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Articles

Higher education innovation: contributions from articles in Brazilian journals indexed in the SciELO and EBSCOhost databases (2012-2022)

Inovação no ensino superior: contribuições de artigos em periódicos brasileiros indexados na base SciELO e EBSCOhost (2012-2022)

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Abstract

This work presents bibliographical research on themes, approaches and propositions of 18 articles referring to innovation in higher education available in Brazilian journals indexed in the SciELO and Ebschohost databases (2012-2022). The study sought to understand the challenges of innovation in the context of education in Brazilian Higher Education. The articles were analyzed based on the content analysis proposed by Bardin (2011). The articles were classified according to the convergence of themes. Three distinct categories emerged: Challenges of innovation in Higher Education education; Practices that drive innovation in Higher Education; The paths and challenges for innovation in the teaching-learning process. The study made it possible to reflect on the possibilities and challenges faced when adopting the path to innovation, however, highlighting the importance of adopting innovative practices that boost the teaching-learning process in higher education institutions.

Keywords: innovation; education; University education.

Resumo

Este trabalho apresenta pesquisa bibliográfica sobre temas, abordagens e proposições de 18 artigos referentes à inovação no ensino superior, disponíveis em periódicos brasileiros indexados na base SciELO e Ebschohost (2012-2022). O estudo buscou compreender os desafios da inovação no contexto da educação no Ensino Superior brasileiro. Os artigos foram analisados com base na análise de conteúdo proposta por Bardin (2011) e classificados de acordo com a convergência de temas. Emergiram três categorias distintas: Desafios da inovação na educação do Ensino Superior; Práticas que impulsionam a inovação no Ensino Superior; Os caminhos e os desafios para inovação no processo de ensino-aprendizagem. O estudo possibilitou refletir acerca das possibilidades e desafios enfrentados ao adotar o caminho para a inovação, contudo, ressalta a importância de adotar práticas inovadoras que impulsionam o processo de ensino-aprendizagem nas instituições de ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: inovação; educação; Ensino Superior.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational innovation is a broad and complex topic, encompassing a variety of perspectives and developments that may emerge across different levels and sectors of education.

The concept itself is polysemic, often associated with processes of change, transformation, and reform within educational systems. Although multiple definitions exist, educational innovation is a specific form of innovation closely related to the broader issue of change in education.

There is currently a certain level of consensus among scholars who study innovation, that it refers to the intentional introduction of novelties aimed at promoting improvements and transformations in educational institutions, from basic education to higher education. According to Campolina (2012), innovation may involve different focal points, ranging from transformations in pedagogical practices and teaching resources to the generation of new ideas concerning educational processes and institutional management. Such innovations may include changes in methods, materials, and curricula and involve multiple educational actors, including teachers, administrators, students, and the broader educational community.

This article addresses the issue of educational innovation and examines how it has been articulated and expressed within the context of higher education institutions in Brazil. The study originates from a research problem investigated in a master's thesis focusing on educational innovations and on the factors that facilitate or hinder innovation processes, particularly the tensions that arise from the misalignment between teachers' needs and the demands imposed by educational management in higher education institutions.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of educational innovation in higher education, a bibliographic study was conducted. The investigation focused on studies that explore how innovation has been conceptualized and implemented within the daily practices of higher education institutions. The search for relevant studies was carried out using the SciELO and Ebscohost databases, both of which contain a significant number of academic journals in the fields of education and psychology.

This search made it possible to identify key concepts and perspectives on educational innovation presented by the authors of the selected studies, as well as the practices and initiatives implemented in higher education institutions. It also allowed us to examine what characterizes innovative higher education institutions and how innovative educational practices differ from those traditionally adopted in most Brazilian universities.

The main objective of this article is therefore to present the results of this bibliographic investigation, highlighting the relevance of educational innovation in the academic context and examining its development within Brazilian higher education. More specifically, the article discusses the main issues identified in the literature and organizes them into thematic categories that highlight both the challenges of innovation and the possibilities for innovative pedagogical practices.

The article is structured into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents the theoretical framework addressing the concept of innovation and the historical processes of change in education. The third section describes the methodological procedures adopted in the study. The fourth section presents the results of the analysis and discusses the main themes identified in literature. Finally, the fifth section presents the final considerations, highlighting critical aspects that require further reflection and pointing to directions for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the polysemic nature of the concept of innovation, it is useful to revisit the etymology of the term. The word innovation derives from the Latin *innovatio*, associated with *novus*, meaning new, novelty, renewal, or to innovate. The prefix *in* combined with the concept of the new conveys the idea of the emergence of novelty within a particular context. In this sense, innovation may refer both to novelty introduced into a context and to novelty that originates from within that context itself.

Despite the multiple meanings attributed to educational innovation, it is generally understood as a phenomenon situated within a specific context, whose outcomes depend on a creative combination of competencies that are strongly influenced by the environment in which innovation occurs. Tidd, Bessant and Pavitt (2008) argue that there is a relative consensus that innovation involves the generation, acceptance, and implementation of new ideas, processes, products, or services. Importantly, the criterion of novelty depends on the context; therefore, innovation should not be understood simply as the opposition between the traditional and the modern, but rather as the emergence of original practices within a given context.

In the field of education, innovation has been examined within the broader framework of the social and human sciences, where it is understood as a phenomenon related to the creation and transformation of institutions and policies, as well as to the social processes and behaviors that shape educational practices. Carbonell (2002, 2016), an internationally recognized scholar in this field, defines educational innovation as a set of interventions, decisions, and educational processes implemented intentionally and systematically in order to generate novelty and transform attitudes, ideas, cultures, content, models, and pedagogical practices.

From this perspective, educational innovation involves not only the introduction of new resources or technologies but also new ways of organizing and implementing educational practices. These innovations may occur in different dimensions of educational systems, ranging from institutional management processes to pedagogical practices within classrooms.

Within the context of higher education, educational innovation refers specifically to transformations that occur in universities and other higher education institutions. These transformations may involve changes in institutional management, organizational structures, teaching practices, and the professional activities of educators working in these contexts.

Historical analyses of higher education demonstrate that innovation should be understood as part of broader historical processes of educational change that extend beyond individual institutions. When discussing innovation in educational contexts, it is also important to recognize that members of the educational community may hold different understandings of what innovation actually means. In order to implement innovative practices effectively, teachers and administrators must develop a shared understanding of what constitutes innovation, particularly given the tendency to associate innovation with disruption, reform, or modernization.

In Brazil, the development of higher education has been deeply influenced by broader economic and political transformations occurring worldwide. According to Cunha and Cunha (2018), one of the most significant moments in the history of Brazilian higher education occurred during the military dictatorship, when the University Reform of 1968 was implemented as part of an agreement between the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This reform contributed to strengthening the relationship between teaching and research and established the foundations of the national postgraduate education system, coordinated by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) (Shigunov Neto; Trevisol; Almeida, 2021).

It is also important to consider the transformations experienced by European universities during the 1990s. Traditionally, universities in Europe were conceived as centers of culture, knowledge production, and research, guided by principles such as institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and the integration of teaching and research. These principles reflected a republican conception of the university that emphasized independence from external political and economic pressures.

The Bologna Declaration (1999), highlighted by Borges (2013), played a crucial role in redefining the role of universities within the European Higher Education Area. The declaration aimed to strengthen the international competitiveness of European higher education while promoting cultural, intellectual, scientific, and technological development across the continent.

In more recent years, debates about innovation in higher education have also focused on the integration of digital technologies in teaching and learning processes. According to Remígio and Cavalcanti (2020), the incorporation of digital technologies should not be seen as a new phenomenon but rather as an urgent necessity for the modernization of the Brazilian educational system. However, technological modernization does not automatically lead to transformative educational outcomes, as it often encounters structural challenges and inequalities within educational systems (Pereira, 2013).

Cristofoletti and Serafim (2017) examine the relationship between universities and the market from two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, some approaches emphasize the positive aspects of this relationship, highlighting concepts such as the knowledge economy and the entrepreneurial university. On the other hand, critical perspectives draw attention to the tensions and contradictions involved in adopting market-oriented logics within public universities, particularly when such logics conflict with broader social and educational missions.

These debates suggest that educational innovation in higher education should not be understood as a linear or purely technical process. Rather, it is a complex and historically situated phenomenon shaped by political, institutional, and cultural factors. Innovation only acquires meaning when novelty is effectively implemented and translated into concrete transformations in organizational structures, management practices, and pedagogical processes.

METHOD

This study adopts a bibliographic research design based on a literature review and content analysis, following the methodological procedures proposed by Bardin (2011). Bibliographic research, according to Gil (2002), is particularly relevant when researchers seek to gather theoretical and empirical information that contributes to addressing a specific research problem. It represents an important path for the expansion and updating of knowledge through the systematic analysis of previously published academic works, especially books and scientific articles.

Severino (2007) emphasizes that bibliographic research is grounded in theoretical categories previously developed by other scholars. In this type of research, the texts selected become the primary sources for examining the topic under investigation. The researcher therefore works with the contributions and interpretations presented by other authors, organizing and analyzing them in order to produce new reflections on the research problem.

Following this methodological approach, a systematic search for scientific articles addressing educational innovation in higher education was conducted. The search process involved identifying relevant publications, reading and organizing the selected material, and subsequently analyzing the content of the studies.

To identify articles indexed in the selected databases, specific descriptors were used. In the Ebscohost database, the following search terms were applied: *"educational innovation" AND "higher education"*, *"educational innovation in higher education"*, and *"educational innovation in higher education institutions"*. In the SciELO database, the descriptors used included *"educational innovation" AND "higher education"* and *"educational innovation" AND "school environment."*

The initial search yielded a total of 468 articles in the Ebscohost database and 237 articles in SciELO. Given the large number of results, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to refine the sample.

The inclusion criteria consisted of:

- articles published in Portuguese;
- studies available in full text in the selected databases;
- publications addressing educational innovation in higher education institutions in Brazil.

Articles written in other languages were excluded. Additionally, a temporal filter was applied, selecting studies published between January 1, 2012, and April 30, 2023.

Considering that educational innovation is strongly influenced by historical, cultural, and institutional contexts, studies conducted outside Brazil were also excluded. After applying these criteria, 18 articles were selected for full analysis.

Based on Bardin's (2011) framework for content analysis, the selected articles were systematically coded and organized into thematic categories. This process involved detailed reading and the recording of relevant information in analytical tables, including the focus of each study and the main findings related to educational innovation.

Through this analytical process, the articles were grouped into three thematic categories, which emerged from the convergence of key elements identified in the studies: Challenges of innovation in higher education; Practices that promote innovation in higher education; Paths and challenges for innovation in the teaching-learning process

These categories provided the analytical structure for examining both the facilitating and hindering aspects of educational innovation in Brazilian higher education institutions.

RESULTS

In order to have a better comprehension of the contributions of the selected studies to the discussion on educational innovation, the results are presented according to the thematic categories identified in the content analysis. This approach allows for a clearer visualization of the set of studies analyzed while preserving the original ideas and theoretical contributions of the authors.

Challenges of innovation in Higher Education

Six studies were identified within this thematic category. These studies highlight the numerous challenges associated with implementing innovation in higher education, which appear to arise from multiple dimensions of the educational system.

The challenges identified range from macro-level issues related to educational policies to micro-level transformations that occur within individual institutions. In this sense, innovation-related challenges may converge across different contexts but are often perceived differently depending on the educational actors involved.

Borges (2013), for instance, discusses the creation of the European Higher Education and Research Area, initiated through the Bologna Process. The Bologna Declaration established a new direction for the reform of higher education institutions and universities, redefining their functions in terms of technological innovation and the development of competencies required for the labor market.

Similarly, Gava and Rodrigues (2016) examine the challenges faced by higher education institutions in supporting innovation through a comparative study between Federal Institutes and Federal Universities in Brazil. Their analysis is grounded in the Triple Helix model, which emphasizes the interaction between government, universities, and industry.

According to this model, universities are expected not only to produce knowledge but also to contribute directly to economic development through scientific and technological innovation.

Despite these expectations, the authors highlight that the institutional capacity to support innovation remains limited in many Brazilian higher education institutions.

When considering the micro-level dynamics of teaching and learning, another important challenge emerges: the persistence of traditional teaching models in university classrooms. Riedner and Pischetola (2021) argue that innovation should be understood as an ongoing process in which teachers play a central role in transforming pedagogical practices to make them more engaging and meaningful for contemporary students.

However, such transformations require adequate teacher training. Teachers must develop not only technical skills related to the use of digital technologies but also a broader understanding of technology as part of cultural and pedagogical practices.

According to these authors, successful innovation processes depend on three key factors:

- a supportive institutional context;
- curriculum structures that encourage innovation;
- and continuous professional development for teachers.

Silva (2020) also emphasizes that innovation in teaching practice does not necessarily require radical disruptions. Rather, innovation may occur through the modification and diversification of existing pedagogical strategies, allowing teachers to create new ways of organizing their teaching activities and enhancing student learning.

Other studies highlight the tension between tradition and innovation within university institutions. Grazziotin and Klaus (2016), for example, analyze how traditional institutional values may coexist with attempts to implement innovative educational practices. According to Silva (2021), for education to advance alongside innovation, movement between improvements and institutional transformation is necessary.

Overall, the studies within this category suggest that innovation in higher education is shaped by institutional contexts, educational policies, and the willingness of educational actors to engage in change processes. At the same time, these challenges create opportunities for educators and institutions to rethink educational practices and explore new possibilities for transformation.

Practices that promote innovation in Higher Education

Eight studies were classified within this category. These studies focus on the practices and institutional conditions that facilitate the emergence of innovation in higher education.

One important factor highlighted in the literature is the creation of organizational environments that support innovation. Following the implementation of the Brazilian Innovation Law in 2004, Gonçalves, Machado and Dalfovo (2017) observed the emergence of organizational learning processes within universities that contribute to the development of innovative environments.

According to the authors, flexibility and collaboration are key elements in fostering innovation. Academic environments naturally promote knowledge exchange, which creates favorable conditions for innovative initiatives.

Similarly, Giacomini et al. (2017) emphasize the role of collaborative relationships in strengthening innovative capacities within higher education institutions. Their study demonstrates that collaboration among individuals and institutional actors can improve the quality of services provided by universities and facilitate the transformation of ideas into technological innovations.

The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) also appears frequently in the literature as a driver of innovation. Simões and Faustino (2019) investigated university professors' perceptions of the role of ICT in teaching and learning processes. Their findings indicate that many teachers recognize the potential of digital technologies to increase student autonomy and enhance interaction within learning environments.

Teachers reported several motivations for incorporating ICT into their teaching practices, including improved access to information and learning resources, increased opportunities for interaction and communication and enhanced support for tutoring and academic guidance. In addition, Pereira (2013) reflected on the use of educational technologies in university teaching, with particular emphasis on teacher training, considering the context in which technology was situated at the time. The aim was to understand technology and its advancement, as well as the ways in which it became embedded within the school environment.

The adoption of active learning methodologies is another important innovation identified in literature. Seixas et al. (2017), for instance, examined the implementation of active methodologies in undergraduate tourism programs in Brazil. Their study highlights both the potential benefits and the practical challenges associated with implementing these methodologies in higher education contexts.

One widely discussed example of an active learning methodology is the flipped classroom, analyzed by Souza and Costa (2016). In this pedagogical approach, students engage with instructional materials before class, allowing classroom time to be dedicated to discussions, problem-solving activities, and collaborative learning.

However, the authors emphasize that the effectiveness of such methodologies depends heavily on the quality of instructional materials and the ability of teachers to guide students in connecting theoretical knowledge with practical applications.

Overall, the studies in this category suggest that innovation in Brazilian higher education often emerges from pedagogical practices developed within the classroom, with teachers playing a central role in designing and implementing innovative learning experiences.

Paths toward innovation in the teaching-learning process

Four studies were grouped within this category. These studies focus on broader strategies and conceptual frameworks that support innovation in teaching and learning processes in higher education.

Teixeira (2012) argues that fostering a culture of innovation in Brazilian higher education requires significant transformations in institutional structures and practices. Drawing on the model proposed by Wiley and Hilton, the author suggests that universities should adopt collaborative strategies that balance competition and cooperation among institutions.

Guimarães and Lima (2016) emphasize the importance of promoting an entrepreneurial mindset within educational environments. In their view, innovation in teaching and learning processes involves encouraging creativity, critical reflection, and experimentation.

Another important dimension of innovation concerns curriculum design. Keller-Franco and Masetto (2018) propose a project-based curriculum model that integrates different academic disciplines around common projects. This approach encourages greater student participation in the construction of knowledge and promotes interdisciplinary learning.

However, innovation processes must also consider the social realities and structural inequalities that characterize Brazilian higher education. Cristofoletti and Serafim (2017) warn against adopting international models of innovation without considering the historical and institutional specificities of the Brazilian context.

Their analysis highlights the tension between the growing influence of market-oriented models of higher education and the traditional mission of universities as institutions dedicated to knowledge production and social development.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the selected studies provides an overview of the theoretical and empirical discussions surrounding educational innovation in Brazilian higher education. The literature reveals both the growing interest in innovation and the persistent challenges involved in transforming innovation from a discourse into concrete educational practices.

The adoption of innovative practices can contribute significantly to preparing students for a rapidly changing society. Moreover, innovation processes may enhance the quality of higher education by promoting both institutional and pedagogical transformations.

However, educational innovation should not be reduced to the adoption of technological tools or new teaching methodologies. It also involves broader institutional dynamics, including changes in organizational culture, curriculum structures, and interactions among educational actors.

At the same time, the implementation of innovative practices faces several challenges, such as resistance to change, limited financial resources, and the diverse social contexts that characterize Brazilian higher education institutions.

For this reason, advancing innovation in higher education requires a multifaceted and non-reductionist perspective, involving administrators, teachers, students, and institutional leaders in collaborative and interdisciplinary processes.

Finally, this study presents certain limitations. Because it is based on bibliographic research, the findings reflect interpretations presented in the analyzed studies rather than direct empirical data from teachers, administrators, or students.

Future research could expand this analysis by including doctoral theses and master's dissertations, as well as conducting field studies and case studies that explore how educational innovation is experienced, interpreted, and implemented in the daily practices of higher education institutions.

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