

## The theme of research as an element of analysis on research in Education in the Northeast region



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### Abstract

Taking research in Education as an object of analysis, we have focused on the concern with the elements of scientific research, among them, the research topic. In this sense, the themes relating to research in Education presented to Postgraduate Programs in Education in the Northeast region are considered problematic. Based on the proposed problem, the objective is to verify the topics covered in theses defended in the area of Education, in order to identify the production of knowledge in the area in recent years. Methodologically, the empirical work in this research consists of summaries of the theses defended in the Postgraduate Programs in Education at public universities in the Northeast region in 2020, 2021 and 2022. This is an exploratory-bibliographical and descriptive-systematic research in its analysis, which presents results that highlight the existence of a consistent set of topics covered and, at the same time, the presence of many other topics outside the area of Education.

### Keywords

research in Education; theses; research topics; postgraduate studies; Northeast.

### O tema de pesquisa como elemento de análise sobre pesquisa em Educação na região Nordeste

### Resumo

Tomando a pesquisa em Educação como objeto de análise, tem-se debruçado sobre a preocupação com os elementos da pesquisa científica, dentre eles, o tema de pesquisa. Nesse sentido, elencam-se como problemática as temáticas referentes à pesquisa em Educação apresentadas aos Programas de Pós-Graduação em Educação, na região Nordeste. A partir do problema proposto, o objetivo é verificar os temas abordados em teses defendidas na área da Educação, no intuito de identificar a produção de conhecimento na área nos últimos anos. Metodologicamente, a empiria nesta pesquisa consiste nos resumos das teses defendidas nos Programas de Pós-Graduação em Educação nas universidades públicas da região Nordeste em 2020, 2021 e 2022. Trata-se de uma pesquisa exploratório- bibliográfica e descritivo-sistemática em sua análise, que apresenta resultados que destacam a existência de um conjunto consistente de temas abordados e, ao mesmo tempo, a presença de tantos outros temas externos à área da Educação.

### Palavras-chave

pesquisa em Educação; teses; temas de pesquisa; pós-graduação; Nordeste.



## El tema de investigación como elemento de análisis de las investigaciones en Educación en la región Nordeste

### Resumen

Tomando como objeto de análisis la investigación en Educación, se centra en la preocupación por los elementos de la investigación científica, entre ellos, el tema de investigación. En este sentido, los temas relacionados con la investigación en Educación presentados en los Programas de Postgrado en Educación de la región Nordeste son considerados problemáticos. A partir del problema propuesto, el objetivo es verificar los temas tratados en las tesis defendidas en el área de Educación, con el fin de identificar la producción de conocimiento en el área en los últimos años. Metodológicamente, el trabajo empírico de esta investigación consta de resúmenes de las tesis defendidas en los Programas de Posgrado en Educación de las universidades públicas de la región Nordeste en 2020, 2021 y 2022. Se trata de una investigación exploratoria-bibliográfica y descriptivo-sistemática en su análisis, que presenta resultados que resaltan la existencia de un conjunto consistente de temas tratados y, al mismo tiempo, la presencia de muchos otros temas fuera del área de Educación.

### Palabras clave

investigación en Educación; tesis; tópicos de investigación; posgrado; Nordeste.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Surveys, debates and analyzes on issues directly or indirectly related to research in Education have been constant to think about the production of knowledge in the area and its repercussion for the political-institutional and theoretical-methodological directions. In this sense, we have been focusing on the analysis of some elements indispensable to scientific research, such as the object of analysis and research themes, issues related to the method and methodological processes, as well as the theoretical references that have been consolidating research in the area of Education. Based on the concern with some of these elements that make up scientific research and that legitimize research in Education, this article focuses on the research themes that have been of interest to researchers in the area in recent years.

In this regard, we present the issue in this study of identifying which topics related to research in Education have been addressed by the Graduate Programs in Education in the Northeast region. Based on the proposed problem, the objective is to verify the themes addressed in theses defended in the area of Education, in order to identify the production of knowledge in the area in recent years.

Theses or doctoral research close the training process for research. It is at this stage that the researcher obtains the preparation for the autonomous performance of future research, as well as the preparation to become an advisor to other future researchers in his area and even in related areas. In the average period of four years, the future researcher plans and executes an investigation delimiting his object or topic of discussion. It is expected that the concerns of future doctors in the area will have repercussions in the course of their profession, either as teachers or as members of a body of professionals that will somehow influence what should be researched and carried out in the area of Education.

In the present research, we chose to analyze the theses defended in the Graduate Programs in the area of Education in the Northeast region of Brazil, in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, being the most recent research and available in the Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes). Our interest is to investigate regionally the theses defended in the area of Education, covering the five regions of the country. We consider that each geopolitical region of the country has its own history in socio-cultural development, in the way knowledge has been built and incorporated into daily life and how it reflects on research priorities, that is, what to research and how to research in the respective regional realities, including in the area of Education.

Thinking about the Northeast region implies understanding political-institutional conditions that have been making this region stand out in its most diverse levels of education, with growth rates that attract the attention of many scholars. According to Madeiro and Bimbatí (2023), in 2021, the Northeast was the region of Brazil that most advanced in relation to the 2017 results in the Brazil Education Opportunity Index (IOEB), from learning levels to the structure of educational institutions and teacher training. This context of advances in the educational field translates the policies implemented by the government from Basic Education to Higher Education. In graduate school, we also see political-institutional advances that make the Northeast a region of interest for study and research.

We do not want to imprison or characterize the knowledge produced in a region from research, but to bring a sampling of the possibilities of what has been characterized in the field of research, with a direction for recent doctors and researchers in the area of

Education. We propose to investigate what has been recently researched in the country in the Postgraduate Programs in the area of Education of public universities.

The Post-Graduation in Education is the institutionalized and privileged space for the production of research in the area of Education. Public universities, whether federal or state, have nowadays been constituted as their own spaces for welcoming, stimulating and disseminating research and knowledge in this area.

Consulting the data made available from Capes evaluations, it was possible to verify that, over the last decades, the Graduate Programs in the area of Education grew quantitatively after a stagnation in this number in the 1980s and 1990s, with an increase in the creation of new universities, as well as a process of internalization by Brazil from the 2000s, including in the Northeast region of the country.

The choice of Graduate Programs in the area of Education and doctoral research defended in the Northeast region is justified by the expansion, in the last decade, of public higher education institutions and the opening of new Graduate Programs in the area of Education in the aforementioned region, as well as by the fact that it has undergone a consolidation of doctoral courses in the area of Education in recent decades.

For Garcia, Yasuda and Bene (2020), the process of expansion of the Graduate Program in Education occurred in two movements, one related to the process of expansion of courses, already in the 1990s, when greater consolidation of the area of Education was expected, and the second movement also linked to expansion, but especially in the North and Northeast regions. This second movement presented a differential, as it brought the concern that the courses in these regions focused on a faculty that thought about themes and problems in the educational field, unlike what had happened in the pioneering programs, which had teachers from several areas other than Education. "Thus, with the growth of studies in the field of education, there is a need to understand how this process is being organized and systematized" (Garcia; Yasuda; Bene, 2020, p. 38).

In this sense, thinking about the expansion movements of post-graduation and seeing the need to think about the processes of organization and systematization at this level of education, we understand the importance of the debates presented in this article. In a study that investigates Brazilian scientific productions, Souza and Diniz (2022) state that the Southeast and Northeast regions concentrate the largest number of studies. This

fact, still in the authors' analysis, can be explained by the fact that they concentrate more research, as well as the number of universities and graduate programs.

It is inferred from this broad and continuous reality of training researchers who, living under a democratic regime, with all the setbacks and peculiarities of the Brazilian context, have opportunities to pay attention to other ways of being, to express themselves and to constitute possibilities for research and to contribute to the solution of problems in the area in their region.

## 2 Methodology

This research is part of the qualitative approach, and a characteristically exploratory-bibliographical and descriptive-systematic investigation was carried out. By procedure, in the exploratory-bibliographical phase, we surveyed the theses based on Capes' Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations. We identified 459 theses defended in 2020, 2021 and 2022 in the Graduate Programs in Education of the 11 public institutions of higher education located in the Northeast region. These theses were downloaded and cataloged in order to compose the empiric of this research. Then, from an exploratory reading of the abstracts of these theses, we identified the research themes delimited by the doctorates in the area of Education graduated in the Northeast region of the country.

In the descriptive-systematic phase, the information extracted in the abstracts of the theses were selected and organized to fulfill the research objective. Selection and organization comprise a classification and synthesis of the extracted information that became research data after analytical treatment.

The choice of the time frame of this research, that is, the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, was due to the greater institutional adherence and registration of theses in the Capes Catalog of Theses and Dissertations for the Northeast region, compared to the previous years of deposit of theses carried out by the Graduate Programs in Education of that region. This research began in 2023 and, also for this reason, we limited the redemption of the theses until 2022 in the aforementioned catalog. With the largest number of theses deposited, in 2020, 2021 and 2022, we seek to give as much coverage as possible and timeliness to the research themes produced in the graduate programs of the Northeast region of Brazil.

The theses were specifically identified through two stages of information filtering. The first filtering of information considered the search for the term "theses", which brought us the total number of 61,875 theses present in this catalog. The next step was to select variables for a first filtering of the theses, in this sense, we used the variables "doctorate", "year" and "area of evaluation" (Education). With the results of the first filtering, we were able to make a second filtering of the theses by selecting the variable "institutions". Based on the list of public higher education INSTITUTIONS (HEIs), we selected the higher education institutions in the Northeast region of the country. Thus, we were able to select the theses defended in the area of Education in the Northeast region by year of defense, thus obtaining 459 theses.

The distribution in Table 1 shows the number of theses defended and the respective HEIs in the Northeast region.

**Table 1** – Distribution of theses by higher education INSTITUTION (Hei)

HEI	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
State University of Bahia	14	12	20	46
State University of Ceará	12	12	26	50
Federal University of Alagoas	9	10	14	33
Federal University of Bahia	16	22	20	58
Federal University of Ceará	19	19	24	62
Federal University of Piauí	9	10	3	22
Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte	0	0	5	5
Federal University of Sergipe	15	12	19	46
Federal University of Paraíba	18	16	18	52
Federal University of Pernambuco	11	3	13	27
Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte	19	20	19	58
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>459</b>

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the Catalog of Dissertations and Theses of Capes (2023).

After presenting the initial course of this study, it is important to address the theoretical framework that guided the research in question. The reference in this research for the purpose of reading and analyzing empiricism consists of selected texts on research in education written by researchers in the area, namely, Antônio Joaquim Severino and Bernardete Angelina Gatti. Both authors are recognized researchers in the area of Education who research, write and publish texts on research in Education, thus becoming the main references for this research and for the debate on the practice of research in the area.

After the presentation of the methodological description of the research, the organization of the theoretical construction that conducted the study and the analysis of the survey presented becomes extremely important. In this sense, to discuss the thematic interests that constitute the area of Education in recent years, it is essential to think about the production of knowledge and research in this area.

### **3 The production of knowledge in Education and the place of research in postgraduate studies**

Post-Graduate studies have been a place of institutional reference for research in recent decades, bringing society's own debates to the research field. As Cardoso (1996) states, the development of scientific, rigorous and systematic research seeks to explain reality within certain parameters, considering the historical-social conditions that affect the very constitution of research and scientific training, in addition to influencing the identification of the problems to be researched. In this sense, thinking about the choices of research themes and their historical-social correlations is fundamental to understand the place of knowledge production in Education and the place of research in graduate studies.

In fact, we will delve into two authors who deal with knowledge production and postgraduate studies. Severino (2006, 2007, 2009) debate on graduate studies in the area of Education, highlighting the methodological work in the production of research, and Gatti (2001, 2005, 2010) debate on the issues or concerns of research in Education. This does not mean that the work of these authors who serve as references is limited only to the highlighted discussions, but we highlight the thematic debate carried out by them.

Drawing on Severino (2006, 2007, 2009), we seek to capture what is important in the production of knowledge, specifically the essential aspects for understanding the reality being researched. This study considers the work produced in Graduate Programs in Education, focusing on the research conducted by recent PhD graduates in this field.

Severino (2006, 2007, 2009) dimensions Education in its social relevance and, thus, emphasizes the importance of what is produced as knowledge in the area. Severino (2006, p. 40) says that "Education, as a practice of social intervention, is a universal mediation of work practices, social life and culture, practices that, in turn, constitute the mediations of men's own historical existence".

Considering these considerations and in line with the objective of this research, we agree with Severino (2006, 2007, 2009) when he emphasizes some concerns about the production of knowledge, especially in the training of researchers in the area of Education, in specific graduate programs. The author's concerns are related to the way research in graduate studies in the area has been produced, especially the theses defended. These concerns involve the institutionalization of research work in the area of Education through graduate studies and the methodological construction of research by researchers.

Regarding the institutionalization of research work in Postgraduate Education, Severino (2007) highlighted the importance of postgraduate studies as a space for training researchers in the area and also the relevance and social commitment of research. As a privileged space for conducting research in the field of Education, graduate programs have become the *sine qua non* for researcher training. These programs provide infrastructure, guidance, seminars, lectures, and opportunities to participate in events, as well as to disseminate and publish their studies. The institutionalization of research in graduate programs provided the existence of its own space with conditions for the development of research for researchers in the area. For Severino (2009, p. 18):

[...] the creation of institutionalized postgraduate environments is justified only by providing conditions for research practitioners to develop their work, through didactic resources and strategic support, works that must be translated into scientific reports, the dissertation, in the case of the master's degree, and the thesis, in the case of the doctorate.

Another aspect for this author is the social commitments that the researcher has in relation to the production of his research. Based on these considerations by the author, we verified that research in Education has adhered to themes originating from social issues that enter educational and school issues. These are transformations in society that are linked to gender issues, the construction of identities, democracy and political and social issues. On the other hand, there are studies that have highlighted questions about social inequality, the problem of privatization of public services, that is, economic and social issues as a debate that generates the research themes. The transformations in society have been reflected in the ways of doing research, starting with what will be researched, and, in this sense, certain aspects gain strength in the construction of research and others do not. Based on this situation, Severino (2007, p. 32) considers that:



Graduate studies cannot be considered outside this context, as if it were disconnected from the commitment of education to a project of transformation of society and emancipation of all people. Like any other segment of education, Graduate Studies, as a place of knowledge production, has social and political commitments to understanding and seeking solutions to the crucial problems faced by Brazilian society in each area of knowledge specifically. The advancement of knowledge must be articulated with the investigation of socially relevant problems, considering the demands of Brazilian society.

Regarding the methodological construction of the theses, Severino (2006) also highlights the need for a research work guided by scientific criteria and alerted to the specificity of the area of Education in the process of investigation of the educational reality. Severino (2006) points out the need to use scientific criteria in the construction of research in the area of Education. The use or not of these criteria are rebutting in the way research in the area of Education has been built, in the choices of what is being investigated. The way we understand knowledge and its investigation will be methodologically reflected in research: "It turns out that the choice and use of certain research methodologies are dependent on these epistemological references, that is, on a certain conception of the subject/object relationship" (Severino, 2006, p. 47).

For Severino (2007), the area of Education has a great influence from postmodern perspectives, in which the subject/object relationship suffers shocks in its conceptualization form and "[...] is characterized by rejecting any claim to a totalizing thought, to Enlightenment metanarratives, to universal references, to transcendences and essences" (Severino, 2007, p. 36).

Gatti is another author, besides Severino, in whom we refer to in this research. Gatti (2001, 2005, 2010), a researcher in the area of Education, highlighted in her texts, published throughout the first decade of this new century, transformations in the way of researching in the area of Education that are still underway today. These are approaches that today are more consolidated in certain research themes. These are problems linked to social and school daily life and to human singularization within the scope of educational policies and in the school universe. Both Gatti (2001) and Severino (2007) state that it is not possible to think about the research carried out in the area of Education without looking at the context in which these researches are produced. For Gatti (2001, p. 111):

The future of graduate education is anchored in its specific history in our country and in how it presents itself at the present moment. In this sense, several questions need to be answered: What is the purpose and nature of graduate studies, at a time

of accelerated changes? What value do they have for people and society? Answers should be sought from diverse interest groups and with different references.

Still in Gatti's (2001) analysis, the research focuses – the problems that socially presented themselves in a new century that challenged the area of Education in Brazil – were different from the problems and concerns compared to the 1980s and 1990s of the last century. In these decades, research in Education was strongly influenced by the social context experienced in the country with the process of redemocratization and the promulgation of a new Constitution. In this new Constitution, demands would be absorbed for a public and universal education that would start to dialogue with its own demands, and not only with demands external to the educational and school interests of the research community and the school community.

The 1980s and 1990s were reserved for the reduction of inequalities by a social justice project and by a collective and social movement to solve problems in the area of Education. Thus, the research in Education was led to think about how these demands of its time and the sources of research would be researched and how the procedures with the information to be collected would be carried out. However, with social transformations in constant progress, Gatti (2001, p. 116) understands that conceptions that once structured thematic and methodological choices have been substantially modified: "The dominant conceptions today are entering a crisis. "The contrasts between scientific knowledge, ethical knowledge, and social equity should deserve a broad and public discussion [...]". Gatti (2005) states that the changes that took place in the early years of the 21st century paved the way for majority approaches in dealing with human subjectivity in research in Education. Research in Education began to focus on issues related to man's discoveries about his own understanding of the world. Modes of understanding the world with unitary and universal visions were then discarded in the production of research and regional and local ways of living began to occupy the concerns of many research in the area of Education, thus constituting a new characterization of research.

The broad philosophical, political or religious views typical of modernity, which intended to make unicist norms acceptable, by which collectivities, science and progress should be governed, giving an integrated, explanatory view of events and facts, are now considered only stylized narrations and not objective views of reality. The standardization they impose, their claim to universal objectivity and their consequent promises of salvation for individuals and groups were disqualified by historical events, totalitarianisms, the decimation of populations, aggressive, restrictive and pauperizing collectivizations (Gatti, 2005, p. 599).

As a result of these issues, according to Gatti (2005), in research in Education other forms of research construction came into discussion, because, after all, new ways of questioning reality were in place. How was it possible to investigate other behaviors, conflicts and customs that formed in an era of digital technologies and the construction of identities of small groups in society? Undoubtedly, such questions arose and began to be considered and, in one way or another, they even reverberated in a new dynamic of school and educational life. So, it means

[...] recent educational research has focused on other perspectives in the school space, diving there with other postures, dispositions and values, bringing greater nuances on the daily work of teachers and students, questioning whether this 'instrumental' is so instrumental, so technically or so scientifically referenced (Gatti, 2005, p. 604).

Given these issues, Gatti (2010) considers that an area of research is not constituted only by the dynamics of its theoretical orientations and research methods in evidence, and must take into account the conditions and context in which researchers and research institutions are immersed, since what happens in society is capable of reorganizing the entire way of thinking and research. It is, therefore, a complex equation, as Gatti (2010, p. 39) states: "There is a search for new ways of understanding things, events, realities".

The place of research and knowledge production in Education, considering the historical-social conditions in which these investigations are being carried out, leads us to think that the possibilities related to research in Education, as well as its themes and research problems, are inserted in a context of public policies that cannot be denied or neglected. For Nascimento, Cruz and Moura (2023), the current context of society organization is based on neoliberal ideals, in which institutional policies reflect the market interests of the State and international organizations for the educational field.

The National Higher Education Policy contributed to the development of this level of education in Brazil in all regions, reflected especially from a broad movement of reforms triggered by the Lula governments (2003-2006; 2007-2010), already in the molds of neoliberal capitalism. This reform movement influenced the increase in HEIs and consequently the increase in research productions. In this regard, even though the focus of this work is not to debate the neo or ultra-neoliberal conditions in which institutions are

embedded, as well as their productions, it is necessary to understand and acknowledge what the recent knowledge production in Education indicates within this context.

The understanding of educational realities has been a constant search of researchers in the area of Education and, therefore, it should be noted that the choices about the themes and problems to be researched also involve issues of society. Cardoso (1996) states that research choices cannot have only theoretical or academic relevance, but mainly social. Therefore, presenting and debating what has been produced in research in Education is fundamental for the production of knowledge.

#### 4 Knowing the results: what points us to empiricism

Understanding the place of the research and the historical-social connections that it needs to present to address a socially relevant theme was one of the ways to justify the need to think about the themes that were chosen and presented in the doctoral theses mapped in this research.

We read the abstracts of the 459 selected theses with the objective of identifying the research themes in the theses defended in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022 in the Graduate Programs in Education of public universities in the Northeast region of the country. The understanding adopted on the research themes considers that these are general discussions related to the problem to be researched and, therefore, includes the possibility of its systematization.

After reading the abstracts of the 459 theses, we systematized them based on the themes indicated by the authors that were presented in this research. The survey of the themes identified in the abstracts of the 459 theses and their systematization provided an overview of the concerns of researchers with doctoral degrees in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022. Such concerns can be seen in the demonstration in Chart 1.

**Table 1** – Systematization of the themes identified in the thesis summaries

<b>Categories</b>
Evaluation
School Culture
Curriculum
Educational Practice

Teaching
Education
Extracurricular
Teacher training.
History of Education
Educational Policies
Other themes

Source: the authors (2023)

We verified that the area of Education, considering the selected theses, has a wide thematic set explored. We understand that a certain social expansion of educational action and the presence of doctoral students from other areas of knowledge, in doctorates in the area of Education, allow the expansion of issues that go beyond the scope of traditional educational and school problems and that we present as "other themes", that is, those whose issues are related to discussions of society. These discussions reflect the behavioral, cultural and social changes in a society that somehow enter the school space or become part of the educational debate.

It is worth mentioning that we are considering the educational debate differently from the school debate. The school debate refers us to the issues that occur or concern the school environment, that is, referring to the daily life of this space. The educational debate is linked to the general issues of Education that affect all school communities and that are debated and defined outside the school environment, such as educational policies and other norms of state educational policy. When we deal with "other topics" to organize society discussions, we mention, for example, the debate on gender. Thus, we constitute this category that is not limited to the school or the educational itself.

In the case of "other topics", we verified certain niches of discussion present in the theses. These are discussions about new technologies whose debates extend to social media, image, cyberculture and digital culture in general. Another type of common discussion involves social inclusion, that is, they are discussions about deafness, the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), physical and intellectual disabilities, without direct connection with the educational or school debate. There are also discussions about art containing visual arts, folklore and African aesthetics. Other issues addressed lead us into discussions about recent social problems, such as bullying, fake news, the black body, human rights, and meritocracy. Of the 459 themes mentioned, there are 63 themes that fall into this systematization in the category "other themes". Another highlight is that we did not

see mention of the Covid-19 pandemic in the abstracts of the selected theses. This may be due to the fact that the research that constituted the thesis reports was initiated before the Covid-19 pandemic.

As for the categories mentioned in Chart 1 that refer to the school and educational debate, we highlight in alphabetical order: evaluation, school culture, curriculum, teaching, education, extracurricular, teacher training, History of Education and educational policies. In relation to these categories, we found that "teacher education" was the theme in 60 theses defended. We identified different ways to discuss teacher training, such as initial training, continuing education, critical training, self-training, omnilateral training, multi-referential training, undergraduate training, training in digital technologies and transdisciplinary training.

Then, "educational practice" was studied in 63 theses as a thematic category. This categorized theme brought different approaches, such as knowledge, practices, life stories, work, professionalization, conditions, university, performance, the early years of school, illness and career. We found that the categories "teacher training" and "teaching" make up almost a third of the themes of the selected theses, that is, 123 researches, representing 26.9%, which indicates that teaching, encompassing training and working life, figures strongly as a research issue in Education in the Northeast region.

The thematic category "evaluation" was selected as the theme in 20 theses. This thematic category was addressed in different contexts, such as, for example, considering the evaluation of Capes, the institutional evaluation, the evaluation of teaching and teacher training and the evaluation of *Prova Brasil*, high school and school performance.

"School culture" was the subject of research in 36 theses, whose approaches focus on issues such as school council, school demands, school bookkeeping, school daily life, schooling, pedagogical practices and school discipline.

The "curriculum" was thematic researched in 28 theses, considering issues such as high school, experiences, self-sufficiency, orality, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), the body, curriculum policy, the feminine, neoliberalism, licensure, music, knowledge, difference and early childhood education.

As an "extracurricular" thematic category, this refers to content not present in the traditional school curriculum and emerges as a demand for student education. This thematic category was selected for research in 64 theses. Extracurricular approaches refer

to different issues, such as indigenous, bilingual, environmental, musical, aesthetic, quilombola, decolonial, socialist, popular, ethnic-racial, biocentric, phenomenological and astronomical.

Another thematic category is “education”, which was identified as the theme in 31 of the selected theses. In this category, higher education, early childhood education, vocational education, youth and adult education and rural education are addressed.

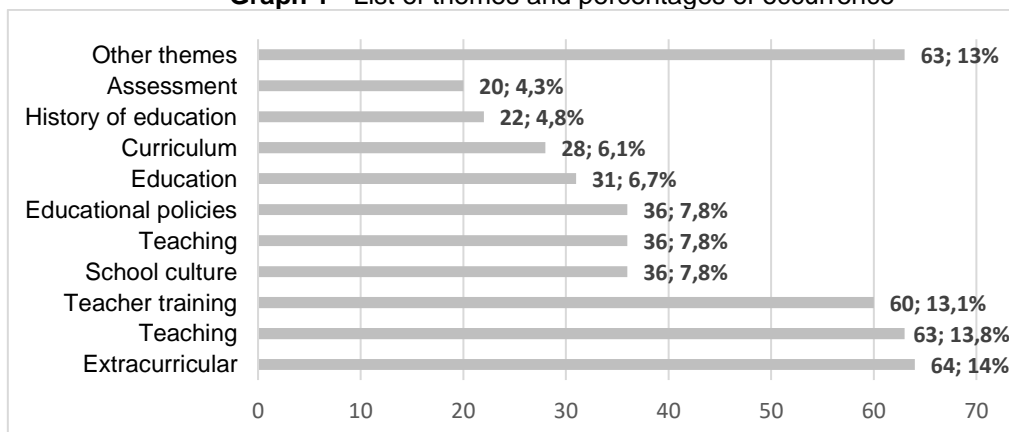
The thematic category "teaching" was identified in 36 theses. The approaches involve discussions on learning, literacy, didactics, socio-educational teaching, human formation, the teaching of school subjects and teaching in different specificities.

Regarding the thematic category "History of Education", there are 22 theses that explore it. In these studies, the approaches are related to instruction, orality, biographies, memory, teacher training, professional education, educational modalities and public policies.

Finally, we mention the thematic category “educational policies”, which was the subject of research in 36 theses. Approaches to this thematic category refer to policies aimed at the university, postgraduate studies, affirmative actions, student assistance, organizational management, democratic management, financing, *Projovem*, the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), outsourcing, integral education, the National Program for the Integration of Professional Education with Basic Education in the Modality of Youth and Adult Education (PROEJA), neoliberal policies, the education system, basic education and school management.

Graph 1 shows the percentage representation of the themes identified in the theses that make up the empirical material of this research.

**Graph 1 - List of themes and percentages of occurrence**



Source: the authors (2023)

In order to reinforce this information related to the survey of the themes in the theses, we present, in Table 2, the systematization of the categories and the percentage of the themes present, thus composing an overview of the themes identified in the selected theses.

**Table 2** - Number and percentage of themes identified in the theses

Categories	Topics	%
Extracurricular	64	14
Educational Practice	63	13.8
Teacher training.	60	13.1
School Culture	36	7.8
Teaching	36	7.8
Educational Policies	36	7.8
Education	31	6.7
Curriculum	28	6.1
Hlstory of Education	22	4.8
Evaluation	20	4.3
Other themes	63	13.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: the authors (2023).

After the presentation on the themes of interest in doctoral research in the Northeast region of Brazil in 2020, 2021 and 2022, we can consider that the privileged research themes in the Graduate Programs in the area of Education indicate an overview of problematizations of teachers and researchers in this region of the country that reflect the concerns and the way of recording the educational reality.

The election of some themes and others is not only related to personal interests or those of advisors and academia in general, but also refers to the issues elected as relevant by administrators in the area of Education regarding educational policies, as well as the social context or even the facts or events that somehow impacted the school and educational community.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results of the study indicate that there is a diversity of themes taken as the core of the theses defended in the period from 2020 to 2022 in the Graduate Programs in



Education, in public universities in the Northeast region of the country. They also indicate that, even with such diversity, the themes "teacher training" and "teaching" are highlighted, which may signal the relevance that these specific themes still have for Education. Adding to these prominent themes, we have the theme "teaching", which, although it obtained a small percentage, is a theme that, directly or indirectly, interrelates with the problems of teaching and teacher training. On the other hand, diversity also indicates that other themes than those considered classic, such as evaluation, educational policies and curriculum, have gained space, as demonstrated by the researchers' interest in extracurricular themes, as identified in 64 theses (14%), and other themes (63 theses, 13.8%) presenting different themes of a social and even school and/or educational nature.

Furthermore, we verified, at the end of this research, the potential for discussion that the survey of research themes in student productions in Graduate Programs in Education can provide. These are historical and contextual discussions about education and the understanding of how these programs have been moving regarding the role of education in society. It also indicates how the new generations of researchers in the area of Education should address the issues of their area in future research and also possibly in professional performance, whether in the area of Education itself or in other areas in which an educational action is necessary.

We consider that a more analytical investigation is necessary on the topics that escape the traditional discussions in the area of Education and that we systematize as "other topics" and "extracurricular". It is necessary to consider how future researchers in the area of Education are understanding teacher training and work in the current context, a possible indication of the most urgent problems pointed out by the area of Education.

We emphasize that it is not possible to investigate the research themes without contextualizing the link between education and society, as well as its regionality, including the institutionalization of research in Education in Brazil. We also emphasize that there are many aspects that will delimit the research themes that are not restricted only to the interests of the academy. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the factors that are external to the academic and scientific criteria that will lead the research works, which will be methodologically circumscribed to the themes that will be defined and researched as problems to be investigated.

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