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Educational policy, access, and innovation in distance degree courses: literature review and scientific method in focus

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Objective: This research aims to analyze theses and dissertations in education that deal with educational policy, access and innovation in degree courses in distance higher education and to identify the scientific method used in these studies. **Methodology:** The methodological course of this investigation is developed through bibliographic research carried out in the Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog, having as a timeframe the period from 2010 to 2020. We also use documentary research to support the analyzes developed through qualitative and quantitative approaches, revealing elements that constitute the object and that materialize the identified results. The study highlights a set of 9 works related to distance education in higher education, seven of which are dissertations and two theses that involve the subject in question. **Result:** About the scientific method used in the publications, we observed as the main theoretical reference indicating the dialectical method focused on the Marxist epistemological perspective. **Conclusion:** The conclusions point to the scarcity of specific research on the relationship between educational policy, access and innovation in distance education courses. The publications highlight that distance education in Brazil follows a neoliberal logic, associating innovation with the use of technologies and the attempt to organize teacher training via the distance modality, but with important fractures resulting from the process of precariousness of higher education.

KEYWORDS

Rural education. Educators' training. Indigenous issues. Decoloniality.

Política educacional, acesso e inovação nos cursos de licenciatura a distância: revisão de literatura e método científico em foco

RESUMO:

Introdução/Objetivo: Esta pesquisa tem por objetivo analisar teses e dissertações em educação que tratam sobre a política educacional, acesso e inovação nos cursos de licenciatura na educação superior a distância e identificar o método científico utilizado nesses estudos. **Metodologia:** O percurso metodológico desta investigação é desenvolvido por meio de pesquisa bibliográfica realizada no Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Capes, tendo como recorte temporal o período de 2010 a 2020. Também foi usada a pesquisa documental para subsidiar as análises desenvolvidas por meio de abordagens qualitativas e quantitativas, desvelando elementos que constituem o objeto e que materializam os resultados identificados. O estudo destaca um conjunto de 9 trabalhos correlatos à EaD na educação superior, sendo sete das publicações dissertações e duas teses que envolvem a temática em questão. **Resultado:** Sobre o método científico utilizado nas publicações, observamos como principal referencial teórico indicando o método dialético voltado à perspectiva epistemológica marxista. **Conclusão:** As conclusões apontam a escassez de pesquisas específicas acerca da relação entre política educacional, acesso e inovação nos cursos EaD. As publicações destacam que a EaD no Brasil segue uma lógica neoliberal, associando inovação ao uso de tecnologias e à tentativa de organização da formação docente via modalidade a distância, mas com fraturas importantes resultantes do processo de precarização da educação superior.

PALABRAS-CHAVE:

Educação a distancia; Revisão de literatura; Método científico.

Política educativa, acceso e innovación en cursos de grado a distancia: revisión de literatura y método científico en foco

RESUMEN

Introducción/Objectivo: Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar tesis y disertaciones en educación que versan sobre política educativa, acceso e innovación en carreras de grado en educación superior a distancia e identificar el método científico utilizado en estos estudios. **Metodología:** El recorrido metodológico de esta investigación se desarrolla a través de la investigación bibliográfica realizada en el Catálogo de Tesis y Disertaciones de la Capes, teniendo como marco temporal el período de 2010 a 2020. También utilizamos la investigación documental para sustentar los análisis desarrollados a través de enfoques cualitativos y cuantitativos, revelando elementos que constituyen el objeto y que materializan los resultados identificados. El estudio destaca un conjunto de 9 trabajos relacionados con la educación a distancia en la educación superior, de los cuales siete son disertaciones y dos tesis que involucran el tema en cuestión. **Resultado:** Sobre el método científico utilizado en las publicaciones, observamos como principal referencial teórico lo que indica el método dialéctico centrado en la perspectiva epistemológica marxista. **Conclusión:** Las conclusiones apuntana la escasez de investigaciones específicas sobre la relación entre política educativa, acceso e innovación en los cursos de educación a distancia. Las publicaciones destacan que la educación a distancia en Brasil sigue una lógica neoliberal, asociando la innovación con el uso de tecnologías y el intento de organizar la formación docente a través de la modalidad a distancia, pero con importantes fracturas resultantes del proceso de precariedad de la educación superior.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación a distancia. Revisión de la literatura. Método científico

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1 Introduction

The research published in the Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog express the results of scientific research consolidated by the evaluation of panels of researchers in the specific areas. This article aims to analyze theses and dissertations in education that deal with educational policy, access and innovation in distance higher education undergraduate courses and identify the scientific method announced in these studies.

About Distance Education (DE), we observed several concepts to define this modality, meeting the needs of each historical period. Among the authors who deal with this theme we highlight: Peters (1991), Aretio (1994), Belloni (2003), Maia and Mattar (2007), Moore and Kearsley (2008), among others. However, we highlight the definition Lima and Alonso (2021, p. 36) that presents DE as follows:

[...] a modality in which those involved in the teaching-learning process are physically and/or spatially separated, this occurs through dialogical processes of interaction and interactivity with the use of innovative digital technologies of information and communication, involves collective and collaborative work with social pertinence, through a pedagogical architecture of management, communication and curriculum with the single pretension of democratic development for an emancipatory and critical training of those involved so that they become empowered citizens in the current Brazilian society [...]

About this modality in higher education and its relationship with educational policies, some documents that mark EaD stand out, such as Decree no. 5.622, of 2005, from the Ministry of Education, and regulated in Article 80 of the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, where it states: "The public power will encourage the development and dissemination of distance learning programs, at all levels and modes of education, and continuing education" (BRASIL, 1996, p. 50). This document presents the legal support for the development of DE in Brazil.

In this context, one can see the offer of this modality in which the Federal Government encourages the possibility of access to education and, consequently, expands vacancies, especially in higher education through teaching programs, and the Open University of Brazil (UAB) stands out as the main program to finance and organize EaD in public higher education.

The concept of innovation is present in several normative documents of education, but the delimitation of this article articulates it with DE. According to Riedner (2018, p. 37), "the concept of innovation appears related to the concept of change, as alterations that are carried out in a progressive manner. It is necessary to consider what already exists so that a change becomes innovation in a gradual way in a scenario of movement, which accompanies the changes in society, very tied to technological development, but not exclusively dependent on it. The concept of innovation is important in the movement of education, but it cannot be confused with the flexibilization and precariousness of education.

The concept of access is related to the process of expansion of higher education, and, in this sense, it is understood as the result of admission, permanence, and conclusion. The relationship of the concept of access with DE is intensified through the indication of this modality as a strategy for expansion of vacancies in higher education.

Gil (2008, p. 8) defines the scientific method as "[...] the set of intellectual and technical procedures adopted to achieve knowledge." The scientific method consists of the path that must be followed by the researcher in the investigation process and that appears in the developed research: in some research it is announced, in other researches the method is implied according to the theoretical reference used. Taking this understanding as a reference, the works selected from the Catalog already informed will be analyzed.

For the development of the research, the documental and bibliographical research was used in a qualitative approach, despite the use of some quantitative data for complementation. The search was carried out in order to show how this subject was researched between the years 2010 and 2020, which succeeded the UAB System, because it was one of the periods of expansion of higher education and distance education in public institutions. The UAB aimed to offer courses to train professionals in basic education, via distance learning courses offered by public universities, especially undergraduate courses.

The survey procedure occurred during the second semester of 2020, applied in the environment of the Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog, specifically in the item "Search", using the following descriptors: "policy and EaD, "access and EaD, "innovation and EaD and "graduation and EaD, present in the titles of the papers, keywords or in the abstracts of the productions. Then, the selected works were read in their entirety, in which the data referring to the categorization of the theme were assessed: survey of the quantity of selected works, knowledge of the objectives, reading of the methodology presented, identification of the scientific method and theoretical framework announced in the research, and finally, data analysis and discussion of the results presented.

To develop the theme, this article is structured as follows: 1. introduction, presenting the research; 2. contextualization of the object; 3. what the theses and dissertations reveal about the theme and the methods present in these works; 4. final considerations, relating the descriptors used with the results found.

2 Contextualization of the Object

The development of public policies is a necessary theme in view of the transformations in the educational scenario, especially after the changes made by means of legislation, initiated since the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, and furthered by the Law of Directives of Bases of National Education 9.394/96 (BRASIL, 1996).

In the documents that regulate education, there are increased changes of neoliberal character and the strengthening of the State's decentralization policies. Education faces

accentuated adjustments to meet the labor market due to the growth of capitalism, minimizing public educational policies.

According to Peroni (2012), educational policies are the result of State reform projects with a focus on decentralization, in which the Federal Government becomes the mediator of the situation and no longer responsible for the action, passing on to society obligations that were its function.

In this scenario, public educational policy is an expression of the context of political arrangements of each society, and it takes place in the process of distance education (DE), concerning an educational modality in full expansion in Brazil, especially in higher education, where one of the most visible programs in this process is the Open University of Brazil (UAB).

The expansion of DE in Brazil in recent years is opportune because it is a flexible means of meeting the demand of people who want to study but cannot attend face-to-face classes because they do not have adequate conditions to do so. It is a modality much sought after by students, mainly because it meets the demands of higher education in Brazilian regions where there is no physical institution, such as a college or university. DE in private institutions also serves the interests of the market, when treated as merchandise, being sold without concern for the quality of this offer.

In this context, Moran (2002, p. 1) argues that "Distance education is the teaching-learning process, mediated by technologies, where teachers and students are spatially and/or temporally separated." This being the case, learning occurs without the physical presence of the authors involved with the support of technological developments. The concept of Distance Education in Brazil is currently defined in Decree No. 9.057, May 25, 2017:

Art. 1 - For the purposes of this Decree, Distance Education is characterized as an educational modality in which didactic-pedagogical mediation in teaching and learning processes occurs with the use of information and communication means and technologies, with qualified personnel, with access policies, with compatible monitoring and evaluation, among others, and develops educational activities by students and education professionals who are in different places and times (BRASIL, 2017b, online).

Thus, it was confirmed that DE is an educational modality linked to the use of technologies, breaking with the concept of presence between the pairs involved, being possible to happen at any location where both are committed to the process of teaching and learning, sharing, and producing knowledge.

Historically, DE has gone through five generations of evolution, beginning with the use of correspondence as a means of carrying out courses, followed by radio and television, which were used as means of support for this education. In the third generation, we have the open university, emphasizing the higher education level. With the dissemination of information and communication technologies, the fourth generation was born operating by

teleconference or audio conference, with the use of the computer and, finally, the fifth generation with the internet, which is present until today (MOORE; KEARSLEY, 2008).

In Brazil, DE went through the same generations mentioned above, but in a slow way in relation to other countries. The regulation of this modality became effective with the Law of Directives for the Bases of National Education 9.394/96 and then, the Ministry of Education published several legal provisions to guide the implementation of article 80 of LDB 99394/96, in educational institutions, especially with the creation of the Open University of Brazil (UAB) which expanded higher education to public institutions.

After these regulations, a significant support from the Federal Government was observed, aiming at the growth of this modality in the Brazilian educational system, especially in the period from 1996 to 2002, when the first distance undergraduate course in Pedagogy at the Federal University of Mato Grosso, the Unirede movement¹, reached a consortium of more than 50 state and federal universities and played an essential role in the discussion of the directions of distance education in the country, as well as the Cederj Consortium with the pilot course in Administration of the Ministry of Education and Culture (COSTA; DURAN, 2012).

It is possible to identify the expansion of EaD in Brazil in recent years through data from the Census of Higher Education (2019): the number of entrants in the EaD modality, in the year 2009 was 332,469 enrolled students and, in 2019, the total was 1,592,184 enrolled students, presenting a growth of 378.9% (BRASIL, 2020). According to Taveira (2022, p. 67), with respect to enrollments, this expansion:

This occurred unevenly and, as an example, we can observe that enrollments in public institutions reached a total of 181,602, in 2010, while in private institutions, they reached 748,577. In percentage terms, enrollments in public institutions represented 20% of the grand total, in 2010, while enrollments in private institutions corresponded to 80%.

Some aspects explain the growth of this modality, such as: political-social, economic, technological, and pedagogical. The political-social aspect is characterized as the means by which the government seeks to establish the minimum state, the containment of public spending and the growing unemployment of the population; the economic aspect consists of the reduction of investments in education; the technological aspect covers the current digital media that provide new learning situations that do not necessarily need a face-to-face teacher; the pedagogical aspect, which demands the need for a less bureaucratic school, more flexible and that corresponds to the reality of the worker with autonomous training (PRETI, 2011).

This situation interferes in the expansion of DE and expands to students the possibility of access to higher education, as Silva and Veloso (2010, p. 222) state:

¹ UniRede was a consortium created in December 1999 under the name of Universidade Virtual Pública do Brasil, with the objective of democratizing access to public, free and quality higher education in undergraduate and graduate courses. Available at: <<https://www.aunirede.org.br/portal/quem-somos/historico/>> Accessed on: 22 Aug. 2020.

[...] the continuity of the education trajectory; the expansion has a relationship (and impact) with access, in proportion to the quantitative growth (institutions, vacancies, enrollments, teachers, financing) and its characteristics (public/free education, academic organization, course, assessment/quality). Similarly, other distinct but related phenomena could be mentioned, such as financing and dropout. Such issues converge to the affirmation that access cannot be explained in isolation or out of context.

The expansion of access does not converge directly to the improvement of the quality of education. EaD expands the possibilities of entry but does not guarantee permanence or completion. Moreover, the offer of DE in public and private institutions is another controversial, polemic and determining aspect of the theme in question, but which is not the objective of this research.

Innovation is present in various aspects of today's society, and education cannot be irrelevant in this process, including in the DE modality. In this sense, it is known that innovation has several meanings, according to Oliveira and Courela (2013, p. 99) "in the field of innovation in education it is usual to consider three terms - innovation, change and reform - which, although they appear interconnected, define different realities", but, in this article, it is considered an act of innovating as the need to organize strategies different from the usual means to achieve a certain goal regarding educational policies.

It was found that the development of DE in Brazil has undergone several historical transformations through decrees, resolutions, and ordinances in order to expand access to higher education, adjusting to the mechanisms present in the demand of capitalist society and, concomitantly, innovation is part of this expansion process. In this sense, DE and innovation are concepts based on a capitalist logic that meets the interests of the market, and at the same time constitute actions linked to the expansion of higher education, including public higher education.

3 What theses and dissertations reveal about the literature review and the methods present in theses and dissertation

The literature review consists of hard work in which the researcher makes decisions and assumes responsibilities that delimit and deepen the research. For the beginning of this literature review, a survey and selection of theoretical sources related to the object proposed for the preparation of the research were carried out. Lakatos and Marconi (2003, p. 248) state that the literature review "[...] consists of a synthesis, as complete as possible, concerning the work and the data pertinent to the theme, within a logical sequence." To survey the academic production, about the object of this study, we resorted to the Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog, published in the period from 2010 to 2020.

Regarding theses and dissertations, Gil (2002, p. 66) argues that "sources of this nature can be very important for research, because many of them are reports of original scientific investigations or accurate bibliographic reviews [...]", thus collaborating in the

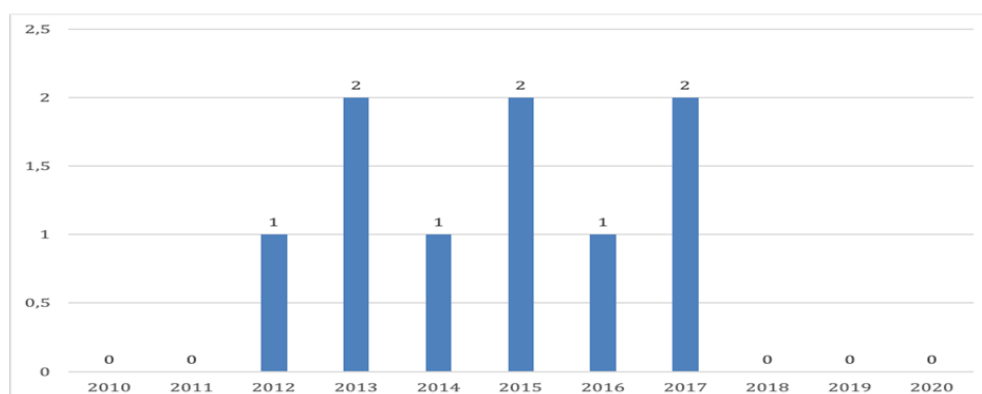
scientific work of the researcher.

The methodology used in this research is similar to the so-called state of knowledge, according to Ferreira (2002), with a bibliographic character and aiming at the mapping of scientific productions about EaD public policies in higher education, observing aspects related to access and innovation in distance learning undergraduate courses. The state of knowledge consists of a complementary and similar process to the literature review; thus, it is emphasized that the main process is the investigation in scientific sources: theses and dissertations published on the Capes website.

The search in the database, called Capes' Theses and Dissertations Catalog, was conducted in the second half of 2020, through the descriptors organized as follows: policy and EaD, access and EaD, innovation and EaD and graduation and EaD and that were present in the titles, in the keywords or in the abstracts, being delimited the language in Portuguese. With this delimitation appeared works, with the following results in the first stage: with respect to the descriptor policy and EaD were 424 works, about access and EaD were found 657 works, the category innovation and EaD appeared 1,080 products and about graduation and EaD were identified 684 productions.

Given this situation, the second step was developed, which consisted of organizing a new filtering: it was defined that the descriptors cited were related to higher education, considering the presence of institutional, administrative, and pedagogical aspects. After this new delimitation, the descriptors were related to DE and higher education, research was identified on: politics - 4 (four) research; access - 1 (one) research; innovation - 2 (two) researches and the degree - 2 (two) researches. Considering the research process and the delimitations, a total of 9 (nine) publications that were related to the themes described were analyzed in the search for research. After identifying the nine studies, they were separated by year of publication, as shown in Graph 1:

Graph 1. Annual publications - CAPES (2010-2020)



Source: Prepared by the author, based on the survey of productions, 2020.

From the data presented in Graph 1, it was found that in the years 2013, 2015 and 2017 occurred the peaks of greatest production focused on the EaD theme, with a total of 6 (six) publications in the repository of the Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog. An important observation is that, in the years 2012, 2014 and 2016, there is a minimum amount of 1 (one) paper published in each year, with a total of 3 (three) productions, inferring a stability in the amount of research published on the theme. Regarding the years 2010, 2011, 2018, 2019 and 2020, no published thesis or dissertation was identified.

The publication of 9 (nine) research, over ten years, expresses a small number of scientific productions that establish a relationship between educational policy, access, and innovation in EaD degree courses in Brazil. In differentiating the groups of theses and dissertations, we obtained the quantity of 7 (seven) dissertations (78%) and 2 (two) theses (22%). Continuing the work of analysis, Table 1 follows, which contains information about the selected theses and dissertations.

Table 1. Theses and dissertations that correlate EaD and higher education with policy, access, innovation, and graduation in the BDT of CAPES and the relationship with the method (2010 - 2020)

Thematic	Title	Author	Year	Production type	Theoretical reference
Policy	Scientific production on distance learning higher education policies in Brazil - 2003 to 2010	Ricardo Bianconi	2013	Dissertation	Dermeval Saviani, Luiz Fernandes, Dourado, Mariluce Bittar, Carina Elisabeth Maciel
Policy	Distance education and educational policies from the nineties on: some notes on the discussion	Ediane Carolina Peixoto Lopes Maturano	2012	Dissertation	Dermeval Saviani, Gaudêncio Frigotto
Policy	DE in the context of the expansion of private higher education in the Federal District	Cristiana Andrade Nepomuceno	2017	Dissertation	Richard Bowe, Stephen J. Baal, Anne Goll, Jamil Cury, Romualdo Portela Oliveira
Policy	Distance education: normative sources and the Open University of Brazil (UAB)	Vivian Vaz Batista	2015	Dissertation	José Carlos Libâneo, Bernardete Angelina Gatti
Access	Distance education and democratization of higher education: the distance learning Pedagogy course at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora	Priscila Aleixo da Silva	2015	Dissertation	Dias Sobrinho, Pedro Demo, Boaventura de Souza Santos
Innovation	Pedagogical and technological mediation in DE: the learner's perspective	Christiane Kaminski	2017	Thesis	Vygotsky, Rudolf Steiner
Innovation	Expansion of DE from the perspective of diffusion of innovation: a study of Corporate Universities of the public sector in Bahia, Brazil	João Sotero do Vale Júnior	2016	Dissertation	Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Alois Schumpeter

Degree	Distance Mathematics Teaching in the online modality: a study of a course from the Open University of Brazil	Marcelo Kruppa Villani	2014	Thesis	Antônio Nóvoa, Nara Maria Pimentel, Celso José da Costa, Vera Maria Candau, Isabel Alarcão
Degree	The experience of the University of Brasilia in the context of the expansion of Physical Education degrees through the Open University System of Brazil	Fernanda Cruvinel Pimentel	2013	Dissertation	Marilena Chauí, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, István Meszáros

Source: Organized by the authors based on the Capes Theses and Dissertations Database, 2020.

Table 1 shows that most of these identified researches present the theme of policies in DE, with a total of 4 (four) works, all dissertations. This descriptor presents several perspectives in the national context, unveiling issues related to this modality in higher education, such as public policies, expansion, implementation, democratization, regulation, privatization, educational policies, scientific productions, and Open University of Brazil (UAB).

It is important to note that 2 (two) productions analyzed present a consensus on the indication of the UAB as a policy of expansion of EaD in public institutions: Batista (2015) and Nepomuceno (2017), in which they justify it by pointing out that in the year 2006 the Open University System (UAB) was created with Decree No. 5,800, of June 8, by the Federal Government together with the Ministry of Education (MEC), with the general objective of developing and expanding this educational modality by offering courses and programs of Brazilian higher education (BRASIL, 2006).

The research of Batista (2015) argues that the legislation of EaD enables and facilitates expansion of vacancies in higher education but does not guarantee the quality of teacher training courses funded by UAB. On the other hand, Nepomuceno (2017), who mentions the UAB as a policy of expansion of public higher education, investigates the supply of EaD in undergraduate courses in the Federal District in private institutions, with emphasis on the period after the legislation on EaD edited in 2017 by the Federal Government and concludes that EaD has its supply centralized in large educational groups. Even stating that the UAB has expanded the expansion of vacancies in distance undergraduate courses, the objectives are different, and the research follows different paths with regard to the relationship highlighted in this article.

In the work of Bianconi (2013), there is an analysis of the scientific production on the public policies of Higher Education in Brazil in the distance learning modality, in the period from 2003 to 2010, a time that corresponds to the two mandates of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva with the intensification and expansion of public higher education and, also, of the EaD offer in the country, showing a field marked by practices that, according to the author, follow the neoliberal ideology in higher education.

The dissertation by Maturano (2012), investigated DE from different aspects: social,

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historical, and political, highlighting that this type of education has increased since the 1990s, with the implementation of laws such as the LDB 9.394/96, and with a greater possibility of access to education. The author highlights that this condition can expand the offer of courses in higher education supported by the use of technologies developed in that period. In conclusion, he highlights:

"[...] the need to update and reconceptualize "Distance Education" becomes essential for its adequate understanding as an effective process of dissemination and qualification of the educational process, especially in contexts of large physical dimensions and complex social and cultural diversity." (MATURANO, 2012, p. 09)

Silva (2015) analyzed the course of EaD Pedagogy at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) and highlights that it is in line with the organization recommended by the UAB system. She observed that the course was structured with the justification of democratizing access to public higher education. The author emphasizes that changes were made in the course regarding the use and appropriation of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as important resources for students and teachers, however, she points out that there is still a need to rethink pedagogical processes and the educational structure of this modality in the university and in the investigated course.

The studies related to the descriptor innovation in DE are presented in 2 (two) researches. Kaminski (2017) argues about educational innovation with the objective of understanding the pedagogical and technological mediation in the view of students in DE, based on the perspectives of Vygotsky and Rudolf Steiner, through qualitative-descriptive-interpretative research that occurred in a private institution. The result presented highlights that, with educational innovation, students foster criticality and autonomy in a way that is aware of their role in society.

Another view in this modality, presented by the research of Vale Junior (2016) and related to the term innovation, is the diffusion of innovation, with the purpose of evaluating the technological trajectory and impacts of the technology diffusion process in an empirical study in corporate universities in Bahia. The research concludes that it is still in a slow process the diffusion of technology in EaD and there are some limitations related to the courses, but it is beneficial in the development of innovation. The author associate's innovation with technology and EaD but announces "limitations related to the formats of the courses and the scope of their reach in the organizations studied and identifies difficulties in obtaining the specialized technical resources needed to advance the EaD programs" (VALE JÚNIOR, 2016, p. 9).

In relation to the descriptor graduation in EaD, the dissertation by Pimentel, published in 2013, analyzed the expansion of Physical Education undergraduate courses in distance learning at the University of Brasilia, justified by its pioneering spirit in terms of training. Regarding the expansion, Pimentel (2013, p. 25) argues about the precariousness of DE as follows:

Thus, there is a need to rethink current policies, thinking about specific policies for distance education that privilege the expansion articulated to supply, minimizing the precariousness of teachers' work, optimizing the infrastructure of the centers and institutions, in a way that does not leave the quality of education questionable, always bearing in mind the challenges of distance education in the current Brazilian scenario.

From this scenario, the author highlights that the expansion of EaD occurred through the precariousness of the teaching work, indicating that even with the expansion of vacancies, several fractures remain and lack investment for EaD to ensure quality in their courses. Pimentel (2013) used a descriptive-exploratory and documentary research, and her instruments for data collection were questionnaires aimed at subjects involved in the creation and development of the course as well as the graduates of the first class of the degree course in UAB/UnB. The author concludes that the institution in question has been seeking to institutionalize EaD and organize the course to expand this modality, but still presents many gaps, especially lack of commitment of the teaching work, given the structure of this education modality.

The thesis of Villani (2014) analyzes the initial training of teachers of the undergraduate course in Mathematics in EaD modality with the Practice as Curricular Component (PCC), through the use of Digital Technologies of Information and Communication (TDIC) at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), linked to the UAB. It consists of a case study, and the subjects of this research are the coordinators, teachers, and tutors in DE; in addition, the instrument used was the semi-structured interview.

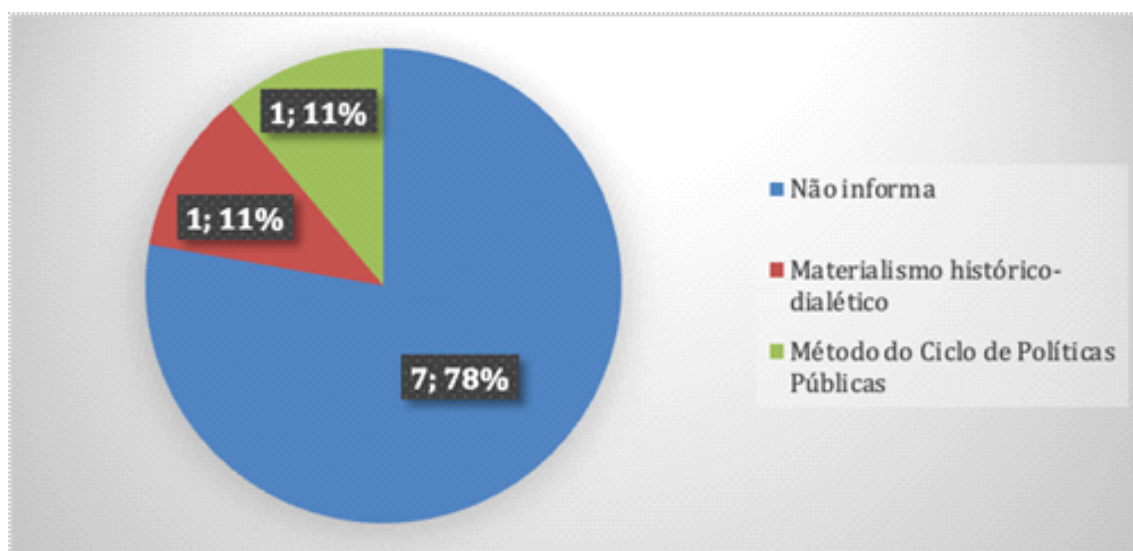
The author highlights the need for "inversion of the logic of Curriculum Design" that is "[...] the starting point for the curriculum of distance undergraduate programs is what it defines as 'curricular knowledge' - related to the basic school curriculum [...]" (VILLANI, 2014, p. 235). Through this concept, the author states that undergraduate courses, specifically of mathematics, should be related to the basic school curriculum, so they can relate theory with practice for the design of distance initial training courses for mathematics teachers.

Villani (2014) concludes by stating that undergraduate degrees are privileged courses in offering EaD and that plurality is found in the training of teachers mediated by technology. Their role is to master teaching techniques and to be the interlocutor in learning by promoting new educational policies in higher education, encouraged by the UAB system.

After the investigation of the objectives and results of the researches presented, it is highlighted how the authors present the scientific method used in their respective researches; for this analysis it was taken as a basis the definition of the term as "[...] the set of systematic and rational activities that, with greater safety and economy, allows the achievement of the objective - valid and true knowledge -, tracing the path to be followed, detecting errors and assisting the scientist's decisions." (LAKATOS; MARCONI, 2003 p. 83). To identify the scientific method, it was observed only if it was announced by the researcher, not aiming to evaluate or judge whether it was adopted or developed, or not, during the research. If so, the scientific method announced by the author was analyzed.

The choice of the scientific method used in the study is of utmost importance for scientific practice, as it helps in the objective, proposes the course of the research, and also gives veracity to it. In this context, the scientific methods identified in the surveys are the following, according to graph 2:

Graph 2. Scientific Methods advertised in the selected surveys



Source: Prepared by the author, based on the survey of productions, 2020

In the total of nine papers analyzed, seven authors do not announce the method used in their research, and only two authors made this explicit in their studies, they are: Nepomuceno (2017) and Pimentel (2013).

In Nepomuceno's dissertation (2017, p. 13), the author announces the scientific method used in the following excerpt:

[...]an approach to the Public Policy Cycle, first developed by Bowe, Ball, and Gold (1992), and presented in the book *Reforming Education and Changing Schools*. The Public Policy Cycle method analyzes the process of policymaking from a non-linear perspective. For the authors, policymaking is not merely drawing up documents and then implementing what they prescribe. It is, in their view, a complex process that involves different actors and arenas and is influenced by the contexts in which the policy is discussed, elaborated, and subsequently put into practice. It is a vision in which the state is not the only policy maker and driver [...].

According to the author's exposition, the scientific method is based on public policies and presents multiple paths to achieve the proposed goal involving all actors of society, considering that the State is not responsible alone to develop the proper practices.

The study by Pimentel (2013, p. 21) announces the scientific method in the following excerpt: "[...] from successive approximations with the categorical elements constituting the

historical-dialectical materialism, because it is understood that this enables the dialectical interpretation of the data of the researched reality".

As for the historical-dialectical materialism method, according to Gil (2008) and Lakatos and Marconi (2003), its precursors are Marx and Engels, who, in turn, express the importance of investigating past events to verify their influence on contemporary society, relating the mode of production with the cultural context and social relations, that is, seeking to apprehend the movement of history that determines and is determined by social, political, and economic relations. According to Minto (2011, p. 169), "the historical dialectic between the economic and political 'factors' that determine education is essential in examining particularity."

The outline of the dialectical method, according to Lakatos and Marconi (2003, p. 106), addresses an idea which "[...] penetrates the world of phenomena through their reciprocal action, the contradiction inherent in the phenomenon, and the dialectical change that occurs in nature and society." According to Lombardi (2011), education is related to and determined by the mode of production of a given society. Thus, the movement that produces the concrete condition in which we live is apprehended through specific categories, but which, when apprehended, produce new meanings, new knowledge, constantly changing the social reality in which we are inserted.

As far as the theoretical reference is concerned, the theses and dissertations mentioned several authors, such as Dermeval Saviani, Luiz Fernandes Dourado, Mariluce Bittar, Carina Elisabeth Maciel, Marilena Chauí, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, István Meszáros, Dias Sobrinho, Boaventura de Souza Santos, Vygotsky, Rudolf Steiner, Moraes Moore & Kearsley, Gatti, among others and, through these mentions, one can induce that most works use the historical-dialectical materialism method to understand the investigated objects and develop their analyses.

4 Final Considerations

When performing the literature review, it was identified that there are still few works published in the Capes Theses and Dissertations Catalog related to educational policy, access, and innovation in undergraduate courses in distance higher education. Only 9 (nine) works were found over 10 years, and this expresses the need for more investigations on the relationship between the announced and the investigated.

It can be stated that the analyzed works show that the expansion of EaD in public institutions was financed by the Federal Government through the Open University of Brazil (UAB). The selected theses and dissertations addressed, for the most part, themes related to this program, assigning to it part of the responsibility for the expansion of vacancies in this modality. Another issue observed is that, by means of the UAB, it provides an opportunity for students to enter higher education with increased enrollments, especially in undergraduate courses. A relationship little explored by the research analyzed corresponds to the completion

of students in this education modality, indicating that the expansion of vacancies and enrollments materializes, but the completion of courses needs further investigation.

In relation to innovation in DE, research indicates that this term is related to technology and pedagogical practice, but there are no defined concepts in the analyzed material. There are some approximations of research theorizations about the term, carried out in other contexts. However, these approximations do not generate new theorizations for the field of education. What can be highlighted is that the term innovation depends on contextual and internal factors of each institution to be defined, but its relationship with neoliberal principles is determined by the way this concept is presented in the analyzed research.

The undergraduate courses are also influenced by DE, benefiting from this offer in order to meet the qualification of labor for the job market. The research shows the importance of undergraduate courses to meet the needs of professionals who work in education, but do not have specific training, but emphasizes the precariousness of education in EaD, especially in the private mercantile sector.

Regarding the scientific method used by the authors, some researches do not explicitly announce the method, but the theoretical framework developed indicates the movement of investigation and how the analyses were carried out, demonstrating the methods adopted in the researches. We identified the predominance of the scientific method based on the historical-dialectical materialism focused on the Marxist epistemological perspective.

It was concluded that the theses and dissertations in education that deal with educational policy, access and innovation in distance higher education courses express the contradictions of this type of education, which advocates the expansion of openings, but has no constant institutional funding. Moreover, the scientific method, not always announced, but present in the development of research and data analysis, identifies itself, in most works, with the perspective of historical-dialectical materialism.

The publications highlight that DE in Brazil follows a neoliberal logic, associating innovation with the use of technologies and the attempt to organize teacher education via distance learning, but with important fractures resulting from the process of precariousness of higher education.

In times of resistance and struggles for the guarantee of quality education, research shows that there are gaps in EaD in Brazil and that more scientific research is needed to expand knowledge about the relationship between policies, access, and innovation in distance learning undergraduate courses.

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