

# Overview of doctoral research in art education in Andalusia: Gender and topics

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the participation of women in doctoral theses on education and art carried out at public universities in Andalusia, with the aim of understanding gender patterns, researched topics, and academic production trends. The theoretical framework highlights the relevance of art in education for fostering creativity, critical thinking, and inclusion, as well as the importance of examining doctoral theses as reflections of academic and cultural dynamics. The methodology used was descriptive and qualitative, based on documentary analysis and bibliometric techniques applied to 83 theses extracted from the TESEO database, considering variables such as university, year, gender of authors, directors, and committee members, as well as thematic descriptors. The results show that most theses are concentrated in the field of Education, with pedagogy serving as the central axis; although some universities show notable female participation among authors, there remains a significant gender imbalance in leadership and committee roles, predominantly held by men. Additionally, there is a thematic concentration in education and music, while fields such as educational technology and social sciences are underrepresented, highlighting the need to diversify research lines in this area.

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Art education, doctoral production in Andalusia, Thematic networks and bibliometric analysis, Gender and academic participation

## Introduction

Art has historically served as a profound reflection of the society in which it develops. From cave paintings to contemporary expressions, art has functioned as a medium to capture emotions, denounce injustices, celebrate achievements, and convey ideas. It not only aesthetically represents a particular era but also serves as a cultural testimony that enables a deeper understanding of the beliefs, aspirations, and tensions of different communities. In this sense, art becomes a window into the collective soul of each society. At the same time, society continuously influences artistic production. Political changes, technological advancements, economic transformations, and social movements directly impact the themes, forms, and styles chosen by artists. Thus, art not only responds to its surrounding environment but also possesses the capacity to question and transform it. This dynamic relationship positions art as a fundamental tool for social dialogue, capable of raising awareness, fostering critical thinking, and promoting empathy among individuals.

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Art plays a fundamental role in education by contributing to individuals' holistic development from multiple perspectives. The study of art within educational settings constitutes an essential tool for comprehensive development, offering cognitive, emotional, and social benefits. Artistic practice fosters skills such as creativity, imagination, and divergent thinking, which are crucial for problem-solving and innovation. Through art, students learn to explore diverse forms of expression and symbolic representation, allowing them to construct personal meanings and understand the world from multiple perspectives. Consequently, art education stimulates cognitive development and creativity among students (Calzadilla, 2009; Elichiry & Regatky, 2010). Moreover, art education plays a critical role in strengthening self-esteem and personal confidence. By engaging in creative processes, students develop greater self-awareness and an understanding of their abilities, which promotes identity affirmation and the consolidation of their own voice. Artistic activities provide a space for freedom where experimentation, mistakes, and reattempts are encouraged without the rigid constraints often imposed by more structured curricular areas. Artistic practice expands perceptual awareness, clarifies ideas and emotions, and facilitates both personal and social integration, enabling individuals to develop essential skills for their holistic formation (Calzadilla, 2009).

Another noteworthy aspect is that art education contributes to the development of key social skills such as communication, empathy, and collaboration. Collective creation, the sharing of artistic works, and discussions on artistic expressions promote dialogue, respect for diverse opinions, and community learning. These experiences strengthen the human and relational dimensions of education, which are often neglected in models focused solely on academic content. Art education also enhances critical thinking and aesthetic sensitivity, elements indispensable in a society that increasingly communicates through visual and symbolic means. By analyzing and reflecting on diverse cultural and artistic manifestations, students develop their capacity for interpretation, questioning, and evaluation, enriching their understanding of the surrounding social and cultural phenomena.

Art within education serves as a catalyst for cultural diversity and freedom of expression. It facilitates the recognition of multiple identities and ways of life, promoting inclusion, tolerance, and participation in cultural life. When culture and creativity are integrated into the educational experience, they broaden the learning horizon and make it more meaningful, helping to build more just, equitable, and culturally conscious communities. Furthermore, art education promotes inclusion and respect for cultural diversity. Artistic education offers a pedagogical approach that fosters understanding and respect for cultural differences, thus contributing to the construction of an inclusive culture within the school environment (Concha-Huarcaya et al., 2024; Trelles de la Peña, 2011).

The LOMLOE (Spain, 2020), which currently governs the Spanish educational system, underscores the importance of art within the school curriculum. Its educational principles and objectives recognize the need to promote creativity, artistic thinking, and knowledge of cultural heritage. Additionally, subjects related to Artistic Education, Music, Visual Arts, and other forms of artistic expression are established across different educational stages, particularly in Primary and Secondary Education. The Spanish educational system also includes an Arts Baccalaureate track, as well as professional and higher artistic education programs covering disciplines such as music, dance, performing arts, design, and cultural heritage conservation, among others. These programs are governed by specific regulations and are delivered in specialized institutions.

As Sánchez de Serdio (2010) points out, the relationships between art and education have followed multiple trajectories, connecting various fields according to interests and needs that do not always coincide. It has not been solely the school system that has promoted art education; the artistic world itself has also claimed the pedagogical domain as one that belongs to it and can enrich its practices. The integration of art into education not only enriches the learning process but also strengthens essential aspects of human development, such as creativity, empathy, inclusion, and cultural identity. These benefits are well documented in the open-access academic literature, highlighting the importance of fostering art education at all educational levels.

### Education, Art, and Research

The analysis of doctoral theses as a research field in itself allows for the visibility of the dynamics of academic knowledge production, as well as the thematic, epistemological, and methodological priorities of a scientific community within a specific period and context. Studying doctoral theses provides a privileged perspective on emerging interests and the ways in which universities train their researchers. According to Moreno and Burgos (2017), doctoral theses represent a highly valuable source of scientific information for understanding consolidated research lines and identifying unexplored gaps, thus serving as a key tool for academic planning and the evaluation of graduate program quality.

Furthermore, doctoral theses reflect the ways in which knowledge is institutionalized and communicated within academia, functioning as indicators of both disciplinary development and scientific and educational policy. As García-Jiménez (2018) points out, the systematic study of doctoral theses contributes to mapping scientific production in specific fields, allowing the identification of patterns, key actors, and relationships among universities, disciplines, and theoretical approaches. From this perspective, analyzing doctoral theses not only contributes to meta-research but also enriches the understanding of how future researchers are trained and what forms of knowledge are legitimized within academic circuits.

Researching topics related to art within the educational field at the doctoral level is fundamental for several reasons that contribute to advancing knowledge and improving pedagogical practices. First, research in art education enables the understanding and transformation of educational reality through the analysis of the various expressive forms of art and their impact on educational processes. Art education, as an educational process that integrates diverse artistic manifestations, applies scientific research to address issues present in its development, thereby contributing to societal well-being (García & Keeling, 2020).

It is essential to promote new research from the perspective of artistic styles and movements, as well as to deepen their interpretation. In this context, it is equally important to recognize the evolution of the creative process over time, considering that major art movements have served as sources of inspiration for the development of multiple fields of knowledge, including science. In this regard, Zambrano U. (2016) points out that “although artistic research does not seek to produce knowledge in the same way as scientific research, it does aim to enrich and expand the symbolic and aesthetic universe in which human beings operate” (p. 115).

The completion of a doctoral thesis in this field facilitates the systematization of experiences and knowledge, enabling the identification and analysis of the main scientific contributions in

the area of art education. Therefore, it is of great importance to systematize the results of doctoral research in order to better understand contributions and trends within this field (García et al., 2021). Moreover, research in art education contributes to methodological innovation by exploring new forms of teaching and learning that incorporate creative practices. Doctoral theses in arts and design, developed through creative practices, have become of particular interest in academia due to their potential to generate communicable knowledge within the framework of research-creation (Elkins, 2013; García, 2019).

In addition, research in this field allows for the examination of relevant problems and theories, as well as the identification of trends and perspectives in art education. A study by Marín (2011) offers a description of some of the key issues, theories, researchers, and findings at both the international level and within Spanish universities, related to research in art education and arts-based methodologies. These aspects connecting doctoral research with art in education are essential for deepening knowledge, improving pedagogical practices, fostering innovation, and contributing to cultural and social development (Barone & Eisner, 2011).

The scientific literature includes studies on doctoral theses in general (Maz-Machado et al., 2023; Melero-Bolaños et al., 2024; Rojas-Rivera et al., 2024) and, more specifically, on the arts. Yilmaz & Acar (2023) analyzed graduate theses produced in Turkey in the field of musical culture, identifying an increase in recent years. Ucak (2011) conducted a citation analysis of sources used in doctoral theses in art in Turkey. García et al. (2021) examined the treatment of the arts in 45 doctoral theses in pedagogical sciences in Cuba. Among the most relevant findings, which represent a novel contribution to the scientific field, were studies of a historical nature approached from a qualitative perspective. It was revealed that results related to educational conceptions and models were oriented toward theoretical-methodological contributions with pedagogical and didactic implications.

Arnal-Ferrández et al. (2023) analyzed the production of Spanish doctoral theses during the period 1987–2021 using the TESEO database, identifying the Complutense University of Madrid as the institution with the highest number of theses in advanced artistic education, with larger universities generally leading in production. They also found that theses focused primarily on music and the performing arts, with less attention given to the visual and plastic arts. In the autonomous community of Andalusia, there are 13 universities—10 public and 3 private—and all public universities offer doctoral programs in fields related to education. For this reason, it was deemed relevant and pertinent to conduct a study with the objective of understanding the participation of women in the process of completing doctoral theses in education related to art at Andalusian universities.

## Method

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative design, focused on documentary content analysis and ex post facto examination. Bibliometric techniques were applied to analyze the collected data.

## Population and Sample

The population consisted of all doctoral theses completed within the departments of “Didactics of Body Expression, Visual Arts, and Music” and “Musical, Visual, and Body Expression and Their Didactics.” It is possible that some theses related to the field were not included if they were conducted outside of the specified departments.

## Study Variables

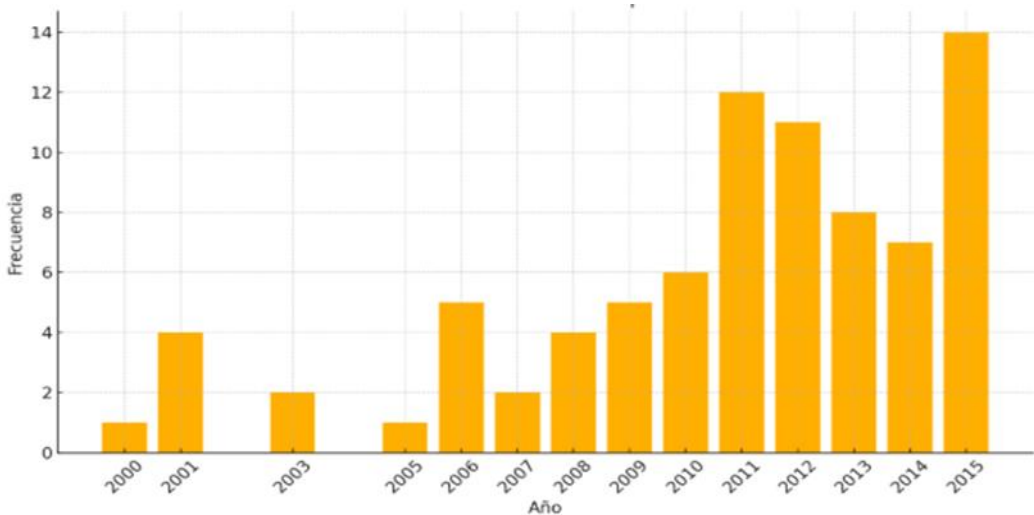
The variables considered in this study included the university where the thesis was defended, the year of defense, the title and descriptors, the gender of the authors, and the gender of the directors and committee members who evaluated the theses.

## Data Collection Process

In February 2025, data were retrieved from the TESEO database (<https://www.educacion.gob.es/teseo/irGestionarConsulta.do>), which contains records of all doctoral theses completed in Spain. All information pertaining to theses defended at Andalusian universities within the specified departments was downloaded. The data were transferred to an ad hoc database, and the gender of each participant in the thesis process (author, director, committee member) was identified according to their role. Descriptor frequencies were then calculated, and a categorization of the descriptors was carried out. To analyze thematic connections, the software Atlas.TI was employed.

## Findings

A total of 83 doctoral theses were identified, conducted at only four of the nine public universities in Andalusia. The graph illustrates an upward trend in the frequency of thesis defenses over time, with a sustained increase beginning in 2006 and reaching a peak in 2015 (Figure 1). During the initial years, between 2000 and 2005, activity was minimal, with only one or two records per year. However, from 2006 onward, a notable increase in production emerged, which became particularly pronounced between 2011 and 2015—a period characterized by high productivity, with annual figures ranging between 11 and 14 theses. The year 2015 stands out as the period with the highest frequency, suggesting a peak moment of academic activity within the analyzed context.



**Figure 1.** Diachronic production of doctoral theses on visual arts in Andalusia

The University of Málaga accounts for the highest number of doctoral theses on Visual Arts (36.14%), followed by the University of Granada (31.33%).

**Table 1.** Number of theses per university

University	No. of theses	%
Universidad de Granada	26	31,33
Universidad de Huelva	20	24,10
Universidad de Málaga	30	36,14
Universidad de Sevilla	7	8,43
Total	83	100,00

When analyzing the gender of the authors, it was found that, of the 83 authors, 36 were women (43.37%) and 47 were men (56.63%), indicating a slight overall majority of male participation. However, when examined by university, notable differences emerge. The University of Granada stands out for its female majority, with 61.54% female authors compared to 38.46% male authors, a pattern similarly observed at the University of Seville, where women account for 57.14% compared to 42.86% men. In contrast, the University of Huelva exhibits the opposite pattern, with a male majority (60.00%) over women (40.00%). The University of Málaga shows the greatest gender disparity, with only 26.67% female authors compared to 73.33% male authors. These data suggest that, while men outnumber women overall, certain institutions display more balanced patterns or even a female majority, which invites further exploration of the institutional, cultural, or disciplinary factors influencing women’s and men’s participation in academic authorship.

**Table 2.** Gender of author by university

University	Author's gender				Total
	Women	%	Men	%	
Universidad de Granada	16	61,54	10	38,46	26
Universidad de Huelva	8	40,00	12	60,00	20
Universidad de Málaga	8	26,67	22	73,33	30
Universidad de Sevilla	4	57,14	3	42,86	7
Total	36	43,37	47	56,63	83

Table 3 presents the distribution of director types by gender across the analyzed universities. Of the total 83 cases, male-only supervisory teams clearly predominate, accounting for 74.70% (62 cases), followed by female-only teams at 19.28% (16 cases), while mixed-gender supervisory teams are scarce, representing only 4.82% (4 cases). When broken down by university, the University of Huelva stands out with the highest proportion of male-only supervision at 95%, and only 5% female-only supervision, with no mixed-gender teams. The University of Málaga also exhibits a pronounced male dominance (72.41%), although it includes 24.14% female-only and a small 3.45% of mixed-gender teams. At the University of Granada, although male-only supervision remains dominant (65.38%), the figures are somewhat more balanced, with 23.08% female-only and 11.54% mixed-gender teams, making

it the institution with the highest presence of mixed-gender supervision. Finally, the University of Seville shows a similar pattern, with 71.43% male-only, 28.57% female-only, and no mixed-gender teams. Overall, these data reveal a marked predominance of men in supervisory roles, with limited presence of mixed teams, potentially reflecting institutional, cultural, or structural dynamics that constrain women’s participation in academic leadership positions.

Table 3. Type of director by gender and university

University	Type of director by gender						Total
	Mixta	%	Only men	%	Only Women	%	
Universidad de Granada	3	11,54	17	65,38	6	23,08	26
Universidad de Huelva	0	0	19	95,00	1	5,00	20
Universidad de Málaga	1	3,45	22	72,41	7	24,14	30
Universidad de Sevilla	0	0	5	71,43	2	28,57	7
Total	4	4,82	62	74,70	16	19,28	83

To determine whether there was any statistical relationship between the gender of the supervisory team (male, female, or mixed) and the gender of the authorship, a chi-square test of independence was conducted, yielding a p-value of 0.398. This indicates that no statistically significant evidence was found to support a relationship between the two variables.

With regard to the gender distribution among committee members by university, a total of 395 members were recorded, with men clearly predominating, accounting for 71.90% (284 members), while women represented only 28.10% (111 members), highlighting a notable gender imbalance in committee composition. When analyzed by institution, the University of Granada showed a female proportion of 37.30% and a male proportion of 62.70%, making it the institution with the most gender-balanced committee. The University of Seville followed, with 40% women and 60% men, also showing a relatively balanced pattern. In contrast, the University of Málaga and the University of Huelva displayed much sharper gender gaps: Málaga reported only 23.78% women compared to 76.22% men, while Huelva exhibited the most pronounced disparity, with just 17.58% female participation versus 82.42% male. Taken together, these data suggest that, while some universities are making progress toward greater gender parity, there remains a strong overrepresentation of men in academic committees overall. This raises important questions about selection processes and the opportunities available for women’s participation in these academic evaluation spaces.

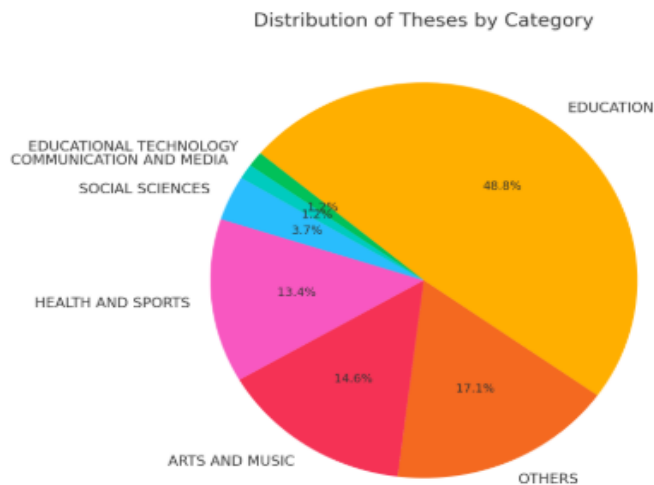
Table 4. Gender of tribunal members

University	Gender of tribunal members				Total
	F	%	M	%	
Universidad de Granada	47	37,30	79	62,70	126
Universidad de Huelva	16	17,58	75	82,42	91
Universidad de Málaga	34	23,78	109	76,22	143
Universidad de Sevilla	14	40,00	21	60,00	35
Total	111	28,10	284	71,90	395



With regard to the thematic areas addressed in these doctoral theses, an analysis of the descriptors was conducted, identifying 66 descriptors, which were subsequently grouped to establish the categories presented in Figure 2. The data reveal that Education is by far the dominant category, accounting for 48.8% of all theses, indicating that nearly half of the academic work is concentrated in this field. This is followed by the categories of Other (17.1%), Arts and Music (14.6%), and Health and Sports (13.4%), all of which hold a considerable, though clearly smaller, share compared to Education. At the lower end of the distribution are Social Sciences (3.7%), Educational Technology (1.2%), and Communication and Media (1.2%), each showing a very limited presence in the overall corpus.

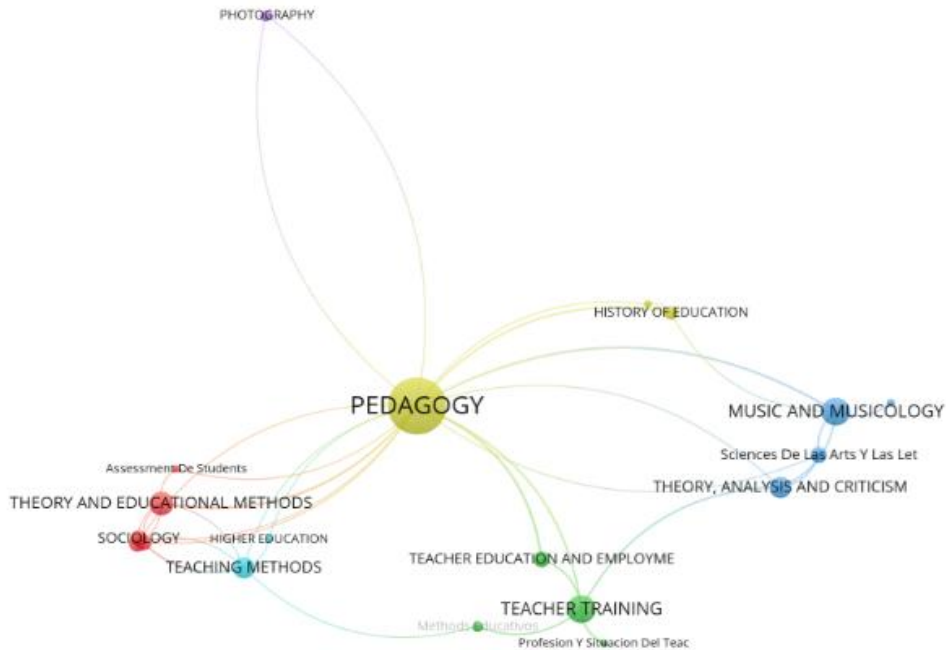
These findings reflect a strong thematic concentration in education, possibly indicating an institutional priority or a heightened interest among researchers in this area. The underrepresented categories may point to emerging fields, niche topics, or areas with less established research traditions within the analyzed context. This pattern presents an opportunity to reflect on the diversification of research lines and highlights the need to encourage doctoral work in underrepresented areas in order to achieve a more balanced academic landscape.



**Figure 2.** Thematic categories

The 66 descriptors generate a co-occurrence network that represents the thematic connections among the most relevant research areas within the analyzed corpus (Figure 3). The most prominent central node is PEDAGOGY, which serves as an organizing axis and displays multiple links to other areas, highlighting its transversal role across the body of work. This node is directly connected to topics such as Teacher Training, Teaching Methods, Theory and Educational Methods, Music and Musicology, History of Education, and Photography, underscoring its centrality and influence.





**Figure 3.** Network of descriptors of visual arts theses

Among the secondary nodes, Teacher Training and Music and Musicology stand out, as they are not only linked to Pedagogy but also exhibit their own branches, indicating a significant and autonomous presence within the thematic map. For example, Teacher Training is associated with topics such as Teacher Education and Employment and aspects related to the teaching profession, while Music and Musicology connects to areas such as Theory, Analysis and Criticism, and Sciences De Las Arts Y Les Let. On the left side of the network, a small cluster is observed around Sociology and Theory and Educational Methods, which also connects to topics such as Higher Education and Assessment Of Students, reflecting an interest in theoretical and social approaches to education. Finally, there are more peripheral nodes such as Photography, which, although linked to Pedagogy, appear isolated from the rest of the network, suggesting that they represent more specialized or niche research lines. Overall, this network reveals an academic ecosystem in which pedagogy functions as an integrative theme across various disciplines, with emerging or specialized areas contributing to thematic diversity. It also uncovers patterns of collaboration and thematic concentration that may serve as a foundation for identifying strengths and opportunities within the research agenda.

### Conclusion and Implications

The analysis of doctoral theses completed at Andalusian universities reveals that the majority of works are concentrated in the category of Education, accounting for nearly half of the total. This highlights the central role of art as a pedagogical tool and reflects the institutional priority of strengthening educational competencies from an artistic and creative perspective. Furthermore, pedagogy emerges as a central node within the descriptor network, connecting multiple thematic areas and underscoring its cross-cutting relevance within the field under study. Although some universities, such as Granada and Seville, exhibit notable female

participation in thesis authorship, the data reveal a significant gender imbalance in supervisory roles and academic committees, where men predominate. This finding underscores the need to implement strategies that promote gender equity, particularly within academic leadership positions and evaluation processes, in order to ensure balanced and diverse participation. The study also reveals a thematic concentration in education and music, while areas such as educational technology, social sciences, and communication are scarcely represented. This situation presents an opportunity to encourage research in less explored fields, which would not only diversify the academic agenda but also address contemporary challenges related to the digital society, inclusion, and cultural diversity. Looking ahead, it seems essential to broaden the research spectrum, as this could help to better understand the social and cultural impact of art education in Andalusia.

### Declarations

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