

## The Commodification of the University in Latin America: Neoliberal Policies in Higher Education<sup>1</sup>

*A Mercantilização da Universidade na América Latina:  
políticas neoliberais na educação superior*

*La Mercantilización de la Universidad en América Latina:  
políticas neoliberales en la educación superior*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to critically analyze how higher education policies in Brazil and in some Latin American countries have been shaped by neoliberal principles. To achieve this goal, the research adopts a qualitative approach through critical analysis based on authors such as Laval (2019), Robertson & Dale (2017), and Peroni, Caetano, and Arelaro (2019). The methodology employed includes a narrative review using the Scielo database, based on scientific literature published between 2007 and 2020. After a thorough reading of the articles related to neoliberalism in higher education, analytical categories were established, which played a crucial role in expanding knowledge about the advancement of neoliberal policies in higher education. The results indicate that, since the introduction of neoliberalism in Latin America, there has been a continuous privatization of higher education, transforming it from a public good into a market-oriented service. The studies highlight the need to reclaim the university's fundamental purpose in fostering human development committed to emancipation.

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Neoliberalism; Educational Policies.

**Resumo:** Este artigo visa a analisar criticamente como as políticas educacionais da educação superior, no Brasil e em alguns países da América Latina, têm sido moldadas por princípios neoliberais. Para atingir esse objetivo, a pesquisa segue uma abordagem qualitativa mediante análise crítica desenvolvida com base em autores tais como Laval (2019), Robertson; Dale (2017), Peroni; Caetano e Arelaro (2019). A metodologia empregada inclui uma revisão narrativa na base de dados da Scielo, com base em literatura científica publicada entre 2007 e 2020. Após a leitura integral dos artigos, relacionados ao neoliberalismo na educação superior, foram estabelecidas as categorias de análise que indicaram um papel crucial na ampliação do conhecimento sobre o avanço das políticas neoliberais da educação superior. Os resultados indicam que, desde a introdução do neoliberalismo na América Latina, houve uma contínua privatização do ensino superior, transformando-o de um bem público para um serviço alinhado ao mercado. Os estudos demonstram a necessidade de resgatar a finalidade precípua da universidade no processo de uma formação humana comprometida com a emancipação.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Superior; Neoliberalismo; Políticas Educacionais.

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**Resumen:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar críticamente cómo las políticas de educación superior, en Brasil y en algunos países de América Latina, han sido moldeadas por principios neoliberales. Para alcanzar este propósito, la investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo mediante un análisis crítico fundamentado en autores como Laval (2019), Robertson y Dale (2017), y Peroni, Caetano y Arelaro (2019). La metodología empleada incluye una revisión narrativa en la base de datos Scielo, basada en literatura científica publicada entre 2007 y 2020. Tras la lectura integral de los artículos relacionados con el neoliberalismo en la educación superior, se establecieron categorías de análisis que desempeñaron un papel crucial en la ampliación del conocimiento sobre el avance de las políticas neoliberales en este nivel educativo. Los resultados indican que, desde la introducción del neoliberalismo en América Latina, ha habido una privatización continua de la educación superior, transformándola de un bien público en un servicio alineado al mercado. Los estudios señalan la necesidad de rescatar el propósito fundamental de la universidad en el proceso de una formación humana comprometida con la emancipación.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Superior; Neoliberalismo; Políticas Educativas.

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## Introduction

The ongoing debate surrounding education remains a central theme, widely discussed across various contexts. The significance of this dialogue is supported by a range of arguments advocating for specific approaches. However, from a scientific perspective, the intrinsic connection between education and political issues becomes increasingly evident, highlighting the urgent need for a thorough analysis of educational policies.

In Brazil, the field of educational policy is still under development and requires the expansion of studies in this area. There is a pressing need for investment in epistemological frameworks to deepen the discussions on this subject (Stremel & Mainardes, 2019).

Despite the relevant policies in higher education in recent decades, which have enabled a broad expansion, there has been a significant incursion by the private sector. These policies have not only driven substantial growth, but have also raised questions about quality and management, often directly aligned with market interests. In view of the current scenario, this article aims to critically analyze how higher education educational policies in Brazil and in some Latin American countries have been shaped by neoliberal principles, based on scientific literature published between 2005 and 2020.

Educational policies in Brazil, according to the analysis of Stremel and Mainardes (2019), began to take shape from the 1960s onwards, initially associated with Comparative Education and Education Administration. Subsequently, this domain gained relevance with the expansion

of scientific publications, the establishment of master's programs, and the formation of working groups in national associations that bring together education professionals.

It is important to highlight that progress related to educational policies occurs in a varied way in different countries. In Brazil and Latin America, this domain is still under development, evidencing the continuous need for expansion and improvement (Stremel; Mainardes, 2019).

Currently, there is practically a consensus that education should be a priority for governments around the world. Since the nineteenth century, there has been a process of expansion of education as a social project that provides advances and contributes to the formation of more egalitarian societies (Robertson; Dale, 2017). This has been reflected in a significant increase in educational policies in several countries, which are directed "[...] to "re/organize and re/order social relations through structures and strategies (Robertson; Dale, 2017, p. 864).

With the advancement of neoliberalism, educational policies have become subject to re-evaluation. Education, once conceived as a means of emancipation and individual autonomy, is now reoriented—within this new paradigm—toward the formation of wage laborers, in which the application of knowledge is minimal and narrowly focused on specific objectives. This scenario tends to trap the individual within a present to which they must adapt at all costs, ultimately suppressing the utopian ideal of liberation (Laval, 2019).

In neoliberal societies, public policies - especially those related to education - are frequently the target of widespread criticism. From the perspective of the bourgeoisie, social policies are regarded as limiting and are seen as fostering individual complacency, ultimately leading to a loss of freedom and a diminished spirit of creativity and entrepreneurship (Perry apud Souza, 2009). Social policies play an antagonistic role in relation to capitalist society, as their main purpose is to prioritize service provision aimed at mitigating the inequalities produced by the capitalist system and current economic policies (Souza, 2009).

As Souza (2009) notes, contemporary neoliberals question the effectiveness of the State as a proper instrument for resource allocation. In this context, there has been a significant rise in criticism and efforts to promote the common belief that public institutions are inherently inefficient, thereby reinforcing the push for greater involvement of the private sector.

Peroni, Caetano, and Arelaro (2019) examine the significant influence of the private sector in shaping the direction of education in Brazil. In many cases, public sectors adopt private-sector logic to guide their policies, often conceding to the business sector the

responsibility for defining, strategizing, and steering educational policies. This reconfiguration of the State's role in current educational policies reflects, in fact, an adaptation to the contemporary crisis of capitalism.

The evaluation of social policies also encounters challenges posed by neoliberal interests; it is therefore crucial to question the motivations underlying such evaluations. As Souza (2009) observes, evaluation must be a collective effort, shaped by inquiries into a complex range of aspects that impact the effectiveness of a policy designed to improve people's quality of life. It is imperative that evaluation is not reduced to mere quantitative measures, as this would neglect the deeply rooted specificities of social problems.

### **Higher Education in Brazil: Reflections Essential for Understanding Educational Policies**

If we were to summarize the history of higher education in Brazil, it could arguably be divided into two main phases: elitism and market-driven expansion. The first phase is marked by restricted access and the historical dominance of certain social groups within universities. The second is characterized by the proliferation of private institutions in a country deeply shaped by structural inequalities.

The development of higher education in Brazil began relatively late. Compared to several Spanish colonies, the Portuguese colony experienced a significant delay in establishing higher education institutions. This lag was not only the result of neglect but also stemmed from explicit prohibitions by the Portuguese crown against founding such institutions in Brazil (Cunha, 2000). In this context, it is worth noting that Spain already possessed a robust intellectual infrastructure capable of exporting academic expertise, whereas Portugal maintained only one prestigious university—Coimbra (Cunha, 2000).

According to Neves and Martins (2016), universities were only established in Brazil following the arrival of the Portuguese royal court in 1808, primarily to train professionals who could meet the immediate administrative and technical demands of the colony. However, Cunha (2000) contends that the creation of universities came at a later stage. The royal court's arrival, he argues, led merely to the creation of isolated chairs—standalone professorships—intended to provide rudimentary training using limited resources. Over time, the consolidation of these isolated chairs and schools eventually gave rise to Brazil's first universities.

Throughout the nineteenth century, faculties of Medicine, Law, and Engineering were gradually established and consolidated. By the early years of the Brazilian Republic, the country had six institutions of higher education, as noted by Neves and Martins (2016). At the beginning of the twentieth century, this number had grown to

approximately 24 higher education schools, and from that point onward, a notable expansion occurred. This significant growth was not solely the result of federal government initiatives. As Diniz and Goergen (2019) observe, the 1891 Constitution played a crucial role by allowing decentralization and enabling state governments and private entities to establish and manage institutions of higher learning.

In 1931, the Francisco Campos Reform introduced a series of seven decrees, among them Decree No. 19,851, which addressed the structure and regulation of higher education in Brazil. An earlier reform, led by Carlos Maximiliano in 1915, revalidated degrees and instituted the college-administered entrance exam. Only candidates who had completed secondary education were eligible to sit for the exam, thereby creating additional barriers to access (Saviani, 2007).

In this historical context, the previously mentioned category of elitism becomes particularly relevant. Various efforts to structure higher education were clearly oriented toward serving a small, privileged segment of the Brazilian elite. In his seminal work, Saviani (2007) underscores how even the Manifesto of the Pioneers of Education—a milestone in Brazilian educational history—was still anchored in an elitist view of the university. The document's proponents believed that it was the university's role to select and cultivate the most capable individuals who would, in turn, form the leadership needed to address the nation's challenges.

The University of São Paulo (USP) was founded in the 1930s, and in 1940, Brazil saw the emergence of its first Catholic confessional university: the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ). Over the subsequent decades, dozens of universities were established, and by 1960, nearly 100,000 students were enrolled in Brazilian higher education. A key milestone during this period was the University Reform of 1968, which reorganized the scientific and institutional framework of universities. This reform modernized the university model and solidified the tripartite mission—teaching, research, and extension—that continues to guide Brazilian higher education to this day (Neves & Martins, 2016).

Beginning in the 1960s, Brazil experienced a sharp increase in enrollment in private higher education institutions. According to Diniz and Goergen (2019), this trend was driven by limited access to public universities and policies promoted under the military regime.

By the end of the twentieth century, privatization in Brazilian higher education had advanced even further, closely aligned with the global rise of neoliberalism. As Laval (2019) observes, the 1980s witnessed a shift in societal discourse that emphasized the scarcity of employment opportunities for youth. It was increasingly argued that individuals without a university degree faced higher unemployment rates, giving rise to a new emphasis on the professionalization of education.

In a neoliberal society — characterized by a focus on training and embedded in what Ulrich Beck (1986) termed the "risk society" — education assumes a central role as a strategy for individual protection. In this context, the logic of capital begins to shape subjectivities. As Dardot and Laval (2016) argue, individuals are increasingly interpellated as entrepreneurial subjects, encouraged to view themselves as small capitalists who must invest in their own market value. University education, particularly when paid for out of pocket, becomes a personal asset to be capitalized upon—turning the student into a form of "human capital" to be continuously enhanced.

Within this new framework, the university undergoes a profound transformation: knowledge itself becomes a commodity. This commodification redefines internal dynamics within higher education institutions, where administrative practices become increasingly shaped by market-oriented management logics. As Barros and Araújo (2018) highlight, this shift is accompanied by a rise in global competition among universities and growing levels of student indebtedness, further entrenching education within capitalist structures.

### Neoliberalism in Higher Education Policies

During the 1970s, under the regime of Augusto Pinochet, Chile became the first country in Latin America to implement neoliberal reforms. In this context, the Chilean higher education system underwent a gradual withdrawal of state support, as the private sector assumed an increasingly dominant role within universities (Donoso Díaz, 2005).

The 1981 Higher Education Reform marked a significant turning point in the governance of Chilean higher education institutions. From that point forward, the economic logic of the free market began to dictate the direction of the sector. The State, constrained by inadequate legislation, adopted a passive and ineffective role, while the academic community was largely silenced with respect to the new directives imposed on the educational system (Donoso Díaz, 2005).

Donoso Díaz's (2005) in-depth analysis of the 1981 reform demonstrates how market-driven policies led to a contraction of the State's role and the de-prioritization of public education. Simultaneously, these reforms created new avenues for the expansion of private institutions. The study also explores the mechanisms by which the State attempted to mitigate the negative consequences of these structural changes, often with limited success.

The advance of neoliberalism, through the interruption of public funding and the promotion of privatization, undermined the principle of equity in higher education. In this context, the author underscores the critical importance of maintaining public educational



institutions, from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. Such a structure, it is argued, is essential to reclaim the social mission of higher education, re-centering it on the public good rather than the market-oriented conception of knowledge (Donoso Díaz, 2005).

Oyarce, Leihy, and Zegers (2020) argue that the structure of higher education in Chile remains deeply shaped by a state bureaucracy closely aligned with market forces and local elites. In their view, right-wing political groups, business interests, and ultraconservative organizations exert considerable influence over the bureaucratic apparatus. Initially legitimized by the principle of subsidiarity, which allows private institutions to claim public funding on equal terms with public institutions, these groups gradually expand their dominance, effectively crowding out space for the development of public higher education.

The authors offer a compelling analysis of the privatization of higher education in Chile, emphasizing that neoliberalism does not aim to eliminate the State, but rather to instrumentalize it. That is, neoliberalism strategically uses the State to safeguard market mechanisms and to ensure the sustainability and expansion of its principles. In this view, the neoliberal project increasingly depends on the State for its continued existence and growth.

When compared with other regional contexts—such as Brazil—this dynamic reveals a broader pattern: local manifestations of neoliberalism do not diminish the State's role, but rather reconfigure it to serve market interests. This model stands in contrast to that of countries which have pursued reforms aimed at reasserting the social function of education, thus achieving a more balanced interplay between public policy and market dynamics.

Stromquist (2012) highlights the serious consequences of privatization and the retreat of the State from higher education across Latin America. According to the author, there is a pronounced emphasis on providing quality private education to the children of the elite, while public education is increasingly marginalized. This imbalance hinders the development of a broadly educated population and perpetuates a structural dependency, in which these countries remain positioned as mere exporters of raw materials within the global economy. A nation that fails to create conditions for its brightest minds to stay and thrive inevitably suffers from a brain drain, losing valuable human capital to more supportive systems abroad.

In contrast to this trend, several emerging Asian economies—notably China, South Korea, and Taiwan—have significantly increased public investment in higher education. These countries are strategically focused on building internationally competitive universities, aiming to achieve global recognition and academic excellence. This effort is already yielding measurable outcomes: Asia now trains twice as many engineers as Europe, signaling a shift in global academic and technological leadership (Stromquist, 2012).

Stromquist (2012) also expresses deep concern over the impact of neoliberal reforms on academic labor. She identifies a pattern of deterioration in the working conditions of university faculty, characterized by increasingly flexible and unstable employment arrangements. Professors are frequently required to teach at multiple institutions simultaneously, limiting their engagement in institutional governance and academic discourse. Moreover, universities have increasingly aligned themselves with market demands, often reducing the teaching load of faculty in the humanities and, in some cases, dissolving entire departments in these fields.

In this context of precarious academic labor, Laval (2019) warns of a broader transformation: educators are no longer perceived as independent producers of knowledge, but rather as industrial workers subject to a regime of intensified control. This shift imposes a series of tasks, restrictions, evaluations, and exhaustive workloads, leading to a significant erosion of professional autonomy and contributing to the overall deskilling of the academic profession.

Stromquist's (2012) analysis provides a comprehensive perspective on the implications of the State's withdrawal from higher education, emphasizing how this absence perpetuates social inequalities by favoring elite private institutions. In contrast, several Asian countries have followed a different path, marked by increased public investment in higher education and a commitment to developing globally competitive academic systems.

In her article, Champangnatte (2016) examines studies conducted in Mexico and Brazil involving higher education faculty, offering a critical lens on how neoliberalism shapes teaching practices and institutional structures. In the Mexican context, research reveals a clearly neoliberal shift in the configuration of academic work. Professors voice criticism regarding the universities' failure to align fully with market demands, while simultaneously expressing concern over performance outcomes and curriculum design. However, as Champangnatte observes, these very discourses are often steeped in neoliberal ideology, even if the faculty themselves remain unaware of the ideological framework they are reproducing.

In Brazil, where a high concentration of private universities exists, Champangnatte (2016) explores how these institutions frequently lead curricular transformations, challenge traditional pedagogical methods, and introduce new formats of assessment. She also critiques the role of the Ministry of Education, particularly in terms of its centralized control over curricula, which limits institutional autonomy and innovation. Importantly, the author underscores the parallel trajectories of Mexico and Brazil, noting that both countries justify the expansion of private universities by portraying them as more cost-effective alternatives for the State. This rationale reinforces a neoliberal narrative advocating the reduction of public investment in favor of private sector solutions.



This critical reflection highlights the pivotal role of faculty in sustaining neoliberal practices, often unwittingly, within higher education systems. In Brazil, as in Mexico, curricular reforms and evaluation mechanisms led by private institutions underscore the degree to which public policy frames these entities as more "efficient" financial models, thereby legitimizing the continued privatization and marketization of higher education.

When addressing neoliberalism and its impact on Higher Education, the need for a persuasive, attractive discourse capable of guaranteeing attention in society becomes evident. Terms such as creativity, innovation, adaptation, flexibility, and changes often occupy documents and proposals within universities, as Bento (2014) observes. These words, although initially well elaborated, have the purpose of emptying already consolidated policies. For neoliberalism, questioning the intellectual structures conquered so far is crucial, since they opt for the adaptable and the fast, easily disposable, thus moving on to new future attempts (Bento, 2016). The author also raises questions about the university's ability to escape the tentacles of capitalism, instigating a reflection on the need for universities and professors themselves to rescue the institution's fundamental mission.

Bento (2016) describes the proliferation of terms such as creativity and innovation in university discourse, used to empty robust and effective traditional policies. These concepts are strategically employed to question and reconfigure established structures, prioritizing flexibility and adaptability.

Spatti, Serafim, and Dias (2016) emphasize that the privatization of universities remains one of the most pressing challenges within the structure of Brazilian higher education. The authors further observe how teaching and extension activities have been increasingly subordinated to research, which has become the dominant metric for evaluating academic performance, both internally and externally. In this context, neoliberal policies within universities foster a commodified approach to knowledge production, one that is systematically organized along capitalist logics and oriented toward technological rent extraction for private enterprise (Laval, 2019).

The authors identify a phenomenon they describe as "fast food" higher education, in which there is a growing emphasis on accelerated training processes. Knowledge is treated as a quasi-commodity—something that must be produced quickly, subjected to standardization and quality inspections, and managed in a manner akin to corporate practices (Spatti, Serafim, & Dias, 2016). This model has significant implications for students' holistic development, as they come to be viewed less as learners and more as consumers of educational services. Saviani

(2007) critically frames this trend as neotechnicism, a paradigm in which control mechanisms are focused almost exclusively on outcomes, and evaluation becomes synonymous with efficiency and productivity.

A particularly salient development within neoliberal university policies is the rise of "Innovationism", which has effectively assumed the status of a fourth pillar of higher education—alongside teaching, research, and extension. Originally conceived in countries of the Global North, the discourse of innovation reaches Brazil with several distortions, often stripped of critical reflection. As Dias and Serafim (2015) note, this new institutional mission is deeply aligned with entrepreneurial values and business-oriented practices, further embedding market dynamics into the fabric of higher education.

Despite the intense process around innovation, the results in Brazil are still widely questionable. This is due to the significant increase in investment in these new dynamics, at the same time that there is a fragile policy in relation to the demands for results. In addition, there is a pertinent criticism, as the discourses and guidelines highlight the need for innovation in various aspects of universities, which harms areas such as the human sciences, generates a culture of extreme urgency for innovation, and disfavors discussions around the humanities, considering them as something outdated (Dias; Serafim, 2015).

Dias and Serafim (2015) further observe that "innovationism" has significant repercussions for research practices, particularly through the rise of academic productivism, which is increasingly favored in terms of visibility and financial support. Graduate programs perceived to possess innovative potential are privileged over those with a stronger formative or humanistic emphasis. The authors express concern over how the traditional pillars of the university—teaching, research, and extension—are being progressively eroded by the expansion of neoliberal, neo-productivism agendas. Within this framework, students are encouraged to pursue all available options—additional degrees, certifications, and training—under the imperative of competitiveness in the job market. Yet, as Saviani (2007) warns, such a model fosters a mindset in which individuals internalize failure, accepting personal responsibility for systemic shortcomings.

Within the broader context of neoliberal intervention in Brazilian higher education, a notable development is the emergence of Corporate Universities. These institutions prioritize training aligned with the immediate needs of the productive sector, emphasizing a wide range of operational and behavioral skills. However, such spaces offer little to no engagement with humanistic knowledge or critical political and social reflection (Silva & Balzan, 2007).

Corporate universities focus on shaping the ideal professional, one who embodies a standardized set of attributes deemed essential for navigating the volatility of neoliberal

economies. This training not only equips the worker to be functionally efficient but also encourages obedience and silence, cultivating individuals who are easily monitored and controlled. As Silva and Balzan (2007) critically point out, the very use of the term “university” in these corporate entities reflects a profound alienation: these institutions mold workers with limited epistemic and critical horizons, aligned with an ideology that is itself transient and market-dependent.

This model has already gained ground in several European countries and the United States, representing a new frontier of capital accumulation. As Laval (2019, p. 57) aptly describes, higher education within this paradigm is increasingly conceived as a network of “factories of efficient knowledge,” where learning is subordinated to productivity, and intellectual development is redefined according to market efficiency.

This model presents a distorted view of the mission of higher education, reducing it to the mere training of adaptable and subservient workers, rather than cultivating critical, autonomous, and socially engaged individuals. Ultimately, the proliferation of such institutions reflects the erosion of the boundaries between academic purpose and capitalist instrumentalization.

Goergen (2010) acknowledges that Brazil has achieved important advances in university policies. However, he warns that the majority of programs responsible for the expansion of higher education have been driven by privatization, often lacking mechanisms to ensure quality. The author highlights the 2010 National Conference on Education (CONAE) as a milestone event, where the role of the State as both financier and coordinator of higher education was reaffirmed. In his analysis, this reaffirmation is essential for resisting the advance of neoliberalism within Brazilian universities.

Goergen (2010) further suggests that strengthening the role of the State in higher education is not merely a defensive measure, but a strategic imperative for promoting both quality and innovation. By providing stable funding and implementing coherent public policies, the State can foster academic environments that balance research excellence with high-quality teaching, thereby creating a more equitable and socially responsive education system. Such a model moves beyond the logic of market efficiency, aligning higher education with broader goals of sustainable and inclusive development. This approach could also serve as an inspiration for policy reform in other countries confronting similar challenges.

In a broader geopolitical context, Calderón, Pedro, and Vargas (2011) argue that international organizations, particularly UNESCO, have played a significant role in the consolidation of neoliberal agendas in the global South. These organizations promote

discourses that attempt to reconcile the eradication of global problems with the promotion of liberal economic principles, often emphasizing limited state funding for higher education.

The authors point out that in this process, UNESCO often fails to explicitly reaffirm the responsibility of the State in providing higher education. Instead, its agenda tends to focus more on combating the phenomenon of so-called “diploma mills” or “diploma-factory”, without sufficiently addressing the systemic issues that allow such institutions to flourish. This focus reveals a neoliberal bias within UNESCO’s higher education policy framework, particularly within the paradigm of the Minimal State. Consequently, the pursuit of eliminating diploma mills aligns with a broader effort to commodify higher education, reinforcing the idea that educational institutions must conform to efficiency and productivity ideals in line with market standards (Calderón, Pedro, & Vargas, 2011).

### Methodological Approach

The methodological approach adopted in this study was built upon a qualitative, descriptive research design, in line with its objectives. It aimed to gather and analyze information on the topic under investigation with the goal of offering new perspectives on an already mapped reality (Lozada & Nunes, 2019).

Regarding the methods employed, the research takes the form of a bibliographic study, focusing on the identification of key materials necessary for conducting scientific inquiry, as emphasized by Oliveira (2002). Within this framework, the study is configured as a narrative literature review, centered on the analysis of relevant academic production.

To carry out the selection of articles, the Scielo database was used, applying the descriptors "Higher Education" AND "Neoliberalism". A total of 10 articles were identified, covering the period from 2005 to 2020. This timeframe was deliberately chosen as it represents a phase marked by intense transformations in higher education public policies, characterized by the growing influence of neoliberal discourses and practices promoted by international organizations and market-aligned governments. Among the selected articles, nine were written in Portuguese and one in Spanish. It is noteworthy that no article was excluded, as all were directly related to the thematic focus of the study.

Initially, a full reading of each article was conducted. Following this, a spreadsheet was created in Excel®, structured with columns into which all relevant content related to neoliberalism in higher education was extracted from the articles. After this selection phase, the data were categorized to support the organization of the writing and the analytical discussion, as presented in Table 01.

Table 01: Categorization of the Selected Articles

Category	Selected Articles	Authors	Journal of Publication
Neoliberalism in Latin America	Crisis de la Educación Superior en el Chile neoliberal: mercado y burocracia (Crisis of Higher Education in Neoliberal Chile: Market and Bureaucracy)	Nicolas Gregorio Fleet Oyarce; Peodair Seamus Leihy; Jose Miguel Salazar Zegers	Educar em Revista
	Currículo universitário: do México ao Brasil neoliberais (University Curriculum: From Mexico to Brazil Neoliberals)	Dostoiewski Mariatt de Oliveira Champangnatte	Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas)
	Educação Latino-Americana em tempos globalizados (Latin American Education in Globalized Times)	Nelly P. Stromquist	Sociologias
	A reforma neoliberal da educação superior no Chile em 1981 (The neoliberal reform of higher education in Chile in 1981 )	Sebastián Donoso Díaz	Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais
Neoliberalism's Incursion into Higher Education	Universidade e pertinência social: alguns apontamentos para reflexão ( University and social relevance: some notes for reflection)	Ana Carolina Spatti; Milena Pavan Serafim; Rafael de Brito Dias	Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas)
	Comentários sobre as transformações recentes na universidade pública brasileira (Comments on recent transformations in the Brazilian public university)	Rafael Dias; Milena Serafim	Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas)
	Educação superior na perspectiva do sistema e do Plano Nacional de Educação (Higher education from the perspective of the system and the National Education Plan)	Pedro Goergen	Educação & Sociedade
	Universidade Corporativa: (Pré-) tendência do Ensino Superior ou ameaça? (Corporate University: (Pre-) trend of Higher Education or threat?)	Marco Wandercil da Silva; Newton César Balzan	Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas)
General Studies on Neoliberalism in Higher Education	Do estado da universidade: metida num sarcófago ou no Leito de Procrustes? (On the State of the University: Trapped in a Sarcophagus or on Procrustes' Bed)	Jorge Olímpio Bento	Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas)
	Responsabilidade social da educação superior: a metamorfose do discurso da UNESCO em foco (Social responsibility of higher education: the metamorphosis of UNESCO's discourse in focus)	Adolfo Ignacio Calderón; Rodrigo Fornalski Pedro; Maria Caroline Vargas	Interface - Comunicação, Saúde, Educação

Source: Authors, (2024).

These studies contribute to the expansion of knowledge regarding the advance of neoliberal policies in higher education. Initially, they explore the emergence of these policies in Latin America, followed by an analysis of how they have come to influence Brazilian universities. Additionally, the studies examine how, throughout this process, the university has gradually lost sight of its original mission.

In the first category, titled “Neoliberalism in Latin America,” the selected articles discuss the progressive penetration of neoliberalism across the region, culminating in its arrival in Brazil. Chile is highlighted as a pioneer in the adoption of neoliberal policies, with education identified as a central focus for entrenching these reforms. This prioritization seeks to establish enduring foundations for neoliberalism. The articles also analyze the negative impacts on higher education institutions, particularly as public funding begins to decline. In Mexico, neoliberal influences appear increasingly embedded in academic culture, to the extent that educators often fail to recognize the detrimental effects of these new paradigms on their professional routines.

The second category, entitled “The Incursion of Neoliberalism into Higher Education,” addresses the rapid dissemination of neoliberal practices within Brazilian universities. The texts emphasize the intensifying privatization of the sector, which in recent years has come to dominate a substantial portion of university education in the country. Moreover, they point to the emergence of a wave of practices, innovations, and methodologies that reflect the deepening presence of neoliberal ideology in the formation of Brazilian students, signifying a broader shift in the national higher education landscape.

In the third category, “General Studies on Neoliberalism in Higher Education,” the articles reflect on the role of international organizations in the expansion of neoliberalism. These entities act as instruments of neoliberal influence, particularly in emerging and developing countries. The studies draw attention to the persuasive rhetoric employed by such organizations, which frequently promote terms like flexibility, innovation, and creativity. These buzzwords have been widely adopted within universities and are contributing to a weakened academic formation and the erosion of previously established educational policies.

The analytical technique applied was content analysis based on thematic categories, developed through a systematic reading of the selected articles from the Scielo database.



## Final Considerations

Brazil is currently experiencing a remarkable increase in the issuance of higher education degrees. However, this growth raises several critical issues that warrant reflection. It is notable that higher education is now predominantly under the influence of the private sector, with many educational policies contributing to this sector's role as a recipient of public investment. The university, which for decades was marked by elitism, is undergoing an intense process of popularization. At the same time, the university degree—once considered a pathway to emancipation—has, under the advance of neoliberalism, become associated with the perceived necessity of credentialing, yet without clear guarantees of career advancement.

The studies analyzed in this research indicate a rapid expansion of neoliberalism within higher education, bringing with it a series of transformations that fundamentally impact the essence and objectives of this educational level. With the growing dominance of the private sector, there is a clear reconfiguration of funding dynamics and a shift toward a management model aligned with market principles, adopting a business-oriented approach. The traditional tripod of higher education—teaching, research, and extension—now competes with an increasing emphasis on innovation, primarily linked to research, which has led to the redirection of priorities within graduate programs. In this context, the human sciences face declining interest and investment, while the productive sector emerges as the main beneficiary of available financial resources.

It is evident that neoliberalism not only undermines the foundations of solid academic formation, but also increasingly tends to promote superficial training. This model is no longer focused on fostering intellectual development but instead seeks to provide individuals with skills for rapid adaptation to the vulnerabilities of the capitalist system. Today's student must be prepared to face market instability, being flexible enough to internalize the idea that any professional failure is a personal one—implying that they simply did not try hard enough.

We argue that neoliberalism must not be underestimated, and that higher education must be reclaimed and reoriented toward its essential mission: to carry forward the process of emancipation.

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