

Original article

Educational Sciences: an approach to educational trends in Latin America



Las Ciencias de la Educación: una aproximación a las tendencias educativas en América Latina

As Ciências da Educação: uma abordagem das tendências educacionais na América Latina

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ABSTRACT

Determining whether the Educational Sciences form a unified structure and function, or whether, on the contrary, they constitute a heterogeneous conglomerate artificially united for external reasons, constitutes a broad field of discussion, especially when analyzing what disciplines such as Group Dynamics, History of Education, Economics, or Educational Biology may have in common. This issue becomes more complex when considering the diversity of settings in which educational events manifest themselves -family, community, mass media, school- where education is conceived either

consciously and purposefully, or spontaneously. The objective was to systematize educational trends in Latin America to allow for a critical assessment of the presentations from the symposium "Pedagogy of Higher Education" at the University Congresses, which have served as a scientific laboratory for the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) to address the changes required by Cuban Higher Education. The methods used included a qualitative approach, the phenomenological method, and scientific systematization, which made it possible to interpret pedagogical discourses and extract regularities. Among the results, a trend toward the transformation of pedagogical models, the strengthening of the social role of the university and the integration of teaching, research, and outreach was identified. The main conclusions were that, despite their diversity, the Education Sciences can be articulated from a transdisciplinary approach and that the symposia have been key to project educational policies in the Cuban and Latin American contexts.

Keywords: educational trends; educational sciences; pedagogy.

RESUMEN

Precisar si las Ciencias de la Educación forman una unidad en su constitución y funcionamiento o si, por el contrario, constituyen un conglomerado heterogéneo unido artificialmente por razones externas, constituye un campo amplio de discusión; especialmente al analizar qué puede haber de común entre disciplinas como la Dinámica de Grupo, la Historia de la Educación, la Economía o la Biología de la Educación. Esta problemática se complejiza al considerar la diversidad de escenarios en que se manifiestan los hechos educativos -familia, comunidad, medios masivos, escuela-, donde el hecho educativo se concibe de manera consciente y orientada, o bien de forma espontánea. El objetivo estuvo encaminado a sistematizar las tendencias educativas en América Latina que permita una valoración crítica de las ponencias del simposio Pedagogía de la Educación Superior en los Congresos Universidad, los que han funcionado como laboratorio científico del Ministerio de Educación Superior (MES), para enfrentar los cambios que requiere la Educación Superior Cubana. Como métodos estuvieron el enfoque cualitativo, el método fenomenológico y la sistematización científica, que posibilitaron interpretar los discursos pedagógicos y extraer regularidades. Entre los resultados se identificó una tendencia hacia la transformación de los modelos pedagógicos, el fortalecimiento del rol social de la universidad y la integración entre docencia, investigación y extensión. Las principales conclusiones estuvieron en que, pese a su diversidad, las Ciencias de la

Educación pueden articularse desde un enfoque transdisciplinar y que los simposios han sido clave para proyectar políticas educativas en el contexto cubano y latinoamericano.

Palabras clave: tendencias educativas; ciencias de la educación; pedagogía.

RESUMO

A questão de saber se as Ciências da Educação formam uma unidade em sua constituição e funcionamento ou se, pelo contrário, constituem um conglomerado heterogêneo unido artificialmente por razões externas é um amplo campo de discussão, especialmente quando se analisa o que pode haver em comum entre disciplinas como a Dinâmica de Grupo, a História da Educação, a Economia ou a Biologia da Educação. Esse problema se torna mais complexo quando se considera a diversidade de cenários nos quais os eventos educacionais se manifestam -família, comunidade, mídia de massa, escola-, onde o evento educacional é concebido de forma consciente e orientada ou de forma espontânea. O objetivo foi sistematizar as tendências educacionais na América Latina para permitir uma avaliação crítica dos trabalhos apresentados no Simpósio de Pedagogia da Educação Superior nos Congressos Universitários, que funcionaram como um laboratório científico do Ministério da Educação Superior (MES), a fim de enfrentar as mudanças exigidas pela Educação Superior cubana. Os métodos utilizados foram a abordagem qualitativa, o método fenomenológico e a sistematização científica, que permitiram interpretar os discursos pedagógicos e extrair regularidades. Os resultados identificaram uma tendência à transformação dos modelos pedagógicos, ao fortalecimento do papel social da universidade e à integração do ensino, da pesquisa e da extensão. As principais conclusões foram que, apesar de sua diversidade, as ciências da educação podem ser articuladas a partir de uma abordagem transdisciplinar e que os simpósios foram fundamentais para projetar políticas educacionais no contexto cubano e latino-americano.

Palavras-chave: tendências educacionais; ciências da educação; pedagogia.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary context, profoundly shaped by the coronavirus pandemic, has forced governments to confront growing tensions between the economic and social spheres, raising the urgent need to

achieve a balance between the two factors. From this perspective, warnings have been raised about the worsening of multiple converging crises -health, environmental, inequality, and exclusion- which highlight the systemic complexity of today's world. This demands a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach, capable of adapting to uncertainty and unforeseen emergencies (Díaz-Canel & Núñez Jover, 2020).

In this context of global crisis and transformation, reflecting on the educational sciences, both in Cuba and Latin America, becomes a challenge that cannot be underestimated. Despite their importance, these sciences have been the subject of insufficient theoretical and methodological treatment, which has limited their progress and epistemological consolidation.

From the perspective of some classics of sociological and educational thought, such as Durkheim, the study of education has been considered capable of achieving the status of a scientific discipline. This is justified by its focus on observable, structured, and characterizable facts, as well as its claim to neutrality, as it seeks to understand these facts without making value judgments. The science of education, in this sense, is concerned with both the analysis of the genesis and functioning of educational systems, examining their causes and relationships (Durkheim, 1974).

On the other hand, Durkheim also recognized that pedagogy manifests itself more as a practical art than a strict science. Although it can operate effectively without a deep theoretical foundation, to avoid falling into routine and automatism, pedagogy must be based on solid scientific foundations. Pedagogy, understood as practical theory, guides educational action, while the educational sciences provide the systematic knowledge necessary to support such action (Durkheim, 1974).

Contemporary authors such as Sacristán (1978) agree that educational sciences not only seek to explain the educational phenomenon from a variety of theories, but also have a normative function and a utopian projection. This triple dimension is manifested in their capacity to generate educational technologies, question the given, and broaden cultural and human horizons. Education is not a closed or merely reproductive phenomenon, and its study demands going beyond reductionist positivism, recognizing its creative and transformative nature.

In the Cuban context, however, conceptual and methodological dilemmas persist that hinder a comprehensive understanding of the Educational Sciences. One of the main conflicts lies in the artificial separation between these and the so-called pedagogical sciences, which has generated

confusion in the academic community. This dissociation has even led to legitimate questions from students about whether or not pedagogy is part of the educational sciences.

Furthermore, some disciplines, such as Educational Psychology, tend to be classified within the field of psychology, while others, such as the History of Education, are treated, in practice, as pure historical sciences, despite being discursively recognized as Educational Sciences. This conceptual and methodological ambiguity weakens the field of education while limiting its ability to articulate a coherent epistemological basis.

To address this issue, it is necessary to clarify the so-called epistemological status of the Educational Sciences. The term "statute," derived from the Latin verb *stare* (to stand, to sustain), refers to the question of the solidity and autonomy of these sciences vis-à-vis other disciplines. For its part, "epistemological" refers to the analysis of their concepts, categories, and principles; that is, to the study of their cognitive structure, which is particularly relevant in a context where the uncritical use of imported terms abounds (Chávez & Pérez, 2015).

Resolving the epistemological conflict in the Educational Sciences does not imply a hierarchy of educational knowledge or placing one discipline, such as Pedagogy or Didactics, at the center of the system. Rather, an approach based on the common origin of this knowledge is required: the educational fact or educational praxis. According to Chávez *et al.* (2011) and Chávez and Pérez (2015), this praxis constitutes a functional unity that grants coherence and autonomy to the different Educational Sciences, independently of the already established knowledge.

From this perspective, Educational Sciences cannot be reduced to derived or subordinate disciplines. Their object of study is specific and historically conditioned: the educational reality, as it occurs in different social contexts -family, community, school, media, among others-. Some of these educational agencies operate consciously, others spontaneously, which requires a broad and dynamic understanding of the educational phenomenon.

Therefore, it is essential to delve into the anthropological, philosophical, and cultural foundations of education and pedagogy to understand their unity and specificity. This requires in-depth theoretical research, especially in Cuba, where strengthening the Educational Sciences is essential to drive the necessary changes in the educational field. This is consistent with the position of Chávez and Pérez (2015), who affirm that these sciences possess an intrinsic unity derived from the educational reality

and an autonomy that legitimizes them as their own bodies of knowledge, independent of other disciplines.

This study is methodologically enriched by incorporating the historical thought of the prominent French historian Pierre Vilar, who conceives of historical science as the analysis of the dynamics of human societies. According to his perspective, historical study should focus on various types of facts: mass events, such as demographic, economic, and mentality phenomena, which develop slowly; opinion-based events, which are more ephemeral in nature; institutional events, which structure social relations through law, constitutions, and treaties, but which are subject to change and social contradictions; and finally, events, understood as specific occurrences generated by individuals or groups, whose decisions provoke transformations in governments, diplomacy, and other areas of social life (cited by Boris, 1996, p. 18).

Consequently, by studying its epistemological status, the aim is not only to clarify its structure and foundations, but also to contribute to the development of a critical, scientific, and transformative education capable of responding to the challenges of the present and the future.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to systematize educational trends in Latin America, allowing for a critical assessment of the presentations of the Symposium on Higher Education Pedagogy held at University Congresses, which have served as a scientific laboratory for the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) to address the changes required by Cuban Higher Education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The general method adopted in this research is dialectical-materialist, which stands as an essential tool for understanding reality in its constant movement and transformation. This method allows us to assess the historicity of the educational processes studied; that is, to understand them as social constructions determined by a specific historical context and in constant evolution. It also facilitates a systemic approach, which conceives facts and phenomena not in isolation, but as integrated parts of a larger, constantly interacting whole.

This approach makes it possible to appreciate the multidimensionality of educational phenomena by considering social, economic, political, and ideological factors in its analysis. Similarly, the dialectical-materialist method provides a comprehensive view that articulates the relationship between the whole and its parts, revealing the inherent complexity of historical and social processes and enabling

the discovery of the essential internal regularities that guide their development. All of this contributes to the formulation of scientific generalizations based on in-depth and contextualized analysis.

From a methodological perspective, theoretical methods such as historical-logical analysis were employed, which makes it possible to reconstruct the evolution of the object of study, identifying its key moments and the causal relationships that structure it, thus revealing its essence. Likewise, methods of analysis and synthesis were used, which allowed the educational phenomenon to be broken down into its constituent parts and then integrated into a deeper and more coherent understanding; induction and deduction, necessary to navigate between empirical data and theoretical conceptualizations, and vice versa; document analysis, as a technique for gathering information from primary and secondary sources; systematization, which facilitated the organization and prioritization of the knowledge obtained; and generalization, as an essential logical process for developing propositions with broader validity.

At the empirical level, key informant interviews were conducted, which allowed for the collection of relevant qualitative assessments on the subject matter. Techniques such as bibliographic indexing, used for the systematic recording of sources and authors, and content analysis, useful for extracting explicit and implicit meanings present in the documents studied, were also used.

A distinctive element of this research is a comparative study of the 2012, 2016, and 2018 editions of the University Congress, a leading international academic event in Cuban and Latin American higher education. This comparison made it possible to identify continuities, ruptures and transformations in the theoretical, methodological and practical approaches around university social responsibility and other relevant educational processes, providing an enriched perspective to the general analysis.

RESULTS

Reflections on the International Congresses on Higher Education Pedagogy (1998-2024)

Since 1998, Cuba has hosted the International Congresses on Higher Education, a scientific and academic forum that brings together specialists, professors, and researchers from Latin America and other regions of the world. These events have made it possible to evaluate the main thematic areas, research interests, and priorities of university education policies at each stage, consolidating a critical and contextualized view of the challenges of Higher Education in the 21st century.

For this analysis, the editions of the VIII (2012), X (2016), XI (2018) and XII (2024) congresses have been taken into account, allowing identifying the thematic and ideological evolution from the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century until today.

In this section, participation figures are not specified, prioritizing the qualitative analysis of the main academic trends (Table 1).

Table 1. Thematic evolution in International Congresses on Higher Education (2012-2024)

Main themes	VIII Congress (2012)	X Congress (2016)	XI Congress (2018)	XII Congress (2024)
University didactics	Focused on educational practice	Cultural and critical approach	Integration of didactic models	Transition towards ecopedagogies
Comprehensive training of the graduate	Emphasis on the technical-humanistic	Professional and human	Multidimensional and intercultural	Comprehensive, sustainable and glocal
Competencies and skills	Predominance of skills	Focus on competencies	Articulation of both dimensions	Evaluation by results and challenges
Educational research	Specific and qualitative cases	Greater organicity and variety	Growing interdisciplinarity	Open science and citizenship
Ethics and values	Link with the teaching process	Wide presence	Interculturality and human rights	Ethics of care and social justice
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)	Complementary medium	Emerging didactics	New learning ecologies	Educational artificial intelligence
Educational modalities	In-person	Blended and virtual	Hybrid and ubiquitous	Flexible and digital education

Educational management and quality	Focus on effective classes	Institutional and innovative	Institutional impact assessment	Participatory governance
Pedagogical theories	Traditional	Emerging and theoretical pluralism	Complexity and transdisciplinary approach	Critical, decolonial and ecoformative pedagogy
History and educational memory	Underrepresented	Greater presence, but limited	Recovery of ancestral knowledge	Latin American pedagogical heritage

Main findings by congress

VIII Congress (2012)

- The event demonstrated a practical approach to university teaching, focused on improving teaching through classroom experience.
- The main focus was on developing professional skills and on the ethical development of the student.
- Technologies were still seen as accessory tools within a traditional pedagogical model.
- Educational research was poorly theorized, limited to case studies with a qualitative approach.
- A limited treatment of emerging theories was identified, as well as a weak analysis of education in its critical and global dimensions.

X Congress (2016)

- Openness towards diverse, emerging and plural pedagogical conceptions was perceived.
- Professional competencies were discussed from a contextual perspective, although without consolidated theoretical definitions.
- There was a better articulation between educational theory and practice, highlighting the importance of curricular integration.
- ICTs began to occupy a central place as promoters of pedagogical transformation, with an emphasis on blended and virtual modalities.
- The need for a humanistic, ethical education committed to social development was recognized.

XI Congress (2018)

- An integrative vision of university education was consolidated, with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity.
- The papers delved more deeply into inclusive education, critical pedagogies, and complex thinking.
- The concept of quality was expanded from the classroom to the institutional system.
- The importance of scientific research with social impact was highlighted.
- The digital transformation of the university began to emerge as an urgent necessity.

XII Congress (2024)

- Approaches centered on sustainability, Eco pedagogy, and the ethics of care emerged.
- The role of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and educational personalization was discussed.
- Competency-based and results-based assessment was widely debated, recognizing its limitations and potential.
- Educational management was linked to principles of democratic governance and social participation.
- The need for a decolonial pedagogy, situated and committed to the challenges of the Global South, was affirmed.

Final considerations

International Higher Education Conferences have evolved from traditionalist approaches to a more pluralistic, critical, inclusive, and technologically integrated perspective. This evolution reflects the social, cultural, and scientific changes of the global context, as well as the growing demands for a transformative, relevant, and committed university for sustainable human development. Current debates revolve around the need to integrate knowledge, cultures, and technologies in pursuit of a Higher Education that not only trains competent professionals, but also ethical and responsible citizens of their time and environment.

DISCUSSION

An analysis of educational trends in Latin America from 1950 to 2025 confirms that, despite the notable convergence around the pursuit of equity and inclusion, each country has displayed distinct characteristics that reflect its own historical and political trajectories. This aligns with the descriptions of Chávez *et al.* (2011), who emphasize that "the spread of the New School and Popular Education did not follow a uniform pattern but rather adapted to local realities" (p. 30).

Similarly, the results show that the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s introduced market dynamics that strained public funding and exacerbated inequalities in access to Higher Education, a finding that coincides with the conclusions of Gazzola and Didriksson (2008) on the partial privatization of universities in the region.

Likewise, the data show that the implementation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has moved from a merely accessory role in face-to-face teaching to becoming a hub of methodological innovation. This evolution is in line with UNESCO's (2013) diagnosis of the "progressive adoption of blended and hybrid teaching modalities and the persistent gaps in infrastructure and digital skills in Latin American education systems" (p. 45). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing measures deepened these asymmetries, especially at the higher education level, confirming UNESCO's (2021) report on the urgent need to improve connectivity and teacher training in virtual environments.

The systematic review by Salas-Pilco *et al.* (2022) provides relevant nuances by showing that student engagement in digital environments is articulated in behavioral, cognitive, and affective dimensions, and underlines the importance of "providing emotional support and technological training to sustain the quality of online learning" (pp. 593-619). These findings support the incorporation of *e-coaching strategies* and virtual tutoring that, according to Jandrić and Ford (2022), configure new ecopedagogies capable of integrating sustainability and social justice into post-digital educational processes (p. 14). At the same time, decolonial pedagogy emerges as a critical response to the neoliberal legacy, a proposal defended by Olssen *et al.* (2023) to question power structures in science education and promote a curriculum situated in the realities of the Global South.

The concern for the comprehensive training of graduates, reiterated at the International Congresses of Pedagogy between 2012 and 2024, converges with what was expressed by Fals Borda and Freire

(2015) about participatory action research as a method "to strengthen liberating praxis and community commitment" (pp. 102-105). Likewise, Freire's theses (1970) on literacy as an act of political awareness provide theoretical support to the experiences of Popular Education in Brazil, Cuba and Mexico, where the emphasis on teacher-learner horizontality and social transformation remained alive during the critical decades of the sixties and seventies.

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, the results confirm the urgency of ensuring equal access to technical, vocational, and university education. UNESCO's roadmap (2017) provides an operational framework for countries to strengthen public financing, promote gender inclusion, and improve educational governance, aspects that were recurrent in the presentations at the 2018 and 2024 conferences.

Finally, the search for resilient and creative teaching practices, aimed at addressing global challenges such as climate change and health crises, requires a renewed focus on teacher training and knowledge building with communities. In this sense, the international congresses function as laboratories of ideas that allow to evaluate the pulse of higher education and to guide relevant public policies.

In summary, the study's results reinforce the idea that the evolution of educational trends in Latin America has been a simultaneously convergent and multiple process, where the incorporation of technologies, responses to the pandemic, market reforms, and critical approaches to popular and decolonial pedagogy intertwine to shape a constantly changing educational landscape. These conclusions underline the need to articulate international and national efforts to build resilient, equitable and truly transformative higher education systems.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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