# UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND GENDER: A QUALITATIVE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF BRAZILIAN ARTICLES

## *POLÍTICAS UNIVERSITÁRIAS E GÊNERO: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA QUALITATIVA DE ARTIGOS BRASILEIROS*

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**ABSTRACT**

Universities are powerful spaces for reducing gender inequalities, especially in relation to professional training and scientific development. To this end, actions and university policies need to be developed and aligned in order to promote conditions for entry, permanence and progress in academic careers. In view of this, this study carried out a bibliographic survey in the form of a Qualitative Systematic Review of national productions in Portuguese on university policies and gender, focusing on policies or studies that cover women. In the methodological process, a string of consultations was carried out on the Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Capes. The works selected are from the last ten years, corresponding to the period from 2012 to 2022. The initial survey resulted in 312 articles. After checking and analyzing the articles, it was possible to find 09 papers on the subject. As a result, it was identified that university policies and gender, especially in relation to women, are incipient and still insufficient to encompass the new facets perceived as difficulties in the training of female students in Higher Education.

**Keywords:** University policies. Gender. Women. Higher education.

**RESUMO**

As universidades se constituem como espaços potentes para a diminuição das iniquidades de gênero, principalmente em relação à formação profissional e o desenvolvimento científico. Para tal propósito, ações e políticas universitárias precisam ser desenvolvidas e alinhadas a fim de promover condições de ingresso, permanência e avanços na carreira acadêmica. Em vista disso, neste estudo foi realizado o levantamento bibliográfico em formato de Revisão Sistemática Qualitativa das produções nacionais em português sobre as políticas universitárias e gênero, tendo como foco as políticas ou estudos que abrangem as mulheres. No processo metodológico, foram realizadas string de consulta no Portal da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Capes. Os trabalhos selecionados são dos últimos dez anos, correspondente ao período de 2012 a 2022. O levantamento inicial resultou em 312 artigos, após averiguação e análise dos artigos foi possível constatar 09 trabalhos sobre o tema pesquisado. Como resultado foi identificado que as políticas universitárias e gênero, principalmente referente ao feminino, são incipientes e ainda insuficientes para englobar as novas facetas percebidas como dificuldades na formação das discentes no Ensino Superior.

**Palavras-chave:** Políticas Universitárias. Gênero. Mulheres. Ensino Superior.

## Introduction

Women's struggle for policies that represent the female gender is an old one, dating back to the 70s. History reveals that it was in the mid-1980s that the first public policies related to women were created, such as the first State Council for the Status of Women, created in 1983 (GERVASONI, COSTA, 2017).

Furthermore, by taking a historical look at the process of women's struggle for policies, it is also possible to identify that in recent decades, various agendas and achievements related to gender issues have been influenced by the feminist movement, including the extension of maternity leave, access to public education, the professional regularization of domestic workers, and retirement for rural workers (MIRANDA, 2009).

As well as contributing to changes in social reality, the struggles of the feminist movements also influenced cultural studies. As a result, there was investment in feminist and gender studies in order to help understand what was being experienced by this social segment, as well as to raise the new demands revealed by society.

In this study, gender, especially women's gender, and the policies developed in universities are topics of interest. It is worth pointing out that we understand the concept of gender according to the definition given by Scoot (1989), in which gender

is understood as a social construction, mainly of ideas about the roles that are proper to men and women, making up a social organization of the relationship between the sexes. In this social organization, the ways in which characteristics are thought of and valued also help to define what is masculine and feminine, especially in relation to inequalities between subjects (LOURO, 1997). The social construction of gender is permeated by existing power relations, which are initiated by a patriarchal culture that points to gender privileges, mainly for men, and which are reinforced by colonial and modern situations and by capitalism (LOURO, 1997).

Thus, education, which is an environment that fosters the attainment of knowledge and the definition of power in science, has also become one of the areas of struggle for women. Bibliographic records show that in the field of education, women also began to make achievements from the 1970s onwards, through the expansion of female participation in university careers (GUEDES, 2008).

However, despite the progress made in terms of university admissions, women are still underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers, making up a significant demand in higher education (CESARIO, BIM, MACIEL, 2017; SANTOS, CARVALHO, BARRETO, 2021), as well as occupying lower numbers in the labor market when compared to men (RAIS, 2021).

It is worth recognizing that the women's struggle in Higher Education is not over yet, highlighting the importance and need to invest in new public discussion agendas to compose policies that encompass gender, women and the institutional cultures that occur within universities. Since we still see systems within the educational sphere that are based on inequality and exclusion.

In view of this, research into gender and the development of policies to combat inequalities pertaining to these issues is still necessary, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2003, p. 56) emphasizes "[...] we have the right to be equal whenever difference inferiorizes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality mischaracterizes us". Paraphrasing this quote, only when we recognize gender differences, including in policies, will inclusion and equity be possible.

Regarding the need to invest in policies that address gender, the concept of gender mainstreaming in public policies is pertinent. Through this concept, we can

consider that development and overcoming gender inequalities are the responsibility of all public and social actors (MIRANDA, 2009).

The transversal characteristic includes the constitution of policies, both in the institutional and administrative spheres of all public spheres. In this way, university institutions are powerful spaces for reducing gender inequalities, since they are often publicly accessible places that foster scientific knowledge, even if it was initially constituted as belonging to the male gender (CHASSOT, 2010).

So, considering the empowering role of universities and the need for actions and policies aimed at gender equality in Higher Education, the following question arises: do the policies developed in universities contribute to reducing gender inequalities?

Based on this question, other questions arise such as: what demands do the bibliographic productions point to as necessary to be met by university policies and gender? And, from the perspective of bibliographic productions on gender, are the policies developed in universities seen as sufficient for gender demands?

In order to gather knowledge that can contribute to clarifying these issues, this study aims to carry out a Scoping Review, which aims to understand how academic productions of national articles written in Portuguese are addressing the issue of university policies related to gender.

The article is structured as follows. After this introduction, the methodological path is presented. This is followed by the Qualitative Systematic Review of university policies and gender. After this, the final considerations are presented, ending with the work's references.

**Methodological Methods**

This study aims to present the results of an investigation with a qualitative approach, whose methodological strategy is a bibliographic review, with the formation of a Qualitative Systematic Review (QSR) (GRANT, BOOTH, 2009) on articles related to the themes of university policies and gender, mainly focusing on women.

The QSR is a method that aims to integrate and compare qualitative academic production on a particular field or theme, so that it is possible to discuss and list characteristics of these productions, making it possible to identify the contributions and gaps that knowledge presents in a given period of time (GRANT, BOOTH, 2009).

The protocol for this QSR consisted of a survey of national academic productions in Portuguese, prioritizing scientific quality by considering only peer-reviewed articles with the methodology described, and which presented the theme of university gender policies.

The time frame for the search for articles was set at ten years, corresponding to the period from 2012 to 2022. This section sought to ascertain what has been produced in the field of knowledge since 2012, in order to cover current aspects of the subject that are influenced by public and university governance.

To carry out the QSR, the database of the Journal Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) was explored. This repository provided public access to various national journals in its database.

During the consultation, we used a string of keywords that refer to the themes of the study, named as descriptors and used in isolation or in combination: "university policies", "institutional policies", "gender", "woman".

The use of these descriptors made it possible to filter out studies that presented information on the relationship between university policies and gender demands, as well as the possible impact of policies or the lack thereof on the inclusion of women in universities.

The initial survey of academic output was carried out using different descriptors and yielded a total of 312 articles.

The first step in the selection process was to carefully read the titles and abstracts of each article. Articles in languages other than Portuguese were excluded from the study, as were those that did not deal with university gender policies.

After selecting the titles and abstracts, a new selection was made with the filtered articles, in which the full text of the articles was considered, and the two exclusion criteria mentioned above were used again.

Regarding the excluded papers, it is important to note that most of the papers dealt with issues related to women's experiences at university, violence against women within universities, violence against women in other institutional contexts, as well as presenting the results of comparative studies between women and men in university courses.

A total of 9 papers were selected that dealt with issues related to university policies and gender, these papers are shown in Table.

Table - Selected papers on the theme of university gender policies in Brazil

| Title | Author(s) | Year | Magazine |
|---|---|---|---|
| Between silences and invisibilities: lack of curricular discussions and institutional gender and sexuality policies in the university | Elder Luan dos Santos Silva | 2019 | Revista Diversidade e Educação |
| Student assistance for LGBTQIA+ students: an analysis of institutional policies within the scope of the University Residence of a Federal University in Brazil | Lana Lisiêr de Lima Palmeira | 2022 | Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educação |
| Women in the top magistory labor market | Raimunda Nonata da Silva Machado; Ana Carla de Melo Almeida | 2021 | Perspectiva |
| Gender and sexualities in the context of the public University: a case study of the Project of lives - UFOP | Felipe Viero K. Machado Mendonça; Margareth Diniz; Marta Regina Maia | 2021 | Revista Internacional de Educação Superior |
| Gender Studies in the development of institutional gender policies at two higher education institutions in RS | Daiana Marques Sobrosa; Karina Oliveira de Freitas | 2021 | Diversidade sexual, étnico-racial e de gênero: saberes plurais e resistências |
| Motherhood for self-care: challenges for the construction of gender equity | Silvana Maria Bitencourt | 2020 | Estudos de Sociologia |
| Human rights education and multiculturalism: gender policies in higher education | Jemina de Araújo Moraes Andrade; Miquelly Pastana Tito Sanches; Helena Cristina | 2019 | Dialogia |

| | Guimarães Queiroz Simões | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender Equity in Education and Science: New Challenges in Brazil Today | Vanessa Moreira Sígolo; Thais Gava; Sandra Unbehaum | 2021 | Cadernos Pagu |
| Gender Inequality in Academic Careers in Brazil | Marília Moschkovich; Ana Maria F. Almeida | 2015 | Dados – Revista de Ciências Sociais |

Source: Authors' production.

Looking at Table, we can see that women produced more content about university gender policies between 2012 and 2022, while only one of the selected papers was written by men. This reinforces the need to train male allies in research related to gender equity.

The selected papers provided essential information to form a perspective on the place that gender, especially women, has taken in the development of policies within universities. This information can help to understand the problem of the influence of policies developed within educational institutions for the professional training of women, without disregarding the performative and cultural characteristics of this gender, considering the aspects of inclusion for career development and scientific engagement. This information is presented below.

**Qualitative Systematic Review of university gender policies**

After surveying the articles, the original texts of the selected papers were read in order to integrate and compare the material. Through these readings, it was possible to highlight that:

Silva's research (2019), aimed to reflect on the processes of silencing, as well as addressing how gender and sexuality issues are being made unfeasible in the curricula of undergraduate courses and in the institutional Student Assistance policies of the Federal University of Recôncavo of the Bahia. The method used was ethnomethodology, using a qualitative approach.

According to the author, despite universities being described as a possible space for the expression of diversity, it is still observed that these educational institutions produce and reproduce hegemonic norms of gender and sexual orientation, especially in places of institutional political formation or learning, such as classrooms. Due to the absence of these themes in the curricula of the courses and university policies, the responsibility for the debate in the classroom is left to the students themselves, causing the feeling that they are being monothematic during their academic training (SILVA, 2019).

Palmeira (2022) also discusses institutional policies linked to the assistance of LGBTQIA+ students in her study, where she looks at the intersection between gender and sexuality. The author's research aimed to analyze whether the Federal University of Alagoas has institutional student assistance policies that cover gender and sexual orientation that differ from heterocisnormativity, with a specific focus on policies related to the University Residence. As a methodological approach, the research used a literature review and documentary analysis based on the propositions of Bardin's content analysis, so the research was based on a qualitative approach.

The author emphasizes that the democratization of access to higher education can be considered a phenomenon of just a few decades (VERÇOSA, 1997). She points out that although the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) is an achievement of the student struggle, this program is not standardized across the different Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES). In this sense, in relation to the focus of the research, she argues that the specific needs of the LGBTQIA+ student public are neglected, the actions developed by the university refer to creating female, male and mixed wards in the University Residences (PALMEIRA, 2022).

However, the characterization of the mixed wing is linked to sexual orientation and not to the composition of an environment without gender normativity, thus indicating a need for institutional gender policies to mature, including those that consider trans women and men (PALMEIRA, 2022).

The research by Machado, Diniz and Maia (2021) focuses on analyzing how extension projects related to gender that are developed within universities can

contribute to reducing gender violence and recognizing the existence of gender and sexuality differences within the university institution. To do this, the theoretical perspective used was post-structuralist studies, especially studies on gender performativity and Queer Theory, common to Butler's work (2002, 2012), and the method used was the case study.

This work (MACHADO, DINIZ, MAIA, 2021) shows the influence that the actions of professors in university extension programs with a multidisciplinary and critical character can have on institutionalizing policies that deal with social demands, including gender, recognized by university research. As Anísio Teixeira (1988) states, the university needs to be in dialogue with society and be an institution that shapes national culture.

Still on the influence that teaching actions have on institutional organization and the constitution of university policies in favor of the lack of gender equality, the authors Moschkovich and Almeida (2015) carried out a study focused on the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), with the aim of investigating the chances of women gaining access to the highest levels of academic careers, as well as the management positions that teachers can occupy in Brazil.

Methodologically, the authors carried out a study on academic careers and collected data on the teaching staff at Unicamp. According to the authors, this study provides conditions to discuss how "gender relations contribute to structuring teaching careers at Brazilian public universities" (MOSCHKOVICH, ALMEIDA, 2015).

In this work, the authors address the unequal ways in which male and female teachers enter and develop their academic careers. They consider the concentration of female students in specific areas of knowledge, assuming that it is difficult for women to enter certain areas. And they address the low proportion of women occupying senior positions in academic careers.

In this article (MOSCHKOVICH, ALMEIDA, 2015), we observed that female teachers take longer than male teachers to reach the top of their careers, bearing in mind that at the institution we researched, the decision to promote is under the control of the teachers themselves, in a collegiate management system.

In this sense, the academic units, with the approval of the University Council, set specific requirements for promotion, such as scientific production, teaching load and student guidance. The authors therefore point to the need to build university policies that are geared towards promoting the career development of female teachers, with the aim of reducing or abolishing the differences between teachers' careers.

As a way of achieving this, the authors suggest organizational changes, especially in the institutionalized decisions of university collegiate bodies on career promotion policies, which do not take gender biases into account. Although collegiate decisions do not extinguish the gender biases present in promotion processes, they can reduce these effects.

The research by Sobrosa and Freitas (2021) aimed to highlight the importance of Gender Studies, with a focus on Feminist Studies and Queer Theory as a basis for the development of institutional gender policies in the context of two IFES in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) and the Farroupilha Federal Institute (IFFar).

The authors state that debates about gender-related university policies at UFSM began due to evidence of cases involving gender inequalities and violence. As a result, an Institutional Gender Equality Policy Commission (CIG) was appointed, which drew up an Institutional Gender Policy, which is currently being processed by the university collegiate bodies.

At IFFar, in 2016, the Gender and Sexual Diversity Center was established, which aims to implement educational actions and practices aimed at creating a space that considers gender equity and respect for differences as fundamental, as presented by the Diversity and Inclusion policy that was already in force at IFFar (SOBROSA, FREITAS, 2021). The research points to the formative role that higher education institutions must provide, with institutional policies being devices that make it possible to open up space for the creation of new perspectives with a view to thinking about social relations, gender and sexuality.

The work, which was developed by the authors Andrade, Sanches and Simões (2019), aims to discuss public policies on gender issues in Higher Education,

especially those related to Human Rights Education and multiculturalism. The method used was discourse analysis and the research was based on a qualitative approach.

This research made it possible to observe that the promotion and appreciation of human rights must be taken on by universities. It is important to highlight the authors' justification for carrying out the study, namely:

> In this sense, it is extremely important for the academic space that the gender theme is part of the construction of affirmative policies on human rights in the teaching, research and extension tripod, by enabling inquiries about reality, because once the theme is inserted, the place of knowledge and recognition of gender will take back the place, the voice and the turn of those who have been neglected, and so are, due to the colonial gender agenda present in the mentalities/subjectivities and, consequently, in the daily practices of individuals in contemporary times. (ANDRADE, SANCHES, SIMÕES, 2019).

However, despite the findings of the institutional power to develop gender-sensitive human rights education, there are still challenges in terms of how to apply university policies within higher education institutions. During the research, the authors point out that this challenge involves, on the one hand, the ethical and scientific commitment of training and, on the other hand, the historical dimensions that sustain cultures within the university that need to be re-signified. (ANDRADE, SANCHES, SIMÕES, 2019).

Sígolo, Gava and Unbehaum (2021) addressed the panorama of gender inequalities in education and the sciences in Brazil. They point out that Brazil has experienced the creation of policies and programs for gender equality in access to the sciences, mainly to combat the horizontal segregation that is expressed in the lower and unequal participation of women in the exact and technological sciences, especially in engineering, in contrast to the greater or equivalent participation of women in the biological, human and social areas, with emphasis on education (LOMBARDI, 2006; GROSSI et al., 2016).

However, the authors point out that in 2016 there was a crisis in Brazil that fostered a more conservative character in the country. This character is represented by lines of social forces that reinforce actions that are economically liberal, morally regulatory, socially punitive and socially intolerant (ALMEIDA, 2019). To carry out

the proposed overview, the authors used a bibliographic survey, which in addition to consulting banks and catalogs of articles, theses and dissertations, proposed a survey of institutional publications and government and international agency websites.

The research identified that information on public policies on gender was not registered on government websites, so through email contacts with researchers at the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), the authors were able to gather information on public policies on gender. The information obtained was that the policies and actions focused on gender and the sciences have been discontinued, with the exception of the projects included in the 2018 call for proposals for Girls in the Exact Sciences, Engineering and Computing.

Another source of possible shaping of institutional policies highlighted by the authors is the implementation of university extension projects, which aim to encourage young women to enter scientific fields. These are extension projects that receive financial support from the university or from partners such as UNESCO, UN Women, the Brazilian Academy of Sciences and the British Council (SÍGOLO, GAVA; UNBEHAUM, 2021). Another piece of information highlighted in this study is the impact of Brazil's crisis on the political agenda and the subsequent restriction of resources in the educational sphere, an aspect that influences the social and professional development of students.

In her research, Bitencourt (2019) sought to identify how university women deal with motherhood and career building during their undergraduate years, and the author highlighted dilemmas in building gender equity in higher education. To do this, the researcher used fieldwork in two university courses and semi-structured interviews with students.

The author emphasizes in her work that there are no public policies that recognize the participation of mothers in Brazilian universities. This aspect ends up hindering the development of these students and preventing them from pursuing an academic career. In the reports gathered during the interviews, the difficulty in reconciling motherhood and study was pointed out, with students often giving up

the course. As an alternative, the author provokes reflections on the creation of institutional policies in universities that are linked to the co-participation of the state and parents in childcare.

And finally, the research by Machado and Almeida (2021) analyzes the historical insertion of women in the labor market and its relationship with education, by following the path of the search to overcome gender inequalities, the authors also consider the role of the intersection of race by pointing out the ethnic-racial dimensions that intensify the challenges of the lifestyles of women of African descent. The method used during the research was bibliographical and documentary, focusing on three central aspects: the sexual division in the labor market, the relationship between achievements in educational trajectories and performance in the labor market, and the need to create public policies that encourage the equal participation of women in the labor market.

The results of the research (MACHADO, ALMEIDA, 2021) demonstrate the need for public policies based on the principles of transversality, intersectorality and intersectionality, with a view to distributing competencies that are political, institutional and administrative so that women can be empowered, both through schooling and the job market. In addition, the authors recognize that there are other inequities for women of African descent, lesbians, rural women, among others, which also need to be considered and taken into account when creating policies.

**Final thoughts**

Through the analysis, it was possible to see that all of the selected studies have a qualitative approach as their research proposal. The methods used by the authors to carry out the studies were different, with three papers proposing a bibliographical survey and/or document analysis as a research strategy, another three papers using a case study, descriptive process, or fieldwork as a way of collecting and analyzing the study's information, one of the papers was based on discourse analysis, and only one paper used ethnomethodology during the research.

With regard to knowledge on the subject of university gender policies, the articles highlighted the absence of institutional gender policies in universities. They highlighted the need for gender-related policies to mature when they are already institutionalized in universities, so that it is possible to effectively meet the demands and needs of the students who would benefit from these policies.

It was also possible to consider the importance of research carried out within universities. Research such as that in the field of university extension helps to institutionalize gender-related policies, since it identifies the demands of the academic community itself and offers actions or strategies to change gender, sexual and racial inequalities.

Through the studies, it was possible to identify actions practiced in higher education institutions that promote university gender policies. In this sense, attention is drawn to the proposals that can be implemented within universities in order to develop this issue.

In relation to the creation of university policies, the importance of bringing in the debate on Human Rights Education and multiculturalism is reinforced, highlighting the formative role that educational institutions can play. Finally, the works also emphasize the possible consequences that the absence of gender policies in universities can generate, such as the influence on the permanence of women who often experience female conditions such as motherhood, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, constituting a social and cultural demand in relation to the production of care.

In view of the above, this Qualitative Systematic Analysis recognizes that because the educational indicators for access to higher education show that women's trajectories are more homogeneous than those of men (INEP, 2020), a false perception has been created that access to education on the gender agenda has been resolved. Aspects that the selected studies argue against.

Gender demands have not yet been met by the policies developed within universities. With the entry of women into higher education, new facets of the inequalities experienced in education have become more noticeable (CARVALHO, 2001, 2004), such as the conception of the male gender linked to science, the low

level of assistance for women to stay at university, horizontal segregation in undergraduate courses, the relationship between motherhood and studies, the possibilities for women to work in the job market, and the intersectional aspects of race and sexual orientation that amplify the difficulties mentioned above.

Thus, the studies show that institutional gender policies are still in their infancy, but have become emerging needs, and are increasingly evident in the university context, as well as being works that emphasize the insufficiency of institutionalized policies to cover the reality experienced by female students in the university space, and that new proposals are needed.

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