

**Public policies for higher education in Brazil:
systematic review of the literature by subject area¹**

*Políticas públicas para a educação superior no Brasil:
revisão sistemática de literatura por áreas temáticas*

*Políticas públicas para la educación superior en Brasil:
revisión sistemática de la literatura por áreas temáticas*

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Abstract: The article aimed to understand the main thematic areas studied in the scope of scientific publications on Brazilian public policies for higher education, considering the period from 1996 to 2023. The qualitative study applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), following the guidelines of the Statement of Key Items to Report in Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) and employs content analysis. The analysis covers eight thematic areas: 1) Access, Inclusion, and Expansion; 2) Evaluation and Quality; 3) Teacher Training and Work; 4) Labor Market and Professional Integration; 5) Internationalization; 6) Retention and Dropout Rates; 7) Scientific Production and Researcher Training; and 8) Technology and Innovation. The results highlight the area of “Access, Inclusion, and Expansion,” which has the highest number of studies and has grown significantly over the years, especially between 2013 and 2015. The area of “Evaluation and Quality” is also relevant, with a peak in publications in 2017 and a strong interconnection with the area of access. On the other hand, areas such as “Internationalization,” “Retention and Dropout Rates,” “Scientific Production and Researcher Training,” and “Technology and Innovation” have a reduced number of articles and less interconnection, suggesting gaps in research. This paper discusses advances and gaps, highlighting the need for future studies using mixed methodologies to deepen research on public education policies and explore areas that have been less addressed.

Keywords: Higher Education; Public Policies; Systematic Literature Review; Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA).

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Resumo: O artigo objetivou compreender as principais áreas temáticas estudadas no escopo da publicação científica das políticas públicas brasileiras para a educação superior, considerando o horizonte temporal de 1996 a 2023. O estudo qualitativo aplica uma Revisão Sistemática de Literatura (RSL), seguindo as diretrizes da Declaração dos Principais Itens para Relatar Revisões Sistemáticas e Meta-análises (PRISMA) e emprega a análise de conteúdo. A análise abrange oito áreas temáticas: 1) Acesso, Inclusão e Expansão; 2) Avaliação e Qualidade; 3) Formação e Trabalho Docente; 4) Mercado de Trabalho e Inserção Profissional; 5) Internacionalização; 6) Retenção e Evasão; 7) Produção Científica e Formação de Pesquisadores; e 8) Tecnologia e Inovação. Os resultados indicam um destaque para a área de “Acesso, Inclusão e Expansão”, que apresenta o maior número de trabalhos e um crescimento significativo ao longo dos anos, especialmente entre 2013 e 2015. A área de “Avaliação e Qualidade” também se mostra relevante, com um pico de publicações em 2017 e forte interconexão com a área de acesso. Por outro lado, áreas como “Internacionalização”, “Retenção e Evasão”, “Produção Científica e Formação de Pesquisadores” e “Tecnologia e Inovação” apresentam um número reduzido de artigos e menor interconexão, sugerindo lacunas na pesquisa. Este trabalho discute avanços e lacunas, destacando a necessidade de estudos futuros com metodologias mistas, a fim de aprofundar as pesquisas sobre políticas públicas educacionais e explorar áreas menos abordadas.

Palavras-chave: Educação Superior; Políticas Públicas; Revisão Sistemática de Literatura; Declaração dos Principais Itens para Relatar Revisões Sistemáticas e Meta-análises (PRISMA).

Resumen: El artículo tuvo como objetivo comprender las principales áreas temáticas estudiadas en el ámbito de la publicación científica de las políticas públicas brasileñas para la educación superior, considerando el horizonte temporal de 1996 a 2023. El estudio cualitativo aplica una revisión sistemática de la literatura (RSL), siguiendo las directrices de la Declaración de los principales elementos para informar revisiones sistemáticas y metaanálisis (PRISMA) y emplea el análisis de contenido. El análisis abarca ocho áreas temáticas: 1) Acceso, inclusión y expansión; 2) Evaluación y calidad; 3) Formación y trabajo docente; 4) Mercado laboral e inserción profesional; 5) Internacionalización; 6) Retención y Evasión; 7) Producción Científica y Formación de Investigadores; y 8) Tecnología e Innovación. Los resultados indican un destaque para el área de “Acceso, Inclusión y Expansión”, que presenta el mayor número de trabajos y un crecimiento significativo a lo largo de los años, especialmente entre 2013 y 2015. El área de “Evaluación y calidad” también resulta relevante, con un pico de publicaciones en 2017 y una fuerte interconexión con el área de acceso. Por otro lado, áreas como “Internacionalización”, “Retención y Evasión”, “Producción Científica y Formación de Investigadores” y “Tecnología e Innovación” presentan un número reducido de artículos y una menor interconexión, lo que sugiere lagunas en la investigación. Este trabajo analiza los avances y las deficiencias, destacando la necesidad de realizar estudios futuros con metodologías mixtas, con el fin de profundizar en las investigaciones sobre políticas públicas educativas y explorar áreas menos abordadas.

Palabras clave: Educación Superior; Políticas Públicas; Revisión Sistemática de Literatura; Ítems Preferidos para Informes de Revisiones Sistemáticas y Metaanálisis (PRISMA).

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Introduction

The literature points to the revitalization of research in the field of public policy, with this recognition being the result of both economic factors that touch on spending restrictions worldwide and perspectives on how government action should be (Souza, 2006; Dalfior, Lima & Andrade, 2015). Similarly, studies investigating the area of higher education have grown significantly. Their relevance stems from the understanding that education—particularly at the tertiary level—drives national development while also cutting across multiple areas, identifying gaps, and raising issues of social relevance (Lesnieski & Trevisol, 2021).

According to Cançado, Barros, and Barros (2021), despite the importance of education, this has been the segment that has received the least number of resources in recent years in Brazil. Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate, through studies on the subject, the government's agenda for effectively implementing public policies in higher education, making it crucial to understand the approaches, theories, and methods of the works that discuss this topic in Brazil.

In this sense, the research starts from the following question: How are the main themes of scientific publication manifested in the context of Brazilian public policies for higher education? Given this question, the general objective is to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to understand the main thematic areas studied in the scope of scientific publications on Brazilian public policies for higher education, considering the period from 1996 to 2023.

This study stands out for its original methodology, integrating the SLR protocols (Prisma, 2020) with Bardin's content analysis model (2016). In this sense, it differs from studies that have conducted theoretical surveys on the phases of the public policy cycle in the field of higher education in Brazil, such as the study by Lesnieski and Trevisol (2021), which investigated the most debated topics in the area of higher education, presenting an overview of academic publications from 2017 to 2020.

We present a theoretical framework covering aspects of public policy and higher education. The methodological procedures detail the criteria applied for selecting the articles analyzed. The results and discussion present the main findings in relation to the thematic areas and how themes relate to each other. The final considerations summarize the proposals for future studies.

Public Policies and Higher Education

For Secchi (2013), public policies are like an agenda or guideline that aims to address issues of public interest. Furthermore, Souza (2006) highlights that public policy is an extensive process that involves actors such as the government and civil society. The emergence of public policies is based on rights understood as fundamental to human beings.

Based on the assumption that education is a right, Azevedo and Aguiar (2001) define educational public policy as government actions in the social sphere that aim to guide and improve the education system in its various forms. In this sense, the actors involved in this process seek to guarantee, among other rights, access, inclusion, permanence, and the reduction of inequalities through the control and improvement of the educational system (Azevedo & Aguiar, 2001; Stremel & Mainardes, 2018).

According to Article 265 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, higher education in Brazil is a social right, offered and encouraged with the cooperation of society and under the responsibility of the State and the family (Brazil, 1988). In this context, with a view to regulating educational policy, the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education (LDB) were enacted in 1996, which provides guidelines for the various levels of education in the country, in addition to reiterating the importance of this category in the Brazilian educational system (Brazil, 1996).

The LDB, understood as a complementary law that regulates the guidelines and foundations for national education, was enacted under the aegis of the 1988 Federal Constitution, which brought with it a set of provisions in the chapter on education, highlighting free public education at all levels, democratic management of public schools, the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension in university education, and university autonomy, among others. Laws, decrees, and ordinances preceded its implementation and guided it [...] (Dourado, 2002, pp. 241-242).

Considering the importance of higher education in a country's development and economy, as well as its nature as public policy and social rights, it is essential to analyze existing studies to identify areas that have been little explored. The Federal Constitution of 1988 establishes the State's obligation to guarantee access to education, ensuring inclusion, retention, and the reduction of inequalities. Therefore, society and families must ensure the effective fulfillment of these rights. This includes the implementation of public policies that promote equal opportunities and the continuous improvement of the educational system

(Stremel & Mainardes, 2018). Notably, Brazilian literature has extensively discussed higher education, emphasizing the ongoing reduction in resources allocated to this area (Lusa, Martinelli, Moraes & Almeida, 2019; Souza, 2006).

The expansion of higher education in Brazil has been marked by public policies that sought to increase access to this level of education, especially for historically excluded groups (Rosa & Martins, 2021; Carneiro & Bridi, 2020; Pires & Wargas, 2018; Schlesener & Pereira, 2016; Almeida & Enrica, 2015; Colares; Ferreira & Colares, 2017; Santos & Freitas, 2014). In addition, public policies related to evaluation and quality play a significant role in Brazilian higher education. In this context, the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES), established by the 1996 National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB), stands as one of the main instruments for ensuring the quality of higher education (Neto, Medeiros & Catani, 2020; Real, 2009).

SINAES encourage HEIs to strive for quality in their activities, whether in teaching, research, or extension (Catani & Oliveira, 2002). At the same time, public policies for inclusion and expansion of access to higher education are still extremely relevant in ensuring access for historically excluded people (Rosa & Martins, 2021; Carneiro & Bridi, 2020). In parallel, the internationalization of higher education institutions has become one of the priorities of public education policies, given its relevance to economic and competitiveness factors, in addition to its contribution to the advancement of innovation in higher education and academic development (Miranda; Stallivieri, 2017). These efforts express the attempt to reduce inequalities and guarantee higher quality education with qualified professionals and allow the inclusion of historically neglected groups.

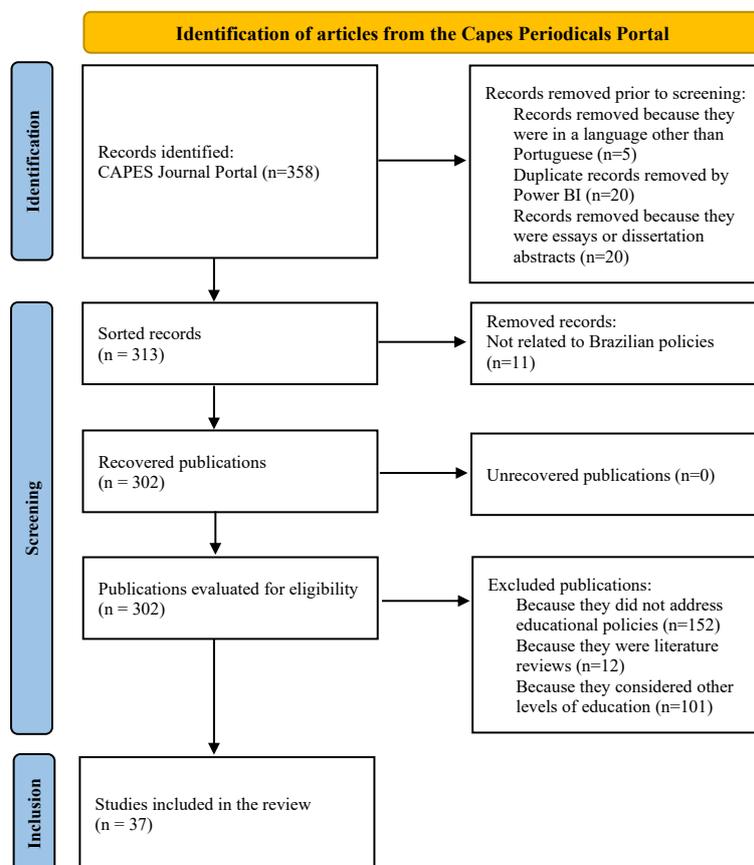
Methodology

The study has a qualitative approach, with the RSL based on the statement of the Key Elements to Report Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA, 2020), which consists of using explicit and systematic methods to identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize the results of studies that address a clearly formulated question (Page et al., 2022).

The study defined and applied filters to the Capes journal portal database to identify scientific publications addressing the research's guiding question and objective presented in the introduction.

The flowchart in Figure 1 summarizes these criteria applied for the execution of the RSL, according to the steps of the PRISMA statement.

Figure 1 – Application of the PRISMA (2020) flow diagram stages



Source: Authors own elaboration based on Page et al. (2022).

This study adapted the PRISMA statement (2020), as the technique involves applying 27 steps to construct a consistent systematic review in terms of textual and structural aspects (Page et al., 2022). As shown in the flowchart in Figure 1, the identification stage yielded 358 articles. The study exported these materials to Power BI, examined them, and removed 20 duplicate records.

Based on the removal criteria, the study removed five articles in other languages; two summaries of master's theses; six expanded abstracts; two essays; and ten abstracts. After the first stage, 313 records entered the screening stage, during which the study extracted the articles' titles and objectives into a spreadsheet created in Google Sheets. The summary allowed us to understand the particularities of the works, which led to further removals.

More specifically, the study removed 11 articles that addressed international rather than Brazilian policies, resulting in 302 publications retrieved. After thoroughly reading the articles and extracting data, the study also removed 152 articles that did not address higher education educational policies. In addition, the study identified and

excluded 101 articles focusing on Youth and Adult Education, secondary education, vocational education, and Early Childhood Education. The study further excluded 12 literature reviews, totaling 320 removals and resulting in 37 articles included in the systematic review.

As for the analysis method used, the study was based on content analysis, which is a methodological tool that supports the researcher's intention to extract the unpublished potential in any message (Bardin, 2016). Still on this aspect, Bardin (2016) highlights three main stages in the content analysis process, namely pre-analysis, document exploration, and treatment of results.

In this research, the pre-analysis stage involved defining categories to create thematic areas based on a cursory reading of the abstracts and conclusions of the studies. The second step consists of separating the content based on the definitions present in the first step, in addition to conducting an analysis of the materials within groups, seeking to examine their specificities. The third stage presents the interpretations made after the previous ones, usually through graphic representations. At this stage, it is possible to identify patterns and trends or even present the results via simple statistics that demonstrate the frequency with which a theme is present in the works (Bardin, 2016).

In this sense, the study used MAXQDA Analytics Pro (Version 2024) to analyze the selected articles. After exporting the data from the software, the study conducted content analysis to code textual segments of the articles and subsequently exported the coded data to Microsoft Excel. The study then created a spreadsheet containing the article identification number, the number of coded segments, and the number of coding per article within each thematic area, as presented in the next chapter.

Results and Discussion

This chapter aims to analyze the data found after applying the content analysis methodology to the articles included in the RSL. The study divided the articles into eight thematic areas, using the classification criteria listed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Thematic areas and classification criteria

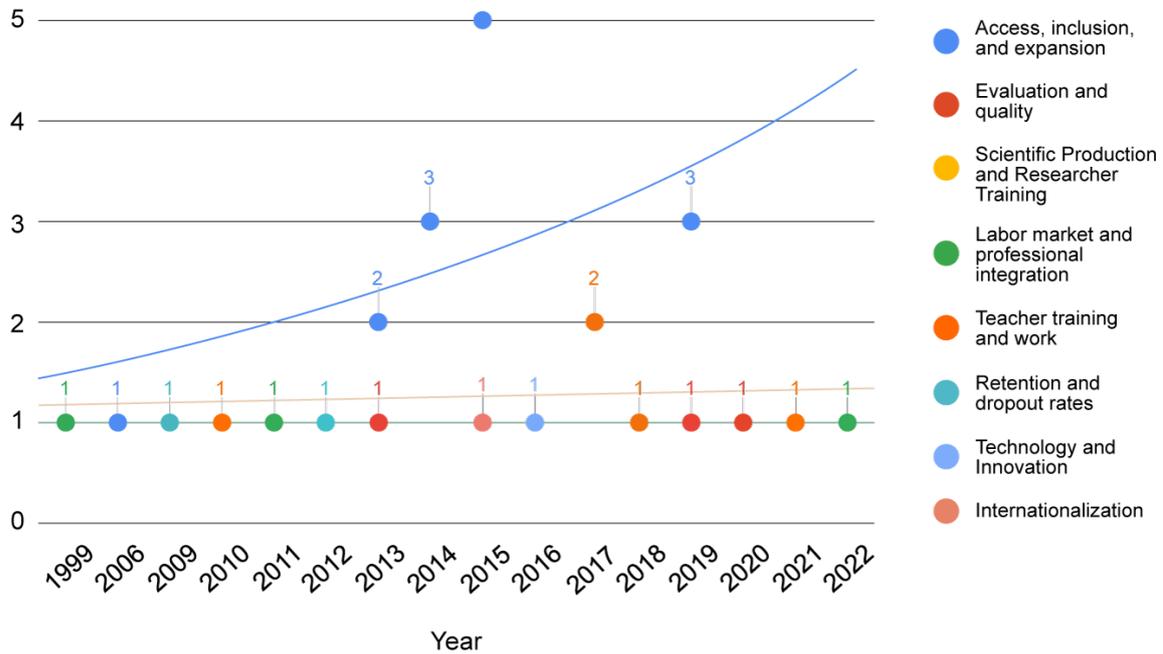
Thematic Areas	Eligibility criteria	No. of articles
Access, inclusion, and expansion	Analysis of public policies aimed at expanding access to higher education, whether through affirmative action or an increase in the number of places available for admission, and works that discuss the increase in diversity in academic spaces	19
Evaluation and quality	Research on policies for analyzing teaching quality; teacher performance and the consequences of changes in higher education over the years	6
Teacher training and work	The studies analyze teachers' working conditions and opportunities for improvement, as well as the implementation and effectiveness of teacher training policies	5
Labor market and professional integration	Relationship between social mobility and educational policies on access, inclusion, and retention; in addition to discussing labor issues in terms of opportunities and employability after completing higher education	3
Internationalization	Studies addressing educational policies for the internationalization of teaching and the exchange of learning between national and international universities	1
Retention and dropout rates	Research on educational policies aimed at ensuring that students complete higher education within the specified period, as well as analyzing the determining factors of retention and dropout rates and the role of educational policies in this issue	1
Scientific production and researcher training	Works that analyze policies to stimulate the production of scientific material in academia	1
Technology and innovation	Studies analyzing the impact of public education policies aimed at implementing innovative tools and methodologies	1

Source: Authors own elaboration with the support of Excel software. Research results, 2024.

After analyzing the articles using the MAXQDA software, the analysis identified eight thematic areas, as presented in Table 1. When analyzing the data, the thematic area entitled “access, inclusion, and expansion” stands out, with the highest number of studies, which means that the studies present in the RSL have a significant focus on this area.

The first descriptive analysis addresses the evolution of the number of publications in each thematic area over the years (Figure 2), showing the growth of certain areas at the expense of others. The area of access, inclusion, and expansion shows significant growth, especially in 2013, 2014, and 2015. Although the number of articles decreased later, there has been rapid growth in this subject area when compared to the others. Another subject area with notable growth is evaluation and quality, which peaked in 2017. The other subject areas maintained constant publication numbers during the period analyzed.

Figure 2 – Evolution of thematic areas according to year of publication

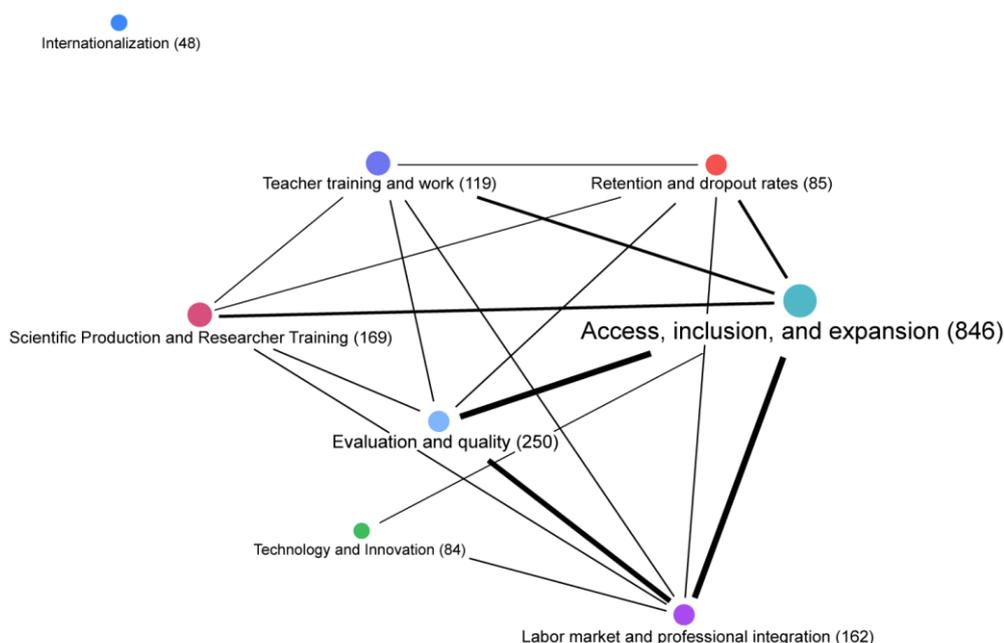


Source: Authors own elaboration with the support of Excel software. Research results, 2024.

According to Bardin (2016), it is possible to apply more than one coding to a document to observe and analyze the complexity of the materials, thus enriching the analysis of the results. When examining educational policies specifically, this co-occurrence of codes can be interesting, considering the complexity of the phenomena and the interconnection between different areas.

In this sense, the analysis applied more than one code across all surveys. The analysis classified the articles within the most recurrent thematic area; however, this procedure does not exclude the examination of the connections established between the areas. Accordingly, Figure 3 presents the code map developed using MAXQDA. This visual tool enables the identification of the most frequently used codes in the analyzed texts, as well as the examination of the frequency of relationships among codes and the density of the dominant themes underpinning the present analysis.

Figure 3 – Code map



Source: Authors own elaboration based on data segmented in MAXQDA.

The thematic area “access, inclusion, and expansion” shows the highest number of occurrences and relationships, as expected given that it contains the largest number of published articles. In addition, the area of “evaluation and quality” is also relevant and presents connections not only with the area of internationalization. In the code map, wider connection lines indicate a greater co-occurrence of interconnected codes across the reviewed articles. The map also shows that internationalization is the only thematic area not connected to others, since the coded segments in this area relate exclusively to it.

The analysis highlights the growth in the number of studies dealing with public policies for higher education, which corroborates the findings of Lesnieski and Trevisol (2021), especially in the thematic area of “access, inclusion, and expansion.” This is related to the growing academic interest in public education policies that aim to increase the inclusion and retention of students in higher education. On the other hand, by presenting the interconnection between the thematic areas created and the existence of a greater number of connections between the themes of “access, inclusion, and expansion” and “evaluation and quality,” it is possible to note that the publications integrate concepts and public policies that address the relationship between inclusion and the quality of higher education.

Thus, the general analysis of the articles, through Figures 2 and 3, indicates the main thematic areas studied within the scope of the study, in addition to examining the longitudinal evolution of publications related to public policies for higher education. The general overview points to greater interconnection between the two areas mentioned above, which confirms which areas have received greater academic attention to the detriment of others, raising the need for future studies in thematic areas that have few articles and are less frequently related to each other.

The area of “access, inclusion, and expansion,” with 19 articles, focuses on the expansion of higher education in the country. In this sense, it is possible to observe the recurrence of studies that address the University for All Program (ProUni) and the Support Program for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (REUNI), which were important initiatives in the scope of expanding access, promoting the expansion of places in both the public and private sectors (Mello Neto, Medeiros & Catani, 2014; Zumblick, Giusti Pachane & Melo Vitorino, 2015).

Despite these advances, democratizing access to higher education faces challenges, since factors such as family income, type of high school attended, color/race/ethnicity, and parents' education still significantly influence the chances of choosing, entering, and remaining in courses (Almeida & Ernica, 2015). This thematic area also addresses aspects related to the quota policy established by Law No. 12,711/2012, which aimed to expand opportunities for access to public universities for students from public schools, black, brown, and indigenous students.

Rosa and Martins (2021), Carneiro and Bridi (2020), Wainer and Melguizo (2018), and Pires and Vargas (2018) emphasize that, in addition to access, student retention, especially for those covered by the Quota Law for access to higher education, is also a challenge. In this sense, they mention student assistance programs, such as the National Student Assistance Plan (PNAES), which aim to minimize the effects of social inequalities, contributing to the reduction of retention and dropout rates, emphasizing that the resources allocated to these policies are still insufficient in view of the expansion in the number of new students (Rosa & Martins, 2021; Carneiro & Bridi, 2020; Wainer & Melguizo, 2018; Pires & Vargas, 2018).

The studies by Rosa and Marins (2020), Pires and Vargas (2018), Schlesener and Pereira (2016) converge on the idea that the democratization of higher education in Brazil requires not only expanding access but also implementing actions that guarantee student retention and academic success, to promote social inclusion and reduce inequalities. A relevant criticism made by Carneiro and Bridi (2020) comments on the disproportionate number of students in relation to the number of teachers and administrative staff to receive and meet the demands caused by the expansion in enrollment numbers.

Furthermore, Almeida and Ernica (2015) as well as Colares, Ferreira, and Colares (2015) argue that simply increasing the number of places available in higher education is not sufficient to measure the democratization of education. However, there are frequent studies that evaluate only data related to the number of enrollments after the implementation of a specific public policy to expand access. Colares, Ferreira, and Colares (2015) argue that future research should consider aspects other than quantitative ones, such as the analysis of academic qualifications measured by the long-term social impact on factors such as the human development index. Based on the research data, the analysis did not identify any articles that addressed these issues.

The six articles in the “evaluation and quality” section discuss how the assessment of Brazilian higher education has become central to educational reforms and policies. One of the most frequently mentioned programs was the SINAES, whose objective is to evaluate institutions, courses, and student academic performance to ensure the quality of higher education (Neto, Medeiros & Catani, 2020; Real, 2009). Despite the advances observed, such as the culture of evaluation, SINAES also presents problematic aspects, such as the emphasis on competitiveness and the ranking of institutions. Furthermore, evaluation mechanisms have not been able to limit the expansion of private institutions of dubious quality (Assis & Oliveira, 2013).

Regarding student assessment, the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE) is the most cited instrument, but its exclusive use to measure the quality of education is criticized by studies such as that by Oliveira, Soares, Cunha, Menegaz & Silva (2022), which show that socioeconomic, structural, and organizational factors influence student performance on ENADE.

Regarding student assistance policy, the study by Macedo and Abranches (2019) highlights the perception of undergraduate students who consider it essential for their continued enrollment at the university, but point out weaknesses, such as the lack of measures to help them in their academic performance.

There is a prevalence in the use of data from ENADE and the National Course Examination (ENC or Provão) in studies in this area (Assis & Oliveira, 2013; Real, 2009) related to documentary analysis, which results in analyses limited to these programs, restricting perspectives from different data sources. It is worth highlighting the work of Macedo and Abranches (2019), which discusses assistance for the improvement of Brazilian educational policies, but presents a specific instrument from only one university. Researchers can replicate the study at other universities; however, it does not provide a broad view of public education policies.

By limiting interviews to students, they disregard other authors who influence and interact with the instrument analyzed, a recurring point in studies in the field of evaluation and quality, observed in studies such as those by Assis and Oliveira (2013) and Real (2009). In this sense, the selection of the group of students may influence and bias the results of the study. Macedo and Abranches (2019), however, point out that students who receive financial aid at the university studied are in a situation of extreme socioeconomic vulnerability, with family incomes below those stipulated by the PNAES.

Furthermore, Real (2009) points out that institutions have sought to obtain positive evaluations in educational assessment mechanisms that demonstrate the quality of the services provided, which means that in the period close to the evaluation, the points are modified to ensure that the score given to the institutions is the maximum, a fact that provides what the author calls “formal quality to the detriment of real quality” (Real, 2009, p. 582), with formal quality being the indicators present in the evaluations and real quality being that actually experienced during the teaching and learning process.

Regarding the thematic area of “teacher training and work,” five studies were analyzed, which discuss whether the topic is a current concern, given that many teachers do not have the necessary didactic-pedagogical knowledge to work effectively with their students (Pereira, 1999; Giaretta, Santos, Montagner, Souza & Massimino, 2016). On another note, Mantovani and Canan (2015) point out that although a considerable proportion of university professors hold master’s and doctoral degrees, the law does not require specific training for teaching at this level of education.

In addition to the points discussed, the studies included consistently indicate that the LDB transferred responsibility for teachers’ pedagogical training to higher education institutions themselves. This finding is particularly evident in the studies by Giaretta et al. (2016) and Mantovani and Canan (2015), who emphasize that a considerable proportion of teachers do not receive adequate didactic preparation, thereby compromising teaching quality. In this context, scholars identify a growing demand for continuing education in the pedagogical-didactic field to improve the quality of higher education in Brazil. To address these deficiencies, multiple institutions have implemented teacher training programs, as reported by Mantovani and Canan (2015).

Pereira (1999) reflects on policies related to teacher training through an analysis of the LDB, pointing out the lack of a teaching career plan, in addition to the precarious nature of the work of education professionals. Although there is a bias in the interpretation and selection of documents, the work is relevant, due to the complexity of

the theoretical framework on teacher training. Years after the publication of the study, policymakers developed initiatives addressing teacher training and career progression, such as the National Education Plan (PNE) established in 2014 (Monteiro et al., 2022).

The three texts in the “labor market and professional integration” section discuss the relationship between higher education and the labor market in Brazil. Historically, economic development and labor-market demands have pressured universities to focus on training skilled workers (Almeida & Silva, 2006; Costa & Nogueira, 2014; Aguiar, 2010). A recurring observation concerns the strengthening of this perspective since the 1960s, given the expansion of higher education aimed at meeting the need for specialized human capital for the changing economy (Aguiar, 2010; Costa & Nogueira, 2014).

In this context, educational policies took on an economic character, based on Human Capital Theory, which conceives education as an individual investment with future returns. This led to the massification of higher education, with the expansion of the private network, often to the detriment of teaching quality, a point debated in other thematic areas such as assessment and quality.

Another recurring discussion addresses how higher education has increasingly aligned itself with market interests, with the flexibilization of curricula and the creation of courses geared toward business demands. Thus, Costa and Nogueira (2014) defend the idea that university degrees are losing their symbolic value, becoming merely a requirement for entering the job market.

In the area of “internationalization,” Miranda and Stallivieri (2017) argue that discussions focused on higher education have become increasingly recurrent in Brazil and worldwide, making internationalization one of the forces that most strongly shape and define higher education today. The authors reinforce the need to develop a public policy for the internationalization of Brazilian higher education, involving the main actors (higher education institutions, government, and companies) and defining the main lines of action.

Although a range of Brazilian government documents address internationalization, no single document consolidates a structured public policy in this area. In addition, programs such as Science Without Borders require improvement to generate greater impact, particularly through the definition of criteria such as identity, institutionality, visibility, reference, and sustainability, as well as the incorporation of a dynamic of continuous measurement and evaluation (Miranda & Stallivieri, 2017).

The article, which falls under the area of “scientific production and researcher training,” focuses on research related to Scientific Initiation (IC), considering it a strategic

activity for the training of researchers in Brazil, with the justification of providing undergraduate students with direct contact with scientific research under the guidance of qualified researchers (Pinho, 2017).

According to Pinho (2017), despite the benefits of CI, it still reaches only a small portion of students, requiring greater commitment from institutions to expand this opportunity. In addition, undergraduate research faces challenges related to the commodification of knowledge and the predominance of private interests in scientific production, to the detriment of its social function.

Regarding “retention and dropout rates,” Araújo, Mariano, and Oliveira (2021) agree that there are factors both within and outside the institution that determine student retention, citing financial difficulties, lack of academic support, and problems with subjects and methodologies as examples. In addition, they emphasize the importance of institutional policies that promote monitoring and support for students, especially those in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, given their fundamental role in reducing retention and dropout rates. Among the most frequently cited points, there is recurrent mention of the PNAES, which aims to contribute to equal opportunities and improved academic performance through actions such as assistance with housing, food, transportation, and digital inclusion for students in vulnerable situations (Araújo, Mariano & Oliveira, 2021).

The “technology and innovation” section focuses on discussing the results of the evaluation of the Interdisciplinary Training Program (ProFIS) at a university. In this sense, Pereira, Carneiro, and Gonçalves (2015) explain the structure of ProFIS and characterize it as an innovation in Brazilian higher education, given its interdisciplinary design and the evaluation system they developed, which tracks student outcomes from admission through professional insertion.

The study reports that teachers consider ProFIS to be suitable for developing social and behavioral skills, and students also evaluate the program positively in terms of developing training for professional practice that is rich in scientific knowledge, concerned with social issues, and based on ethical values. The authors argue that ProFIS has achieved its stated objectives, while also highlighting the challenges related to the integration among the subjects offered (Pereira, Carneiro & Gonçalves, 2015).

To complement the analysis of the thematic areas, the results indicated certain points regarding potential future research agendas, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 – Research agendas by thematic area

Research agendas by thematic areas	Main studies that informed the recommendations
<p>Access, inclusion, and expansion: The study analyzes academic qualifications in terms of their long-term social impact on factors such as the Human Development Index, but the research data revealed no articles addressing these aspects. Application of mixed methodologies, using quantitative tools such as statistical data analysis and qualitative tools such as ethnographic studies and focus group analysis, considering the experiences of people directly affected by policies of access, inclusion, and retention.</p>	<p>Colares; Ferreira & Colares (2015); Rosa & Martins (2020); Carneiro & Bridi (2020); Pires & Vargas (2018); Schlesener & Pereira (2016); Almeida & Ernica (2015); Mello Neto, Medeiros & Catani (2014); Santos & Freitas (2014).</p>
<p>Evaluation and quality: Analyze assessment data in conjunction with others. Research addressing the impact of assessment policies on students' psychosocial issues. Analysis of the impacts of assessment and quality policies on the actors involved, such as teachers and students. Research aimed at analyzing whether students receiving financial aid are in a situation of extreme socioeconomic vulnerability and whether this is a pattern among students receiving any type of financial aid.</p>	<p>Macedo & Abranches (2019); Assis & Oliveira (2013); Oliveira, Soares, Silva, Cunha, Menegaz & Silva (2022); Real (2009).</p>
<p>Teacher training and work: Research is investigating how HEIs have been working on the qualification of their teaching staff.</p>	<p>Zumblick, Giusti Pachane & Melo Vitorino (2015); Giareta, et al., (2016); Mantovani & Canan (2015).</p>
<p>Labor market and professional integration: Research analyzing whether academic degrees are losing their symbolic value, becoming merely a requirement for entering the labor market. Research considering primary data. Longitudinal studies analyzing the professional trajectory of graduates.</p>	<p>Costa; Nogueira (2014); Almeida & Silva (2006); Costa & Nogueira (2015).</p>
<p>Internationalization: Research aimed at analyzing educational policies related to internationalization. The study analyzes the trajectories of students participating in internationalization programs, focusing on employability and the effects of internationalization on publications and international collaboration networks.</p>	<p>Miranda & Stallivieri (2017).</p>
<p>Retention and dropout rates: Application of qualitative and mixed approaches.</p>	<p>Araujo, Mariano & Oliveira (2021).</p>
<p>Scientific production and researcher training: Works that address collaboration networks, aiming to analyze whether and how networks influence research and scientific production figures.</p>	<p>Pinho (2017).</p>
<p>Technology and Innovation: Research into the difficulties of integration between disciplines and viable solutions. Work that accompanies students after completion of ProFIS, particularly in relation to professional integration. Longitudinal analysis of ProFIS to assess the impact of the program on students' training and professional integration.</p>	<p>Pereira, Carneiro & Gonçalves (2015).</p>

Source: Authors own elaboration.

Conclusions

The thematic areas overview highlights that certain areas show greater growth, more specifically research related to access, inclusion, expansion, and research related to evaluation and quality. In addition, it is possible to observe how the thematic areas relate to each other

through co-occurrence analysis. These results show the relationships between the areas and how often each one relates to the others, highlighting that the only area that does not relate to any other is internationalization.

The study analyzes the thematic areas, highlighting significant advances, existing gaps, and agendas for future research. Considering proposing a research agenda on topics in the field of education in Brazil, in general, and based on data related to the evolution of the thematic areas identified in the study, a future research agenda may aim to monitor this evolution, seeking to predict growth and decline. For example, it is possible to investigate whether recent changes in the PNE influence academic production.

In addition, other studies can analyze the network of researchers and institutions in specific subject areas, tracking the evolution of research in each area. This movement can reveal patterns of collaboration in research. Another possibility is to analyze the influence of socioeconomic aspects on academic output, seeking to understand whether economic crises or sociodemographic changes influence the number of research projects over the years in each thematic area. In this regard, future research could focus on investigations that compare the evolution of Brazilian and international work, analyzing how regional, geopolitical, or cultural factors influence scientific output in each area.

In conclusion, this review points to the need for diversified mixed approaches (qualitative and quantitative) in studies, whose central objective is to discuss the role of public policies applied to the context of higher education. The possible agendas listed aim to reduce existing gaps in the area, seeking to better understand educational policies, their consequences for society, and the evaluation of their results and impacts.

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