

Trends in educational policies related to educational quality: a systematic review

Tendências de políticas educacionais vinculadas à qualidade educacional: uma revisão sistemática

Tendencias de políticas educativas vinculadas a la calidad educativa: una revisión sistemática

Pablo Sebastián Azaña-Lucio

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1367-0009>

PhD Candidate, Universidad César Vallejo (UCV),
Peru
pazanal@ucvvirtual.edu.pe (correspondence)

Edwin Gustavo Estrada-Araoz

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4159-934X>

Lecturer at Universidad Nacional Amazónica de
Madre de Dios (UNAMAD), Peru

Yasser Malaga-Yllpa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0220-8297>

Lecturer at Universidad Andina del Cusco (UAC),
Peru

María Isabel Huamani-Pérez

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9226-4083>

Lecturer at Universidad Nacional Amazónica de Madre
de Dios (UNAMAD), Peru

Elizabeth Orfelia Cruz-Laricano

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0266-4126>

Graduate Researcher at the Universidad Nacional
Amazónica de Madre de Dios (UNAMAD), Peru

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This study provides a foundation for policymakers to design more informed and contextualized strategies that can improve educational outcomes in their respective countries.

Originality/value:

The research contributes to understanding how educational policies can evolve to address the specific challenges of each country and provides valuable recommendations for future policy formulation, thereby enhancing quality and inclusion in education.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this systematic review study was to analyze current trends in educational policies related to educational quality in Spanish-speaking countries. **Methods:** The study involved an exploratory-descriptive and critical investigation, covering relevant articles and theses. The PRISMA method was used to conduct a systematic review, consulting priority databases such as Scopus, Science Direct, Scielo, ProQuest, Repository UCV, and Dialnet. **Results:** The review indicates the coexistence of various educational policy trends, including the defense of different economic systems, the pursuit of higher educational quality, the promotion of inclusivity in education, and the safeguarding of the right to education for all. These policies reflect a multifaceted approach to improving education, adapted to the specific contexts of each country. **Conclusions:** It is crucial to implement contextually adapted and evidence-based educational policies and to foster collaboration among stakeholders to achieve inclusive and quality education. This study contributes to understanding trends in educational policies and offers recommendations for future research and the formulation of effective policies.

Keywords: Educational policies, education, educational quality, basic education, educational trends, developing countries, Spanish-speaking education system.

RESUMO

Antecedentes: O presente estudo é de natureza documental e teve como objetivo analisar as tendências atuais nas políticas educacionais relacionadas à qualidade educacional em países de língua espanhola. **Métodos:** Foi realizada uma investigação exploratória-descritiva e crítica, abrangendo artigos e teses relevantes ao tema. O método PRISMA foi utilizado para conduzir a revisão sistemática, consultando bases de dados prioritárias como Scopus, Science Direct, Scielo, ProQuest, UCV e Dialnet. **Resultados:** Os resultados indicam a coexistência de várias tendências de políticas educacionais, incluindo a defesa de diferentes sistemas econômicos, a busca por maior qualidade educacional, a promoção da inclusão na educação e a salvaguarda do direito à educação para todos. Essas políticas refletem uma abordagem multifacetada para a melhoria da educação, adaptada aos contextos específicos de cada país. **Conclusões:** Concluiu-se que há necessidade de implementar políticas educacionais adaptadas ao contexto e baseadas em evidências, bem como a importância da colaboração entre as partes interessadas para alcançar uma educação inclusiva e de qualidade. Este estudo contribui para a compreensão das tendências nas políticas educacionais e oferece recomendações para pesquisas futuras e a formulação de políticas eficazes.

Palavras-chave: Education policy, education, educational quality, basic education, educational trends, developing countries, Spanish-speaking education system.

RESUMEN

Antecedentes: La presente investigación es de carácter documental y tuvo como objetivo analizar las tendencias actuales en políticas educativas relacionadas con la calidad educativa en países de habla hispana. **Métodos:** Se realizó una investigación exploratorio-descritiva y crítica, abarcando artículos y tesis relevantes a la temática. Se utilizó el método PRISMA para llevar a cabo la revisión sistemática, consultando bases de datos prioritarias como Scopus, Science Direct, Scielo, ProQuest, UCV y Dialnet. **Resultados:** Los resultados indican la coexistencia de diversas tendencias políticas educativas, que incluyen la defensa de distintos sistemas económicos, la búsqueda de una mayor calidad educativa, el impulso de la inclusión en la educación y la salvaguarda del derecho a la educación para todos. Estas políticas reflejan un enfoque multifacético hacia la mejora de la educación, adaptado a los contextos específicos de cada país. **Conclusiones:** Se concluyó que existe la necesidad de implementar políticas educativas contextualmente adaptadas y basadas en evidencia, así como la importancia de la colaboración entre las partes interesadas para lograr una educación inclusiva y de calidad. Este estudio contribuye al entendimiento de las tendencias en políticas educativas y ofrece recomendaciones para futuras investigaciones y la formulación de políticas efectivas.

Palabras clave: Políticas educativas, educación, calidad educativa, educación básica, tendencias educativas, países en desarrollo, sistema educativo hispanohablante.

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of educational policies has become a fundamental aspect in educational research due to its direct impact on the educational system, students, teachers, and the broader community (Martínez, 2018). Implemented policies can have both positive and negative effects, and in a constantly changing global context, it is crucial to evaluate their effectiveness to ensure high-quality education (Puertas & Ortiz, 2021). In recent years, interest has surged in understanding whether these policies genuinely contribute to the improvement of educational quality and how they can be adapted to address emerging needs (Ramírez & Aquino, 2019). This systematic review emerges from the need to examine and synthesize the available empirical evidence on educational policy evaluation, with a specific focus on Spanish-speaking countries that face distinct contextual challenges.

Educational quality is a multifaceted and broad concept that extends from equity in access to resources to pedagogical effectiveness and student outcomes. According to the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO, 2020), every nation bears the responsibility of addressing the global learning crisis and ensuring quality education. This challenge is particularly acute in many regions, including African and Latin American countries, where educational quality remains a persistent issue. The Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 (2030) emphasizes the necessity of inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education, highlighting that both quality and equity are essential priorities for sustainable human development.

Several studies have addressed the relationship between educational policies and educational quality from diverse perspectives. Gutacker et al. (2023) examine how health disparities increase with educational level, even in developed contexts. Corimanya (2021) stresses the significance of educational infrastructure as a key determinant of service quality, while Martínez et al. (2020) argue that despite the versatility of the concept of educational quality, it often disproportionately focuses on academic factors, neglecting holistic, community-centered approaches. Franco (2017) investigates how U.S. educational policies have exacerbated inequalities, particularly affecting migrant populations. These studies underscore the complexity of educational quality and the importance of policies tailored to the specific needs of diverse contexts.

Recent literature further expands on these themes. Díez et al. (2020), for instance, explored the impact of two quality management systems—EFQM and PCI—on the performance of Spanish educational centers, demonstrating how educational policies and management processes directly influence organizational improvement. Similarly, Stromquist (2007) critiques global education initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals, for reducing the notion of quality to narrow cognitive skills like reading and math, overlooking essential aspects such as gender equity and social transformation within educational systems. In this regard, Braga, Checchi, and Meschi (2013) provide a long-term perspective on educational reforms in Europe, highlighting the distinction between inclusive policies, which reduce inequality, and selective ones, which often exacerbate it. Benavot (2012) also highlights the risks of overemphasizing learning outcomes at the expense of a comprehensive evaluation of inputs and processes, stressing the need for critical perspectives on the widespread adoption of large-scale learning assessments in the context of global education reform.

Carnoy (2016) offers insight into the impact of globalization on national education systems, arguing that while competition drives educational expansion, each nation's policy approaches are deeply influenced by historical and political factors. In line with this, McCambly and Mulroy (2024) investigate the intersection of equity and quality in U.S. postsecondary education, revealing how racialized policies can persist within educational structures, despite reforms. Dotta (2016) adds a Latin American perspective by analyzing the Brazilian educational system's response to neoliberal reforms, illustrating the complexities of ensuring educational quality within restrictive policy frameworks.

In addition to these perspectives, the review of previous works, such as those of Holguín et al. (2021), who examine the importance of digital skills in educational management, and Thinley (2021), who identifies five dimensions of educational quality, provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the factors influencing the effectiveness of educational policies. In the context of Spanish-speaking countries, there is a critical opportunity and need to develop educational policies that not only address persistent inequalities but also adapt to the unique socio-cultural and economic challenges these nations face, ensuring that educational quality is both equitable and contextually relevant.

The need for this systematic review is evident for several reasons. First, it will allow for the identification and analysis of key practices and variants in educational policies across diverse contexts, providing a basis for the formulation of more effective future policies. This review not only sheds light on which approaches have been most successful in different settings but also helps to identify gaps that warrant further research. Additionally, by examining the existing evidence, we can assess the strengths and limitations of methodological approaches in evaluative studies, contributing to the development of more tailored, evidence-based policies for developing countries. Finally, the objective of this research is to analyze current trends in educational policies related to educational quality in Spanish-speaking countries.

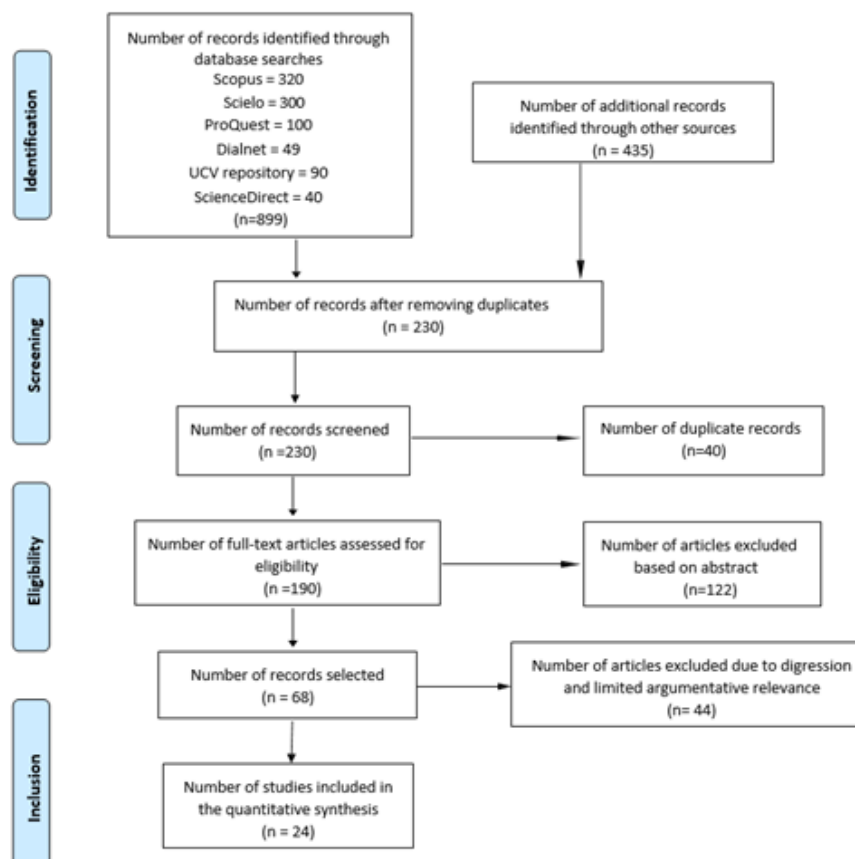
METHODOLOGY

In this study, the PRISMA methodology was used as a guide for the design, execution and presentation of the review, thus ensuring the transparency and quality of the review process. The study of trends in education policies was carried out between August 2023 and July 2024, consisting of a quantitative bibliographic inquiry. The review was framed as quantitative, since it evaluated a quantifiable reality in response to a formulated question and followed the steps of the PRISMA method, allowing for a replicable systematic review. This review is considered exploratory, given that its objective is to identify relevant concepts in a research sector based on bibliometric variables (Sobrido & Rumbo, 2018). According to Matthew et al. (2021), the PRISMA 2020 statement can be used in original, updated or continuously updated systematic reviews, guiding the conduct of systematic reviews when not many resources are available.

The units of analysis in this quantitative exploratory review are original documents that meet certain specific criteria and are found in relevant databases, with content related to the topic addressed and full texts available for review. These documents were synthesized in the results segment, identifying the papers that were the focus of the analysis. The descriptors used will be the thematic axes related to the study, inducing the construction of the body of research from titles, key concepts and summaries of studies, and identifying thematic axes of relationship. The search was limited to papers published from 1990 to the present, allowing a significant assessment and progression in the review.

The systematic review focused on theses and articles from journals included in databases such as Scopus, Scielo, ProQuest, Dialnet, UCV repository and ScienceDirect that are recognized for their importance in education-related publications. The descriptor terms and keywords used for the search were: "EDUCATION", "POLITICAL TRENDS IN EDUCATION", "EDUCATIONAL POLICIES" and "POLITICAL TENDENCIES IN EDUCATION", together with their equivalents in Spanish: "EDUCACIÓN", "TENDENCIAS POLÍTICAS EN EDUCACIÓN" and "POLÍTICAS EDUCATIVAS". These terms were selected for their relevance and widespread use in the field of analysis. For the inclusion criteria, we considered documents that met the descriptors indicated, published in repositories and scientific journals in the last five years and with access to the full text. Exclusion criteria included materials other than articles (such as book chapters), theoretical articles (except for systematic reviews or high-impact articles), articles unrelated to the subject of analysis and duplicate articles. In addition, an initial visit was made to the websites of each journal to evaluate their submission process, scope, focus, impact and relevance. Only after this evaluation were the papers in each journal selected, after reading the abstract of each volume, determining those that address the thematic axes.

Figure 1. Flow of information through the different phases of systematic review.

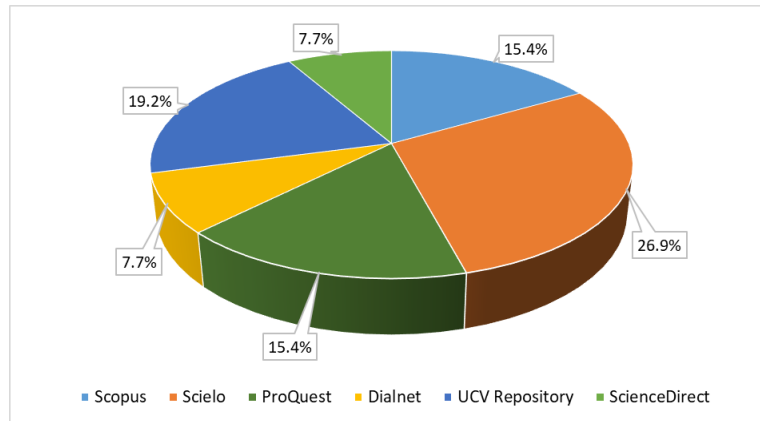


Note. Developed based on the PRISMA methodology

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After performing an exhaustive systematic review and employing various strategies, such as the use of quotation marks and Boolean operators in different databases, 899 systematic review articles corresponding to the years 2016 to 2023 were obtained. Of these, 24 articles were selected for the present work (Figure 1). As depicted in Figure 2, the primary source for document indexing was the Scielo database (26.9%), followed by repository UCV (19.2%), Scopus and ProQuest contributed 15.4% each, while Dialnet and ScienceDirect contributed 7.7% each.

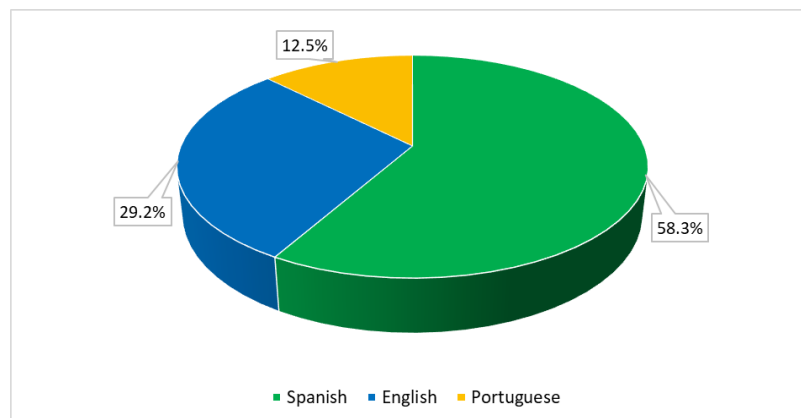
Figure 2. Databases from the documents were sourced.



Note. Developed based on the results and following PRISMA methodology

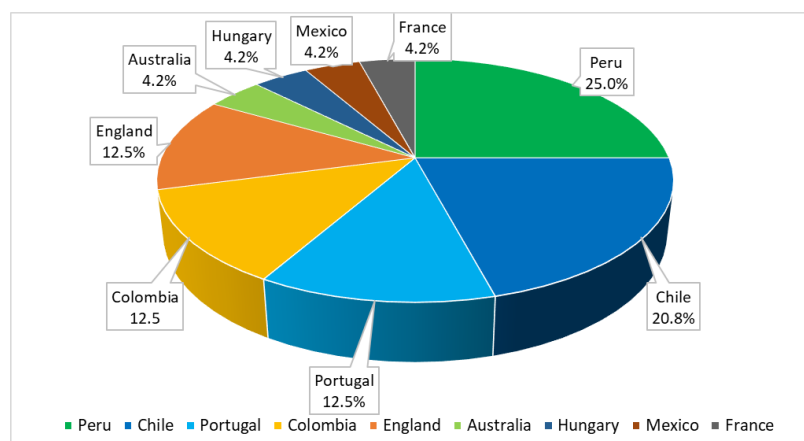
According to Figure 3, this systematic review considered more documents published in Spanish (58.3%), followed by documents in English (29.2%) and, finally, documents in Portuguese (12.5%). On the other hand, the papers considered in the systematic review come from various countries. The distribution is as follows: Peru (25%), Chile (20.8%), Portugal (12.5%), Colombia (12.5%), England (12.5%), Australia (4.2%), Hungary (4.2%), Mexico (4.2%) and France (4.2%).

Figure 3. Languages of the documents included in the review



Note. Developed based on the results and following PRISMA methodology

Figure 4. Origin of the documents included in the review



Note. Developed based on the results and following PRISMA methodology

Table 1 shows that the relationship between educational policies and public management reveals a series of significant challenges and gaps.

Table 1. Publications included in the review

N°	Authors	Sample	Keywords	Results and conclusions
1	Chavarría (2022)	102 students	Public policy in education	Education in the state policy framework is linked to mental health, suggesting the need for a deeper connection between psychological well-being and education.
2	Perez (2020)	67 executives	Educational policies	Managers acknowledge the existence of an educational model in their institutions, but admit a lack of clarity about the details and objectives of this model.
3	Palacios (2023)	Not specified	Policy and inclusion	Although laws promote inclusive rights, in practice, inclusion applies only to a small group, revealing a significant gap between policies and their implementation.
4	Castle (2022)	180 education specialists	Public policies	Public management, educational quality and inclusion are interrelated and cannot be considered in isolation for effective educational improvement.
5	Ramírez (2017)	179 students	Educational trends	Educational trends and leadership are interrelated and influence each other, suggesting that effective leadership is crucial to the implementation of educational trends.
6	Peña (2019)	30 teachers	Educational policies	There are significant differences in teaching performance and in the implementation of educational policies among different institutions, indicating the influence of contextual factors on educational quality.
7	Palacios et al. (2020)	Not specified	Education policy and neoliberalism	The State assumes a supervisory role with possibilities for improvement, while the privatizing trend commoditizes the educational service, affecting its accessibility and equity.
8	Rosales et al. (2020)	Not specified	Latin American educational policies	It is necessary to implement ambitious policies for the training and selection of educational leaders to guarantee educational quality.
9	Bagnall & Nakar (2018).	Not specified	Professional training for teachers	Teachers and trainers must exhibit knowledge, ability, commitment and confidence to ensure effective educational training.
10	Beighton (2021)	Not specified	Education and neoliberalism	Neoliberalism has established an apparatus of biopolitical control and exploitation in education, transforming educational discourse into a mechanism of standardization.
11	Bossio (2021)	Not specified	Trends in education	Education has transcended traditional boundaries through the virtual modality, redesigning learning experiences and offering new opportunities for academic development.
12	Stace (2021)	Not specified	Educational trends	There are several educational trends coexisting in educational systems, reflecting a variety of approaches and methods in current educational practice.
13	Thwe & Kalmán (2023)	Not specified	Models and competencies for teacher educators	Policies and strategies for teacher competencies are more relevant than personal or professional factors, varying according to region and experience.
14	Padilla-Fuentes et al. (2021)	Not specified	Public schools	State education policy shows a deterioration that demands urgent changes to improve the quality and accessibility of education in the public sector.
15	Donoso et al. (2021)	Not specified	Trends in public financing	Current policies do not solve problems of segmentation, inequality and low educational quality, underscoring the need for significant reforms in educational financing and management.
16	Rico & Ponce (2022)	Not specified	The role of teachers in the 21st century	The role of the ideal teacher is aligned with the socioconstructivist paradigm, although its practical application is limited due to real conditions that do not favor its full implementation.
17	Locatelli (2018)	Review of educational regulations	Education as a public good and governance	Governments often consider education only as a complementary framework, rather than a fundamental right, evidencing a gap between the principle of public good and educational policies.
18	García et al. (2022)	Not specified	Education in changing times	Inclusive education faces new challenges and needs, highlighting the importance of continuous and undergraduate training to ensure equitable treatment of all students.
19	Lagos (2023)	Not specified	Educational policies and pedagogy of extractivism	It is essential to articulate people's knowledge with school activity to promote a pluralistic education that promotes social change and considers environmental conservation.
20	Santos & Monteiro (2023)	294 primary school teachers	Educational policies and decision making	The results show a paradox in the perception of grade repetition; while it is seen as an obligation, it also faces the problem of how to achieve educational quality.
21	Bastos & Ferrão (2019)	Not specified	Repeat and basic education	Repetition is influenced by individual, family and social factors, but is also related to the role of the school, showing varied results in repetition rates.
22	De La Peña & Vines (2019)	Not specified	Education and sustainable development	The current environmental situation requires educational attention, highlighting the need to integrate sustainable development approaches into the educational curriculum.
23	Vargas & Gonzáles (2022)	Not specified	Public policies, neoliberalism and education	The dominant educational models, influenced by supranational ideologies, affect the curricular structure and educational policies, prioritizing capitalist interests.
24	Pipa & Peixoto (2022)	5932 students	Educational policies and grade repetition	Students older than 15 years show a lower task orientation and a weak school identity, which could lead to unfavorable results and be an imitative tendency among their peers.

Note. Developed based on the results and following PRISMA methodology

Chavarría (2022) highlights the need to connect education with mental health, suggesting that psychological wellbeing should be integrated into the educational framework to improve its effectiveness. In contrast, Pérez (2020) highlights a lack of clarity among managers about existing educational models in their institutions, which may affect effective policy implementation. Palacios (2023) and Castillo (2022) extend this discussion by identifying a gap between inclusive policies and their practical application, with Palacios noting that inclusion is limited to a small group despite laws promoting it. Castillo adds that public management, educational quality and inclusion are interrelated and must be addressed together to achieve effective improvements.

The impact of neoliberalism on education is another crucial issue. Palacios et al. (2020) show how privatization commodifies education, affecting its equity and accessibility. Rosales et al. (2020) also address this issue, stressing the need for ambitious policies to ensure educational quality through leadership. Beighton (2021) argues that neoliberalism has established an apparatus of control and exploitation in education, transforming educational discourse into a mechanism of standardization. Vargas & González (2022) reflect how the dominant educational models, influenced by supranational ideologies, affect the curricular structure and educational policies, prioritizing capitalist interests over the principles of educational equity.

In the area of educational trends and teacher training, Ramirez (2017) explores the interrelationship between educational trends and leadership, suggesting that effective leadership is crucial for the implementation of new educational trends. Bagnall & Nakar (2018) highlight the importance of trainers and teachers exhibiting knowledge, ability, commitment, and confidence to ensure effective education. Thwe & Kalmán (2023) clarify that policies and strategies for teacher competencies are more relevant than personal or professional factors, varying by region and experience. Rico & Ponce (2022) add that, although the role of the ideal teacher is aligned with the socioconstructivist paradigm, its practical implementation faces limitations due to real conditions.

Regarding inclusion and sustainable development, García et al. (2022) highlight the new challenges and needs in inclusive education, stressing the importance of continuous training to ensure equitable treatment of all students. Lagos (2023) argues that it is essential to integrate peoples' knowledge with school activity to promote a pluralistic education that drives social change and considers environmental conservation. De La Peña & Víneces (2019) conclude that the current environmental situation requires specific educational attention, integrating sustainable development approaches into the curriculum. Finally, the issue of grade repetition and its impact shows several factors that influence this phenomenon. Nóbrega & Vera (2023) observe a paradox in the perception of repetition as an obligation, while facing the problem of achieving educational quality. Bastos & Ferrão (2019) highlight that repetition is influenced by individual, family and social factors, as well as by the role of the school, showing varied results in repetition rates. Pipa & Peixoto (2022) investigate that students older than 15 years with repetition show a lower task orientation and a weak school identity, which could have negative effects and establish imitative tendencies among their peers.

Discussion of the main trends detected

The Latin American situation with respect to empirical research on educational trends reflects great instability, evidenced by the constant changes in its educational policies that seek media results. Problems such as inequality, segregation, dropout, low subsidies, poor infrastructure and low teacher salaries are recurrent. In this context, this systematic review made it possible to analyze current policy trends, classifying works and topics addressed in common, focusing on the following aspects: health and education; public policies and regulations; inclusion and equity; educational leadership; education and virtuality; and sustainable development.

Trends in health and education

One cannot speak of significant improvements in learning outcomes, whether small, regular or substantial, without addressing the biological and psychological development of students. Learning retention requires an adequate environment that facilitates both the acquisition and the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Along these lines, Chavarría (2022) points out that education within state policy is closely linked to mental health, suggesting that both physical and spiritual well-being must be in optimal conditions for effective learning.

Trends in public policies

Education in Latin America faces serious difficulties due to the instability, contradiction and decontextualization of educational policies. This situation generates uncertainty for teachers, who often have to follow pre-established guidelines without a clear understanding, fearing sanctions for non-compliance. Pérez (2020) criticizes the lack of clarity in the educational model, while Palacios et al. (2020) point to a privatizing trend that commodifies education. Thwe & Kalmán (2023) argue that prevailing educational policies dictate the type of learning rather than the individual factors of students and teachers. According to Padilla-Fuentes et al. (2021), profound changes are urgently needed in the educational system, given that neoliberalism and supranational organizations favor capitalist interests to the detriment of the public good. For his part, Locatelli (2018) argues that, for governments, education is often considered a complementary framework rather than a fundamental right.

The lack of emphasis on educational scientificity, the predilection for empirical solutions and the absence of rigor contribute to dilemmas such as grade repetition, which pits students' rights against educational quality. Santos & Monteiro (2023) and Bastos & Ferrão (2019) highlight the influence of individual, family and social factors on repetition, while Pipa & Peixoto (2022) observe a lower school orientation and identity in students older than 15 years, which could have negative effects on their peers. Furthermore, Donoso et al. (2021) conclude that current policies do not adequately address

segmentation, inequality and low educational quality. Likewise, Vargas & González (2022) argue that the dominant educational models are dictated by supranational interests, while Stace (2021) points to the coexistence of diverse educational trends in national systems.

Trends in inclusion

Education is recognized as one of the fundamental rights of all people, but inclusiveness goes beyond simply attending a school and being taught by diverse teachers. To truly address inclusion, it is necessary to delve deeper into what it means and how it should be implemented, ranging from coverage and infrastructure to teacher quality. Educators must be well prepared, know their subject thoroughly, adapt to current changes and use contemporary educational tools.

Despite legislative advances promoting inclusive rights, in practice, inclusion is often limited to a small group of students. Palacios (2023) highlights that although laws guarantee inclusive rights, actual implementation remains weak. Castillo (2022) emphasizes that public management, educational quality, and educational inclusion cannot be separated; these elements are interrelated and must be addressed together. García et al. (2022) point out that the theoretical and methodological foundations of inclusive education must face new challenges to meet emerging needs. This includes the need for continuous training to ensure that all students are treated equitably and equally.

Trends in educational leadership

"Educational leaders" play a crucial role in the implementation of significant changes in the educational system, a role that is not limited only to managers, but also encompasses teachers. Ramirez (2017) argues that any educational trend must be in tune with leadership, as both influence each other. Rosales, Montes & Figueroa (2020) stress the need for ambitious policies for the training and selection of educational leaders that facilitate the improvement of educational quality.

Furthermore, Peña (2019) reveals significant differences in teaching performance and the implementation of educational policies among different institutions, suggesting that the creativity, ingenuity and organization of each institution are determining factors. In this context, Bagnall & Nakar (2018) highlight that teachers and trainers must exhibit knowledge, ability, commitment and confidence, essential attributes for the development of effective pedagogical leaders.

On the other hand, Rico & Ponce (2022) defend the socioconstructivist paradigm, which postulates that an ideal teacher should be trained in its fundamental principles. However, they also point out the unfeasibility of this approach in practice due to the lack of adequate conditions in the educational environment for its implementation.

Trends in education and sustainable development

Lagos (2023) argues that it is essential to articulate the knowledge of the people with school activity in order to promote a pluralistic education that fosters social change. This approach proposes a different way of interacting with nature, promoting development and environmental conservation. This argument not only addresses the global environmental problem, but also highlights the responsibility of companies and families in the use of resources, pointing out a trend that hinders favorable social relations and equal opportunities for development.

On this topic, De La Peña & Vines (2019) express great concern about the environmental situation in communities and societies, which is currently in a critical situation. They argue that it is necessary to pay attention to this issue from the educational sphere, suggesting that education can play a crucial role in raising awareness and taking action in the face of environmental challenges. The inclusion of environmental issues in the educational curriculum and the promotion of sustainable practices in schools can help to form more environmentally conscious and responsible citizens, thus contributing to a more balanced and sustainable development.

Trends in education and virtuality

Bossio (2021) highlights how education has crossed frontiers in terms of service, redesigning learning experiences towards a virtual and remote modality. Virtuality emerges at the current juncture as a necessary complement to face-to-face education, allowing learning to transcend the physical classroom for the deepening and development of academic activities. In addition, it is presented as an opportunity for improvement for those people who do not have an educational institution nearby or who cannot access it for various reasons.

FINAL REMARKS

This systematic review led to the conclusion that there is a need for a deeper integration between educational policy and mental health, highlighting the importance of mental wellness programs in educational institutions. In addition, it highlights the confusion that exists in some managers about the educational models implemented, indicating an urgent need for more training and internal communication to ensure that these models are clear and effective.

In terms of inclusion, although educational policies guarantee inclusion rights, their application is limited and does not reach all students, pointing out the need for more effective implementation mechanisms. It is also stressed that public management, educational quality and inclusion are interrelated concepts that require a holistic approach in policy design.

With respect to educational leadership, it is revealed as a crucial factor influencing educational trends, suggesting that strengthening leadership in schools can have a significant impact on educational quality. The trend towards privatization of education and the supra-vigilant role of the state poses risks of commodification of educational service and biopolitical exploitation, which requires critical evaluation and careful balancing.

In addition, an urgent need is identified to review and update educational regulations to ensure that education is treated as a public good and to address current deficiencies. Equity in access and quality of education, along with the integration of environmental education and sustainable development into curricula, are essential to address contemporary challenges.

Limitations and future research agenda

The limitations of this study arise from both theoretical and methodological aspects. The use of the PRISMA methodology, while ensuring transparency and replicability, inherently restricts the scope to documents available in specific databases, potentially omitting relevant sources not indexed or lacking full-text access. Moreover, the decision to exclude non-article materials (e.g., book chapters) and theoretical articles, unless they are systematic reviews or of high impact, may limit the diversity of insights captured. The focus on bibliometric variables, while useful for quantification, might overlook other qualitative interpretations of educational policy trends. As an exploratory review, the study also does not aim to produce generalizable conclusions. To address these limitations, future research should focus on several key areas to advance the research of educational policies and management in the context of developing countries:

Table 2. An agenda for future research

Research Issue	Methodology	Research path to be followed
Interdisciplinary frameworks	Use integrative models that incorporate psychology, economics, and social theory	Develop a more holistic understanding of how different factors interact to affect education outcomes.
Postcolonial and indigenous perspectives	Conduct case studies and qualitative research with local communities	Address context-specific issues by incorporating indigenous knowledge and postcolonial critique of educational practices.
Longitudinal studies	Employ longitudinal data collection methods, such as cohort studies	Capture the long-term impacts of educational policy changes and reforms, which cross-sectional data cannot reveal.
Mixed-methods research	Combine surveys, interviews, and ethnographic methods with statistical analysis	Provide a richer, more complex view of how educational policies affect different stakeholders in diverse contexts.
Larger, representative samples	Utilize larger datasets, including national or regional databases, and increase sample diversity	Ensure findings are generalizable to broader populations, reflecting the diversity within developing countries.
Environmental and sustainability integration	Incorporate environmental education and sustainable development into policy analysis	Address the growing importance of sustainability in education, especially in countries facing environmental challenges.
Technology and digital divides	Investigate how digital tools and resources can be equitably distributed in schools	Explore solutions to overcome technological barriers in education, particularly post-pandemic.

Note. Developed by the authors based on trends found in the literature

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C. elaboration of figures and tables:	30%	20%	20%	20%	10%
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