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OBJECTIVES OF STUDIES ON ALUMNI IN UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: A STUDY BASED ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHY PRODUCED AT THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT (CIGU)

OBJETIVOS DOS ESTUDOS SOBRE EGRESSOS NA GESTÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA: UM ESTUDO A PARTIR DA BIBLIOGRAFIA PRODUZIDA NO COLÓQUIO INTERNACIONAL DE GESTÃO UNIVERSITÁRIA (CIGU)

OBJETIVOS DE LOS ESTUDIOS SOBRE EGRESADOS EN LA GESTIÓN UNIVERSITARIA: UN ESTUDIO A PARTIR DE LA BIBLIOGRAFÍA PRODUCIDA EN EL COLOQUIO INTERNACIONAL DE GESTIÓN UNIVERSITARIA (CIGU)

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ABSTRACT: This research aimed to analyze the objectives of studies on alumni in the context of university management. A basic, descriptive research with a mixed approach was conducted, using bibliographic techniques and descriptive statistics. Data were collected from the proceedings of the International Colloquium on University Management (CIGU) between 2014 and 2023, covering the period during which the event expanded to a global level. This process resulted in 48 articles, which formed the corpus of this study and were analyzed according to the categories of objectives of academic studies proposed by Larocca et al. The main findings show that almost all works are of an applied nature (96.0%), with a balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches. In terms of objective classification, more than half of the analyzed works had evaluative objectives (52.1%), followed by descriptive (33.3%), comprehensive (10.4%), and propositional (4.2%) objectives.

KEYWORDS: Alumni. Academic studies. Objectives. University Management.

RESUMO: A presente investigação teve o intuito de analisar os objetivos dos estudos sobre egressos no âmbito da gestão universitária. Para isso, realizou-se uma pesquisa básica, descritiva, de abordagem mista, utilizando-se da técnica bibliográfica e da estatística descritiva. Foram coletados dados provenientes dos anais do Colóquio Internacional de Gestão Universitária (CIGU), que ocorreram entre os anos de 2014 e 2023, período de ampliação desse evento para o nível mundial. Desse processo, resultaram 48 artigos que compuseram o corpus deste trabalho e foram analisados de acordo com as categorias de objetivos dos estudos acadêmicos propostas por Larocca et al. Como conclusões, destaca-se uma quase totalidade dos trabalhos de natureza aplicada (96%), com equilíbrio em relação à abordagem qualitativa e quantitativa. No que tange à classificação dos objetivos, mais da metade dos trabalhos analisados apresentaram objetivos avaliativos (52,1%); seguidos pelos trabalhos com objetivos descritivos (33,3%), compreensivos (10,4%) e propositivos (4,2%).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Egressos. Estudos acadêmicos. Objetivos. Gestão Universitária.

RESUMEN: Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar los objetivos de los estudios sobre egresados en el ámbito de la gestión universitaria. Se llevó a cabo una investigación básica, descriptiva y de enfoque mixto, utilizando técnicas bibliográficas y estadísticas descriptivas. Se recopilaron datos de los anales del Coloquio Internacional de Gestión Universitaria (CIGU) entre 2014 y 2023, período de ampliación del evento a nivel mundial. Se analizaron 48 artículos, clasificados según las categorías de objetivos de los estudios académicos propuestas por Larocca, Rosso y Souza. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los estudios eran de naturaleza aplicada (96%), con un equilibrio entre enfoques cualitativos y cuantitativos. Además, más de la mitad de los trabajos tuvieron objetivos evaluativos (52,1%), seguidos por estudios descriptivos (33,3%), comprensivos (10,4%) y propositivos (4,2%).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Egresados. Estudios académicos. Objetivos. Gestión Universitaria.

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INTRODUCTION

In the educational context, the term “graduate” refers to a student who has completed a training process; that is, a student who has successfully graduated. These former students are essential to the institutions from which they graduated, as they can provide valuable information regarding the impact of their courses and experiences at the institution on their personal, professional, and social development.

Studies on graduates began to gain special emphasis from the 1990s onwards, as a result of institutional initiatives (Brennan et al., 2005; Mora & Vidal, 2005), with a noticeable increase in the number of publications related to the theme as well as in the approaches used in these studies.

However, although there has been a significant rise in the number of publications on higher education graduates, it is still rare in the literature to find an analysis focused specifically on the objectives of graduate studies.

In this sense, the purpose of this article is to analyze the objectives of studies on graduates within the scope of university management. To this end, the study was guided by the classification of research objectives proposed by Larocca et al. (2005), applying this framework to the CIGU database, more precisely from the 14th edition of the event onwards.

In terms of originality and innovation, this research aimed to identify studies on graduates in university management published in the CIGU proceedings, characterizing them according to their geographic and methodological aspects and classifying them based on their objectives.

This study is structured as follows: this section presents the contextualization of the article and the objective of the study. The following sections present the theoretical framework used in the research, the methodological procedures, and the discussion of results. Subsequently, the final considerations are presented, followed by the references used.

Graduate Management in Higher Education

Graduate, *alumni*, degree holder, completer, qualified, or former student are synonymous terms and/or enrollment statuses that, in the educational context, refer to a very specific relationship between an individual and an educational institution. These terms are widely used in the literature related to university management to characterize the student who completes a training process, creating a permanent bond between the graduate and the educational institution (Cabral, 2021; Cabral et al., 2022).

It is imperative, in this process of personal, social, and institutional transformations within the graduate institution dynamic, that institutions demonstrate evidence of achieving

the objectives of their graduates' training. In the Brazilian context, they are subject to the quality assessment of their courses, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as established by the National Higher Education Evaluation System and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Brasil, 2004, 2023).

In this context, from a management perspective, it is necessary for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to properly manage their graduates so that they can provide evidence related to the education of their students and, thereby, meet the demands of society and government, as well as their expectations as organizations. Moreover, graduates can provide important information regarding the strengths and opportunities for improvement of educational programs (Cabral, 2021; Espartel, 2009; Oliveira, 2021), academic management processes, and the alignment of institutional planning with social transformations (Simon, 2017). According to Nishimura (2015), research on graduates is an important means of assessing institutional quality and demonstrating the impact generated by former students on society.

Thus, HEIs have adopted various practices related to graduate management, aiming to achieve organizational outcomes through these practices. These actions, according to Cabral (2021), focus primarily on: benefits for graduates; communication; the continuous development of *alumni*; dissemination of knowledge produced by graduates; donations and volunteering by *alumni*; professional management employed in *alumni*-related activities; the social impact resulting from graduate education; the maintenance of the bond between the former student and their *alma mater*; monitoring of graduate trajectories; monitoring of outcomes through the application of *alumni* perceptions in the improvement of management practices; raising student awareness regarding the institution's *alumni* culture; and the perspective on the importance of *alumni* promoted by the educational institution.

The importance of graduate management in HEIs can also be observed in the decision-making processes of funding agencies regarding the allocation of financial resources to institutions; in graduate employability; in the impact of *alumni* on institutional image promotion; in identifying the effects of student training; and in the quality of *alumni*'s technical and scientific output (Brennan et al., 2005; Cabral, 2021; Santos et al., 2017).

In light of the above, it is evident that graduate management is a relevant topic within the scope of university management, and that academic research can serve as an important resource for the management of HEIs.

The following section presents an overview of studies related to graduates, the characteristics of these studies in terms of geographical distribution, and the theory related to the objectives of academic works.

Objectives in Academic Production on Alumni

Studies on *alumni* from HEIs are still more concentrated at the undergraduate level. However, there is a similarity in the aspects and methodological issues employed, which are equally important for graduate education, as pointed out by Nishimura (2015).

In this context, several studies—especially in the United States—have adopted a quantitative approach, with the purpose of developing models that predict the likelihood of students making donations to their HEIs after graduation (Demétrio, 2021).

As highlighted by Cabral (2021), research on *alumni* has gained prominence over the past three decades, both in Brazil and abroad. At the national level, studies are more focused on research related to *alumni* profiles, aiming to understand former students' motivations, ambitions, and realities during and after their academic journey. Abroad, a large portion of studies—particularly those conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom—adopts a perspective centered on the *alumnus* as a potential donor or sponsor of the activities of their educational institutions, also known as *Alma Mater*. In addition, studies have been conducted to understand the professional destinations and careers of former students.

Regardless of the focus of *alumni* studies, research on this theme constitutes a fundamental tool for university managers, especially because the *alumnus* is potentially the main source of information regarding the achievement of an educational institution's objectives. However, academic research that specifically addresses the objectives of scholarly works on *alumni*—beyond the categorization into exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research (Severino, 2013), which enables a critique of the academic output—is still rare.

In this regard, Larocca et al. conducted a study in 2005 in which they proposed categories for the objectives of academic works in the field of Education. To this end, the authors collected data from master's theses in a graduate program, with the aim of understanding what was intended with the objectives found in those documents. As a result, the objectives were classified as comprehensive, evaluative, propositional, and descriptive.

Comprehensive objectives are related to actions aimed at interpreting a broader reality or problem, perceiving the totality of elements contained within it. Actions with an evaluative purpose characterize the evaluative objectives. Suggestions or the development of proposals, plans, or actions constitute the propositional objective. Finally, descriptive objectives are those in which, basically, records or accounts of experiences and narratives are presented (Larocca et al., 2005).

In a summarized form, Table 1 presents the classification proposed by Larocca et al. (2005), along with the central idea and the key expressions that led to the classification, based on the objectives described in the analyzed works.

Table 1 – Classification of academic research objectives

	Central idea	Key expressions
Comprehensive objectives	Perceiving the whole	To understand; to analyze; to reflect; to investigate; to discuss; to characterize.
Evaluative objectives	Evaluate	To analyze repercussions; to analyze the scope; to conduct critical analyses (whether it favors or disfavors); to capture contributions; to evaluate actions.
Propositive objectives	Change	To contribute to; to seek or raise alternatives; to propose; to define; to support; to construct a proposal.
Descriptive objectives	Expose	To outline; to identify; to understand; to analyze the form; to investigate in what way.

Source: adapted from Larocca et al. (2005).

With regard to the objectives of the studies analyzed by Larocca et al. (2005) in the field of Education, it was found that, in the research conducted by the authors, the comprehensive objective was the most frequent, accounting for approximately 40% of the total objectives identified. Next, both evaluative and propositional objectives accounted for around 18% each. Descriptive objectives, in turn, were present in approximately 10% of the cases.

The aforementioned authors further classify the objectives into: instrumental objectives and generalist objectives. Instrumental objectives are those that do not directly indicate the research problematization but support it. That is, they are considered to be objectives inherent to the researcher's actions, preceding the research itself. Generalist objectives, on the other hand, are those that are so broad that it becomes difficult to grasp the problematization from which they originate, and they may fit into more than one category. In the case of the study conducted by the authors under discussion, instrumental and generalist objectives accounted for approximately 14% of the total objectives listed in the research (Larocca et al., 2005).

However, the authors argue that instrumental and generalist objectives may, in fact, be considered "non-objectives." In this regard, the present study is limited to using the classification presented in Table 1 above, as it seeks to establish a predominant classification for *alumni*-related research.

It is understood that the classification developed by Larocca et al. (2005) is not limited to the field of Education and may encompass various other fields of knowledge, such as the field of Applied Social Sciences and, within it, university management.

Methodological Procedures

This research is characterized as basic in nature and descriptive in terms of its objectives, as it analyzes the objectives of *alumni*-related studies within the scope of university

management. The approach of this study is mixed, considering the qualitative nature inherent to the classifications of the studies carried out and the quantitative perspective of the description of the field's landscape (Creswell, 2010; Prodanov & Freitas, 2013).

For data collection, the bibliographic technique was used, drawing from the Institutional Repository of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), where the articles published in CIGU are available. The bibliographic material corresponds to the body of studies already conducted and disseminated in scientific media, which may contribute to the development of research (Marconi & Lakatos, 2008). A temporal cut was established starting from the 14th edition of the event, given the shift in CIGU's focus from a continental (America) to a global scope from that year onward. The database of this event was selected due to its relevance within the field of university management, with *alumni* management as one of its main themes.

Considering the selected time frame, which totals a universe of 1,947 articles published in the Annals of the nine editions of CIGU (from the 14th to the 22nd edition), this *alumni*-focused research was conducted using the "search within this collection" field, applying the descriptors *alumni*, *egresso*, and *egresado*. In this stage, carried out between May and June 2024, 77 articles were identified, two of which were duplicates, resulting in 75 articles to be analyzed regarding their relevance to the scope of this research.

Articles that did not have higher education *alumni* as their central theme were excluded, resulting in a portfolio of 48 selected studies. These articles were examined to obtain the following information: number of authors; university of the first author; country of the first author's university; main themes addressed in the article; keywords; nature of the study; approach; and categories of objectives.

It is important to note that the categorization of the objectives was based on an adaptation of the proposal by Larocca et al. (2005), considering studies related to higher education *alumni*.

However, it is important to highlight the difficulty encountered in categorizing the objectives, due to the fact that some articles contain verbs that do not accurately reflect what was actually done or the methodological path followed in the research. In such cases, it was necessary to study some papers in depth in order to categorize them correctly. For example, one case presented the objective as "to identify how," while the article aimed to carry out an evaluation. In another instance, the authors used the verb "to understand," whereas the study was limited to a mere description.

Once the indexing of each article in the portfolio was completed, the database was subjected to descriptive statistical methods, such as the calculation of absolute and relative frequencies, and measures of central tendency and dispersion, in order to characterize *alumni*-related studies within the scope of the university management and to identify predominant

trends in research on higher education *alumni*, promoting a discussion in light of the theoretical framework of this study.

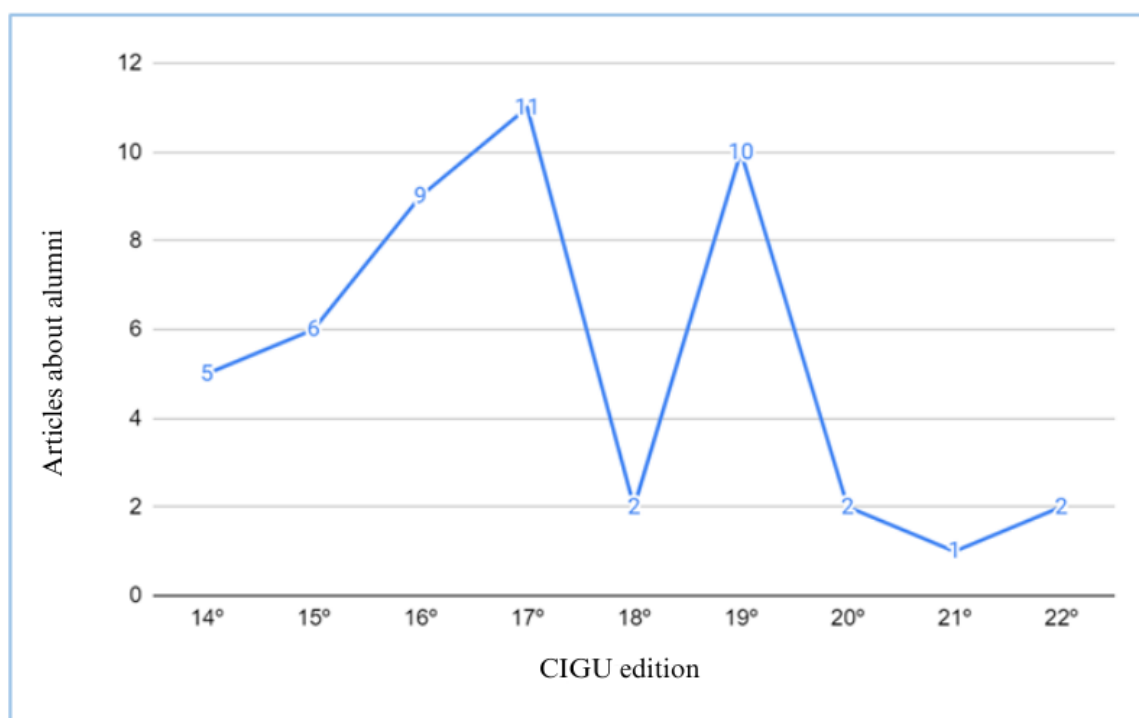
Results

The 48 studies on higher education *alumni* published from the 14th edition of CIGU onward represent 2.5% of the 1,947 articles published during this period. In every edition, at least one study on the topic was presented, highlighting that, although modestly, *alumni* have entered the discussion agenda of CIGU.

The 17th edition, held in Mar del Plata—Argentina, had the highest absolute frequency, with 11 studies among the 48 identified. This edition also had the highest relative frequency, reaching approximately 5% of the articles published that year (2017).

Figure 1 presents a graph showing the absolute frequency of articles by edition of the event.

Figure 1 – Absolute frequency of articles on graduates per issue of CIGU



Source: prepared by the authors.

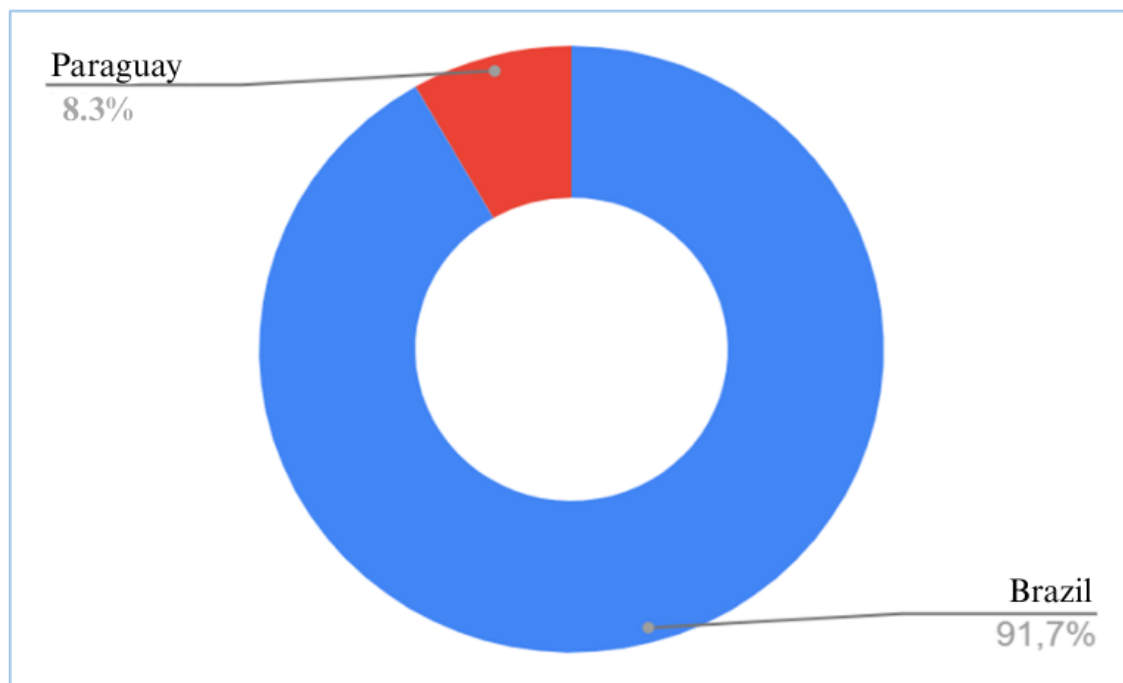
From the data in the graph, it can be noted that, throughout the last editions of CIGU, there has been no standard pattern regarding studies on higher education *alumni*, with the number of published works fluctuating constantly and without a specific trend.

It was found that 159 authors (with repetition) participated in the development of the 48 studies, revealing that the research on this topic, on average, involves three researchers. Studies with two to four authors account for approximately 83% of the portfolio, and

the median is three authors. However, it is understood that the number of authors per study is heterogeneous, as evidenced by the variation coefficient (41.8%), resulting from cases where six authors are involved.

When analyzing the countries of the main authors of the manuscripts, a predominance of studies developed by researchers from Brazilian universities is observed, as shown in the graph in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Relative frequency of article distribution according to the country of the main author

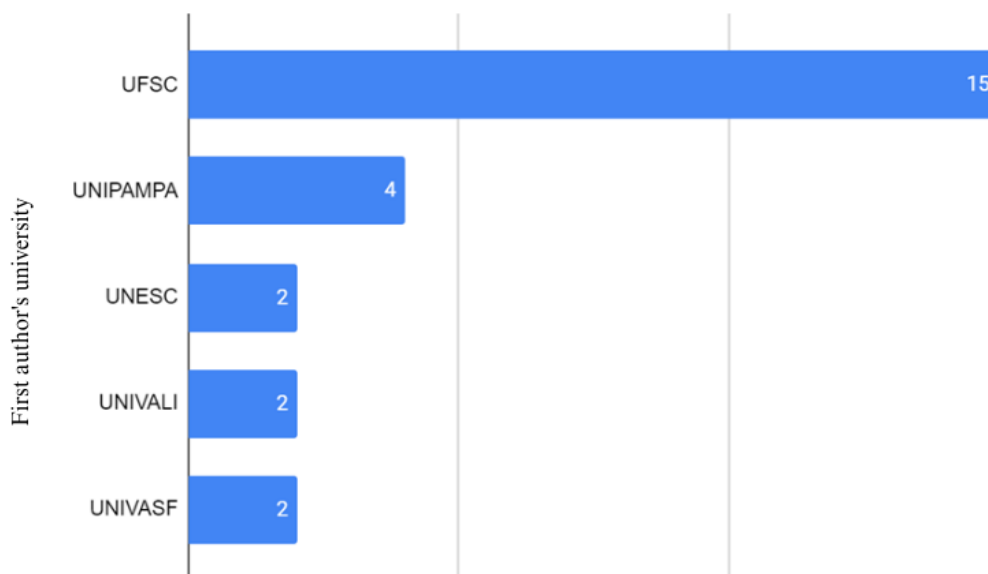


Source: prepared by the authors.

It is noteworthy that, although the event encompasses universities from all over the world, particularly Latin American universities, due to the history of CIGU itself, studies on the theme “higher education *alumni*” do not include countries beyond Paraguay and Brazil.

With regard to the universities of the main authors of each study, the researchers of the 48 articles are affiliated with a total of 28 different HEIs. Within this universe, UFSC stands out as the institution with the most results presented at the aforementioned event, accounting for 15 of the 48 analyzed articles. This indicates that approximately one in every three studies on higher education *alumni* in this portfolio was conducted by researchers from this university, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Absolute frequency of article distribution according to the main author's university – Universities with two or more published articles



Source: prepared by the authors.

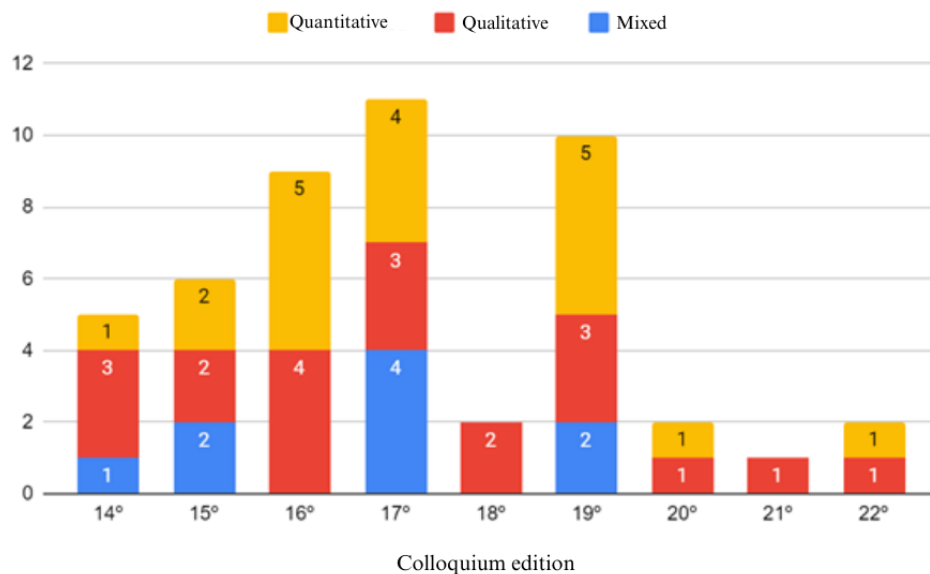
The aforementioned result highlights the importance of the studies developed at UFSC for discussions on higher education *alumni* at CIGU. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that a more in-depth study would be needed regarding the proportion of researchers from this university participating in the event, in order to analyze this fact from a relative perspective.

In terms of methodological aspects, from the perspective of nature, 46 out of the 48 articles in the portfolio are related to applied research, revealing an intention to develop studies on *alumni* with the potential for practical application of the results achieved. The two identified basic research studies were developed by UFSC researchers and sought to elaborate theoretical models regarding the follow-up of postgraduate (*stricto sensu*) *alumni*, to develop a comparative analysis between the postgraduate evaluation processes in two different countries, and to examine the role of *alumni* in that evaluation.

Regarding the research approach, there is a balance between quantitative studies (19 articles) and qualitative studies (20 articles), while it is important to highlight the development of nine studies using mixed methods, which are not very common in organizational studies.

Figure 4 presents the absolute frequency of articles on higher education *alumni* according to the approach used, by CIGU edition.

Figure 4 – Absolute frequency of article distribution according to the CIGU edition and the research approach

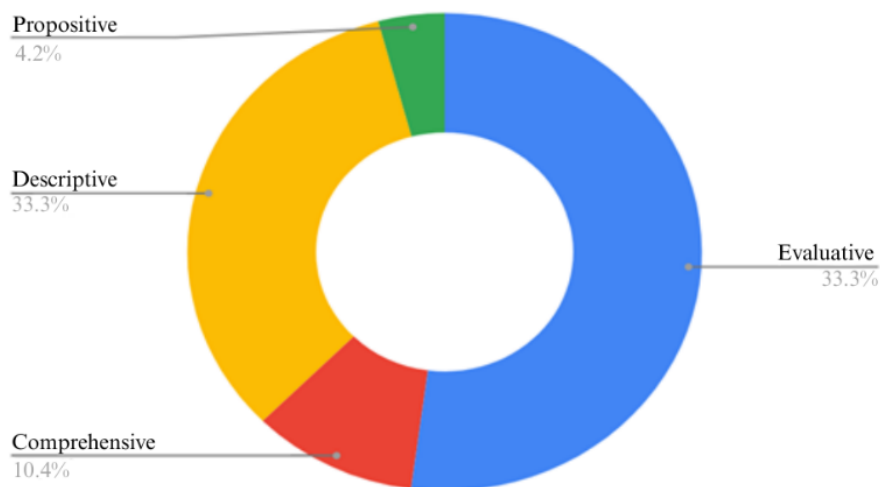


Source: prepared by the authors.

The frequency distribution shows that, as with the overall frequency, the frequency by edition of the Colloquium is balanced between quantitative and qualitative approaches, therefore not suggesting a shift in approach over time.

Regarding the categories of the general objectives of the analyzed articles, the portfolio in question encompasses all the categories proposed by Larocca et al. (2005), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Relative frequency of article distribution according to the category of the general objective



Source: prepared by the authors.

According to the data in Figure 5, it is observed that the articles with an evaluative objective account for more than half of the portfolio, followed by articles with a descriptive objective, which comprise 33.3% of the total. This result suggests that studies on higher education *alumni* published in CIGU seek not only to describe the phenomena under investigation but also to establish a comparative analysis between the phenomena and related theoretical frameworks (Larocca et al., 2005).

On the other hand, comprehensive and propositional studies appear less frequently, indicating an opportunity for broader discussions regarding the understanding of *alumni* management as a whole and the potential for changes in relation to existing practices.

Understanding university management as a field of study related to management, it is possible to comprehend the evaluative purpose of *alumni* research that comprises the CIGU database. It is reasonable to assume that, in an event focused on management, critical analyses of the contributions of actions, as pointed out by Larocca et al. (2005), carried out within the scope of alumni management by educational institutions are to be expected, given that evaluation is an inherent part of management. This category includes studies aiming to demonstrate alumni management practices, as reflected in the approaches presented by Cabral (2021), when he conducts a self-assessment of institutional alumni management practices.

As for the studies with descriptive objectives contained in the database of the event in question, these represented the second most frequent category among the articles on alumni in university management. This may be related to the fact that these studies focus on seeking information about professional performance, as well as the profile of alumni, aligning with the theoretical framework provided by Cabral (2021), who points out that, on a national level, alumni research seeks to understand former students' motivations, ambitions, and realities during and after their academic training. It is also worth mentioning that articles with a descriptive purpose are aligned with the perspective portrayed in this study, in relation to the demonstration of institutional evidence concerning the achievement of training objectives for their alumni (Brasil, 2004; Capes, 2023).

Unlike the reality portrayed by Larocca et al. (2005), only 10% of the articles published in the CIGU editions analyzed in this study presented comprehensive objectives, that is, aimed at understanding the whole. This finding brings important evidence to the field, considering that CIGU is one of the main events on the topic worldwide: the event has contributed more to the dissemination of specific cases and actions than to the advancement of theory on alumni in university management.

Regarding the propositional objectives, which represent 4% of the cases, the articles analyzed proposed actions, plans, alternatives, or suggested changes to a given situation. It is believed that in order to propose alternatives to a situation, it is first necessary to have a set of knowledge that supports such propositions. Although alumni studies have gained prominence

for decades and demonstrate the institutional importance of former students, as highlighted by Brennan et al. (2005), Cabral (2021), and Santos et al. (2017), it seems, at least based on the database researched and the selected scope, that the theory on the subject has progressed only modestly. In this regard, it is understood that, when more studies with comprehensive objectives are published at CIGU—those that advance theory on alumni in university management and on alumni management—there may also be an increase in the number of propositional studies.

By conducting an analysis relating the objective category to the country of the primary researcher, it is observed that one of the five articles with a comprehensive objective was developed in Paraguay, which shows that 25% of Paraguayan studies are comprehensive, whereas this percentage in the Brazilian context is approximately 9%, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Absolute frequency of the number of articles according to the objective categories and the country

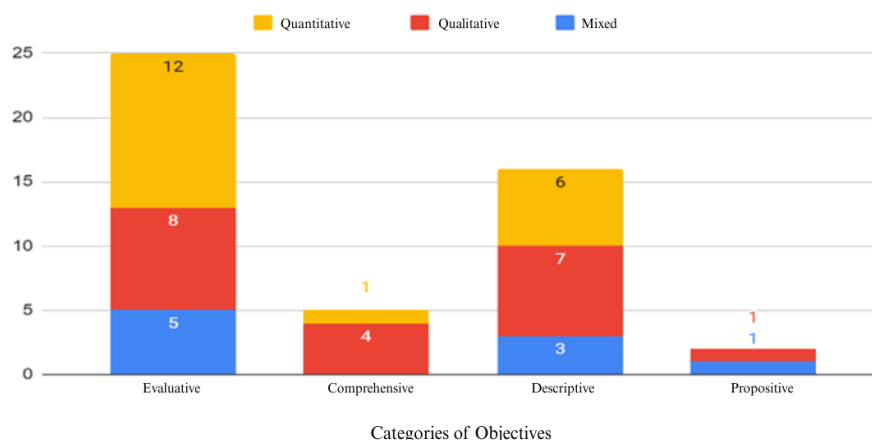
Objective Categories	Country	
	Brazil	Paraguay
Evaluative	22	3
Comprehensive	4	1
Descriptive	16	0
Propositive	2	0
Total	44	4

Source: prepared by the authors.

With regard to their nature, the two basic research studies have a comprehensive general objective, indicating that they sought to develop a holistic view in order to contribute to the existing theories developed in the field of study under analysis. The applied research studies, on the other hand, follow the previously presented relative distribution, as they account for approximately 96% of the portfolio.

Articles with evaluative objectives were developed using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches, revealing that, in analyzing the impacts of academic training, conducting critical assessments of whether the training was beneficial, and capturing contributions from the education received, the studies relied both on more subjective and nonmeasurable aspects and on statistical methods to reach their conclusions. However, there was a predominance of the quantitative approach, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Absolute frequency of articles according to the objective category and research approach



Source: prepared by the authors.

As with the evaluative objective, articles with a descriptive objective also employed all three approaches. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the qualitative approach predominated over the others, although the difference compared to the second most used approach is subtle. This is not the case for studies with comprehensive and propositional objectives.

Among the five studies with a comprehensive objective, there is a predominance of the qualitative approach (four articles), suggesting that the comprehensive discussions held at CIGU focus on understanding and reflecting on the topic of “higher education alumni” from a more subjective perspective, rather than engaging in discussions based purely on numerical and statistical aspects. Nonetheless, it is noted that one of the comprehensive studies used a quantitative approach. No studies in this objective category were found to use mixed methods.

Finally, regarding the two studies with a propositional objective, one used a qualitative approach, and the other employed mixed methods, revealing that the portfolio’s research seeking to contribute to the alumni management process aimed to identify or raise alternatives, propose, define, support, or build a proposal, doing so by resorting to deeper and more subjective aspects of the topic in question.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study aimed to analyze the objectives of research on alumni within the scope of university management. To this end, a basic, descriptive study with a mixed-methods approach was conducted, employing bibliographic techniques and descriptive statistics.

The data collected came from the CIGU proceedings database, covering event editions held between 2014 and 2023. Searches were conducted in the aforementioned database using

descriptors that included publications in Portuguese, English, and Spanish. As a result, 48 articles were selected and analyzed for inclusion in this study.

It is noteworthy that the articles related to alumni within the context of university management represented approximately 2.5% of the total number of papers published in the proceedings of an event that addresses various themes relevant to university management. However, it is not possible to establish a trend regarding the number of publications over the years.

It was found that Brazil was the country with the highest frequency of publications on alumni and university management, accounting for approximately 92% of the total studies analyzed. Furthermore, around one in every three papers published in the CIGU database during the period analyzed was developed and led by a researcher from the Federal University of Santa Catarina. In addition, 46 out of the 48 studies investigated were of an applied nature.

Regarding the approach of the studies on alumni and university management, a balance was observed between those with a quantitative approach (19 studies) and those with a qualitative approach (20 studies). Moreover, nine articles with a mixed-methods approach were identified.

When analyzing the papers in terms of their objectives, based on the proposal by Larocca et al. (2005), this study found that the majority of the papers published in the CIGU proceedings between 2014 and 2023 related to alumni and university management presented evaluative objectives (52.1%). When added to those studies with descriptive objectives, they comprise approximately 85% of the total studies analyzed here. In this regard, it is evident that most of the published studies aimed to assess and appraise actions, as well as to record reports of experiences, rather than to provide theoretical contributions and alternatives to situations or issues related to the topic of alumni.

Since these are studies submitted to an event focused on “management,” it is reasonable to assume that management practices, along with case presentations and evaluations of actions—typical of evaluative and descriptive studies—would constitute the majority of articles related to alumni. However, attention is drawn to the need for the field to increase the production of studies with comprehensive and also propositional objectives, bringing to light new theories, problems, and solutions for university management.

It is suggested, for future studies, that the classification of objectives presented here be expanded to different databases, thereby enabling the development of a general overview of the academic output related to alumni in the context of higher education.

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