9 – Coefficients of the Generalized Law of Lotka

Coefficient and Period Studied	This Work	Lotka	Chung et al. (1992)	Leal et al (2003)	Cardoso et al. (2005)	Mendonça Neto et al. (2006)
C	1.79	2.00	1.87	2.44	2.54	2.53
Period	2002 to 2005	1907 to 1916	1968 to 1988	1974 to 2001	1990 to 2003	1981 to 2005

Although these results at first glance suggest higher productivity by authors who take a positive approach, this difference can in large part be explained by the fact that this study, besides covering a relatively shorter period (four years) than the others, involves a more recent one as well, when accounting research in general grew impressively.

In any event, the results suggest that for the recent period there is high productivity by authors who take a positive approach and also a level of concentration of knowledge in this area greater than the empirical patterns observed by Lotka.

The authors who had the highest production or works addressing the positive approach are listed in Table 10.

Table 10 – Authors in Descending Order of Publication

Author	Program	Number of Participations
LOPES, A.B.	USP	19
TEIXEIRA, A.J.C.	FUCAPE	16
CORRAR, L.J.	USP	13
MEDEIROS, O.R.	UNB	13
NOSSA V.	FUCAPE	11
DALMACIO, F.Z.	FUCAPE	9
TERRA, P.R.S.	UNISINOS	8
LOUZADA, L.C.	FUCAPE	7
CARVALHO, L.N.G.	USP	6
COSTA, F.M.	FUCAPE	6
SANTANA, D.P.	FUCAPE	6
SARLO NETO, A.	FUCAPE	6
AGUIAR, A.B.	USP	5
BORBA, J.A.	UFSC	5
CUPERTINO, C.M.	UNB	5
GUERREIRO, R.	USP	5
LOSS, L.	FUCAPE	5
LUSTOSA, P.R.B.	UNB	5
SECURATO, J.R.	PUC-SP	5
ZANELLA, F.C.	UNISINOS	5
Total		160

The above table shows that 19 authors who had up to five participation in the study period represent 12.5% of the total of 152 authors and were responsible for 160 participations (45% of the total).

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results indicate there has been an unquestionable growth in the influence of positive accounting theory in the scientific output of Brazilian postgraduate accounting programs.

It is worth observing, however, that this influence is still quite concentrated in the programs of FEA/USP and FUCAPE, which were together responsible for 59% of the accumulated output in the period from 2002 to 2005. Besides being concentrated in these two programs, the production was also more concentrated in relation to authors than the empirical patterns observed by Lotka. However, it is reasonable to assume that the tendency in coming years will be for this type of approach to become less concentrated as students receive their degrees from these two leading programs and take up teaching positions at other institutions. Two recent works based on positive accounting should significantly contribute to this diffusion, those of Iudícibus and Lopes (2004) and Lopes and Martins (2005)

As stated by Camargo, Coutinho and Fernandes (2005) for the finance area, preliminary indications suggest that most studies follow in the footsteps of models developed in more advanced academic centers, principally in the United States, which may not contribute to the formulation of theories suitable for Brazilian reality. This can be justified, however, because of the initial stage of this approach in Brazil. Nevertheless, it is hoped that in the near future the studies carried out by Brazilian researchers based on positive accounting will start to focus on specific aspects of Brazilian reality.

From a practical standpoint, we suggest that additional efforts be aimed at systemizing the cataloging of studies, with an expanded database and sharper focus on the themes involved. It would also be good to analyze the process of institutionalization of the positive approach in Brazilian accounting research and use other approaches than the normative and positive, such as the critical approach, widely disseminated in European academic circles, as well as the behavioral approach.

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