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The closure of multigrade schools in rural territories: what the research shows (2005–2022)

O fechamento de escolas multisseriadas em território campesino: o que apontam as pesquisas (2005 a 2022)

El cierre de escuelas multigrado en territorio campesino: lo que señalan las investigaciones (2005-2022)

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Abstract

This article presents a qualitative approach to the state of the art regarding the closure of multigrade schools in rural areas. We mapped studies on the closure of these schools identified in the platforms of the Catalog of Theses and Dissertations of the Office to Coordinate Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (CAPES) and the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), in the period from 2005 to 2022, to shed light on contemporary tensions and discussions in the scientific production in general, and the state of the art in the field of rural education in particular. These searches identified a total of 10 such dissertations/theses in the two databases. These were read with the support of the IRaMuTeQn software and classified according to maximum approximation to the theme of “closure of multigrade schools in rural territories.” The results indicated fragility of research involving closure of multigrade schools in master’s programs in the country and the need for ongoing research in doctoral programs.

Keywords: Territory. Rural Education. State of the Art.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma abordagem qualitativa do tipo estado do conhecimento sobre o fechamento de escolas multisseriadas em território campesino. Neste trabalho, foram mapeadas as pesquisas sobre o fechamento das escolas multisseriadas em território campesino, por meio das plataformas do Catálogo de Teses e Dissertações da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) e da Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações (BDTD), no período de 2005 a 2022. Nesta pesquisa, objetivamos desvelar tensionamentos e discussões contemporâneas por meio da produção científica, de forma geral, e, em específico, de Estados de Conhecimento na área da Educação do Campo, com foco no fechamento de escolas multisseriadas. O corpus de análise final se configurou em 10 dissertações captadas nas plataformas Capes e BD TD, com a leitura de todos os trabalhos e auxílio do software IRaMuTeQ. Essas pesquisas foram analisadas e categorizadas com aproximação máxima à temática “fechamento da escola multisseriada na Educação do Campo”. Os resultados indicaram a fragilidade nas pesquisas sobre o fechamento de escolas multisseriadas em cursos de mestrado e a necessidade de continuidade dessas pesquisas em cursos de doutorado.

Palavras-chave: Território. Educação do Campo. Estado de conhecimento.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un enfoque cualitativo del tipo estado del conocimiento sobre el cierre de escuelas multigrado en territorio campesino. En este trabajo, se mapearon las investigaciones sobre el cierre de escuelas multigrado en territorio campesino a través de las plataformas del Catálogo de Tesis y Disertaciones de la Coordinación de Perfeccionamiento de Personal de Nivel Superior (Capes) y de la Biblioteca Digital Brasileña de Tesis y Disertaciones (BDTD), en el período de 2005 a 2022. En esta investigación, nuestro objetivo fue revelar tensiones y discusiones contemporáneas a través de la producción científica, en general, y, específicamente, de Estados de Conocimiento en el área de Educación del Campo, con enfoque en el cierre de escuelas multigrado. El corpus de análisis final se configuró con 10 disertaciones recopiladas en las plataformas Capes y BD TD, con la lectura de todos los trabajos y la ayuda del software IRaMuTeQ. Estas investigaciones fueron analizadas y categorizadas con una aproximación máxima a la temática "cierre de la escuela multigrado en la Educación del Campo". Los resultados indicaron la fragilidad en las investigaciones sobre el cierre de escuelas multigrado en cursos de maestría y la necesidad de continuar estas investigaciones en cursos de doctorado.

Palabras clave: Territorio. Educación del Campo. Estado del conocimiento.

Introduction

The term Rural Education emerged from the first First Brazilian National Meeting of Educators of Agrarian Reform (ENERA), held in 1997 and promoted by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), the University of Brasília (UnB), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB).

The First Brazilian National Conference for Basic Education in the Countryside, held in Luziânia, Goiás, in 1998, represented the consolidation of discussions initiated at the first ENERA and marked the affirmation of the Rural Education Movement.

In 2004, during the Second Brazilian National Conference for Basic Education in the Countryside, new directions for struggle were defined, signaling the development of a historical educational process driven and organized by social actors across different rural territories.

This Movement conducted studies and debates around the construction of an educational project for rural schools—not just any school, but one designed to address the struggles and needs of rural populations. At the time, there were already *Escolas Famílias Agrícolas* (Agricultural Family Schools – EFAs), which adopted the Pedagogy of Alternation; adult and youth literacy efforts led by the *Movimento de Educação de Base* (Grassroots Education Movement – MEB); Indigenous and forest peoples' advocacy for schools rooted in their cultural traditions; schools established in MST settlements and camps; and training initiatives for teachers and technical professionals in productive sectors. Additionally, numerous isolated schools existed in various parts of the country, where local communities actively fought for quality education (Conferência Nacional: Por Uma Educação Básica Do Campo, 1998).

These isolated schools, now referred to in public education networks as single-teacher or multi-teacher schools, are educational units located throughout rural territories and primarily offer early childhood education and the early years of elementary school. These schools are organized into classes composed of students from different educational stages or grade levels who study simultaneously in the same classroom. In other words, these schools are structured as *multisseriadas* (multigrade)¹ classrooms, in which students from various grades are enrolled in a single class under the instruction of one teacher.

This study mapped research on the closure of multigrade schools in rural territories using the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog and the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) from 2005 to 2022. This time frame was chosen because the earliest studies on multigrade schools date from 2005.

The objective of this paper is to reveal contemporary tensions and debates by scientific research, particularly in the form of States of Knowledge in the field of Rural Education, with a focus on the closure of multigrade schools.

We outline this work in four sections: “Multigrade Schools in Rural Territories”; “Methodological Pathways,” which includes the subsections “Research in the CAPES Database” and “Research in the BD TD Database”; “Information Sources and their Interfaces”; and “The Multigrade School in the Context of Closure: What the CAPES and BD TD Research Shows,” which includes the subsection “Main Findings.”

This work is affiliated with the CNPq Research Group “Cultures, Partnerships, and Rural Education,” under the research line “Teaching, Curriculum, and Cultural Processes,” in the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES).

Multigrade Schools in Rural Territories

Lichand *et al.* (2023) highlight that in 2019, 86% of multigrade classrooms were located in Brazil's rural territories, present in 72.5% of schools offering elementary education in rural areas. Of the “818,922

students enrolled in multigrade classrooms in 2019, 85.9% (703,499) were in the early years of elementary education, while only 14.1% were in the later years" (Lichand *et al.*, 2023, p. 8; our translation). The authors further note that "24,152 multigrade schools were operating in Brazil in 2019, representing 20% of schools offering elementary education" (Lichand *et al.*, 2023, p. 8; our translation).

Most multigrade schools are located in rural communities and represent both access to knowledge and the right to begin formal education for rural populations. Given this, social movements and community leaderships have broadened their struggles to include preventing the closure of these educational units and advocating for improved educational quality in rural territories.

Arroyo (1999, p. 33; our translation) reflects on the negative connotation often attributed to multigrade schools:

I want to tell you something: I studied in a rural multigrade school—in fact, no one even used the word 'multigrade' back then. I had never heard of grades. The word multigrade carries a negative connotation in the urban graded-school model, as if the urban school were the ideal, the model to follow, and the multigrade school something to be eliminated in favor of implementing the graded model in rural areas. Please do not make that mistake [...] you know that the graded system is disappearing all over the world [...] Brazil is one of the last countries still maintaining this rigid annual grade system.

Souza *et al.* (2017) argue that the dominant school model is in conflict with rural realities. Teachers feel pressured to balance the demands of public education systems with the specificities of their school contexts. In general, in the dynamics of school organization, there is an attempt to make different children be subjected to a standardized school time in the form of grading. This means school activities disregard diversity, producing inequalities in children's learning in the performance of the proposed activities (Souza, *et al.*, 2017). According to the authors,

The findings show that teachers are unprepared to manage student differences. Thus, the easier path is to homogenize groups to avoid the diversity present in classrooms, which present students who may not adapt to planned activities or to the imposed school schedule (Souza *et al.*, 2017, p. 44; our translation).

Multigrade schools are inherently based on heterogeneity in the teaching and learning process, involving students of various ages, cultural backgrounds, and knowledge systems in an integrated learning environment shaped by interaction between students and educators. These schools ensure the right to education close to home in rural territories while engaging with local cultures, knowledge, and ways of life. In this sense, Monti (2009) emphasizes the importance of studying culture in teacher education, stating:

[...] education is culture understood through its subjective appropriation, aimed at individual differentiation within one's environment. Education requires both experiences and concepts, which are essential for the development of thought, enabling us to name and understand our surroundings and engage with them (Monti, 2009, p. 202; our translation).

We must also highlight the concept of territoriality, which, in addition to its political dimensions, "also encompasses economic and cultural relationships, as it is closely linked to how people use the land, how they organize themselves in space, and how they attribute meaning to place" (Haesbaert, 2010, p. 22; our translation).

In this light, rural schools can be understood as spaces of specific territorialities:

Territory is land and people, that is, an identity, the fact and feeling of belonging to what belongs to us. Territory is the basis for work, residence, material and spiritual exchanges in life, all of which it influences. When we speak of territory, we are speaking of used territory, used by a given population (Santos, 2000, p. 96; our translation).

The various social groups living in rural areas construct their own territorialities and seek a school that reflects their identities, whether Indigenous, *quilombola*, fishing communities, or farming populations. This diversity is thus represented in the school's pedagogical practices.

Multigrade schools in rural territories are organized into three categories: unified classes (only early childhood education students); multi-stage classes (students from early childhood and early elementary grades); and multi classes (only elementary students) (Lichand *et al.*, 2023).

An important point concerns the term multigrade. Brazilian legislation regarding elementary education has gradually replaced the term “série” (grade) with “ano” (year) due to the implementation of Law No. 11,114/2005, which mandates enrollment of six-year-olds in elementary school, and Law No. 11,274/2006, which extends elementary education to nine years. These laws required public school systems to implement changes by 2010. Consequently, terms such as multi-year or multi-stage schools have emerged to describe these rural schools, which are formally classified as single-teacher² or multi-teacher schools. However, we adopt the term multigrade in this study, as it is the term most frequently used in the research found in the CAPES and BDTD databases.

Methodological aspects

This study is characterized as a state of knowledge analysis, understood as: “the identification, registration, and categorization that lead to reflection and synthesis of scientific production in a given area over a defined period, encompassing journals, theses, dissertations, and books on a specific theme” (Morosini, 2015, p. 102; our translation).

Constructing a State of Knowledge allows for mapping existing ideas on a given topic, guiding the researcher toward reliable sources, identifying underexplored subtopics, or even revealing significant gaps in the literature (Morosini & Fernandes, 2014).

In this context, we used the State of Knowledge method to examine how the theme of multigrade school closures in rural territories has been addressed in theses and dissertations. Our sources were the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog and the BDTD.

It is important to note that CAPES is a foundation linked to the Ministry of Education (MEC), responsible for expanding and consolidating graduate programs *stricto sensu* (master's and doctoral) across Brazil. It manages the CAPES Journals Portal, which provides access to academic research, both master's and PhD studies conducted in Brazil, and statistical data.

The BDTD, maintained by the Brazilian Institute for Information in Science and Technology (IBICT) with support from the Funding Authority for Studies and Projects (FINEP), brings together theses and dissertations from research and teaching institutions throughout Brazil. This platform, officially launched at the end of 2002, promotes scientific dissemination by registering and publishing theses and dissertations online.

Our research process followed several steps with defined criteria to identify relevant works on the closure of multigrade schools in rural education:

- **Step 1:** Defining search terms:
 - Reviewed keywords to identify terminology used in academic publications, using Google Scholar³;
 - Organized keywords using Boolean operators and tested them across search platforms⁴, then applied these terms in the various databases to verify the reaction of the procedure on each search platform;

² Single-teacher school: consisting of a single classroom with multigraded or multiaged enrollment in the school unit.

Multi-teacher School: consisting of more than one classroom with multigraded or multiaged enrollment in the school unit.

³ Google Scholar is a tool capable of searching for articles, digital books, theses, and dissertations and other content capable of providing a theoretical or referential foundation.

⁴ Boolean Operators are words used in the search system with the function of combining the terms of a search. These words are: AND, OR, and NOT. They intend to facilitate the search and must be written in capital letters.

after testing the terms/words in the research platforms, we confirmed the most effective Boolean terms for searches in CAPES and BDTD.

- **Step 2:** Initial Identification of works using Boolean operators:
CAPES: “*escola multisseriada*” (multigrade school) AND “*educação do campo*” (rural education)
BDTD⁵: “*multisseriada*” (multigrade) AND “*educação do campo*” (rural education).
- **Step 3:** Selection criteria for in-depth study on “closure of multigrade schools in rural territories”:
- After selection, we filtered works that included terms such as “*prática pedagógica*,” “*prática docente*,” “*trabalho docente*,” “*fechamento*,” “*nucleação*,” “*paralisação*,” “*extinção*,” and “*políticas públicas*” (in English, “pedagogical practice,” “teaching practice,” “teaching work,” “closure,” “school consolidation,” “school deactivation,” “extinction,” and “public policy,” respectively) in titles, abstracts, keywords, and tables of contents.
- **Step 4:** final identification of relevant research
- Based on the previous steps, we read the selected works to identify studies that specifically address the closure, consolidation, suspension, or extinction of multigrade schools.
- The database search covered the period from 2005 to 2022, as 2005 marks the year when the first studies on multigrade schools appeared on the platforms.

Search in the CAPES Database

The search in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog used the terms “*escola multisseriada*” (multigrade school) AND “*educação do campo*” (rural education), yielding 32 records—3 theses and 29 dissertations—filtered for 2005–2022. However, works on this topic only begin to appear in CAPES from 2009 onward.

During the CAPES portal search, we encountered two access issues. First, many studies were marked as “prior to the Sucupira Platform” and thus unavailable. Second, some theses and dissertations defended at public universities after the portal’s launch for scientific dissemination were missing.

All of these absent records were, however, located via other sites, including those predating Sucupira’s launch. Notably, the present study author’s own 2016 dissertation⁶ was not available on CAPES but was found in BDTD.

In our initial CAPES search, we included all works tagged with rural education and multigrade school, as adding the term “closure” dramatically reduced the number of results.

We then reviewed titles, abstracts, keywords, and tables of contents, selecting only those addressing pedagogical practice, public policy, and in some way exploring closure, consolidation, suspension, or extinction.

Finally, we read the full texts of the selected works to identify detailed treatments of multigrade school closure/consolidation/suspension/extinction. This process yielded three dissertations, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – Stricto sensu graduate works on multigrade schools/rural education and closure/consolidation/suspension (2009–2022)

Type of research	Title	Author	Year	Institution
Dissertation	As escolas no campo e as salas multisseriadas no estado de São Paulo: um estudo sobre as condições da educação escolar	Jaqueline Daniela Basso	2013	Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar)

⁵ In BDTD, the word “*escola*” (school) was removed from the terms organized in the set of Boolean operators, as the suppression of the term made it possible to access a larger number of studies on multigrade schools.

⁶ The research entitled “Educação do Campo em Movimento: dos planos à ação pedagógica em Escolas Multisseriadas e Anos Iniciais de São Mateus e Jaguarié (ES).”

Type of research	Title	Author	Year	Institution
Dissertation	Saberes da experiência em salas multisseriadas	Adailza Mendes Holanda Pimenta	2018	State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN)
Dissertation	O processo de ensino-aprendizagem em sala multisseriada: símbolo de luta e resistência para a educação do campo	Irani da Silva de Jesus	2020	Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES)

Source: CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog (November 2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

The above studies were selected for their in-depth focus on closure, consolidation, suspension, and extinction in rural schools. Notably, the terms “*paralisação*” (suspension) and “*extinção*” (extinction) did not appear in the documents at this stage.

Research in the BDTD Database

The BDTD search employed “*multisseriada*” (multigrade) AND “*educação do campo*” (rural education) returning 82 records—63 dissertations and 19 theses—filtered for 2005–2022.

On this platform, we chose to use only the term multigrade, instead of multigrade school, because we identified a significant change in the number of works to be obtained for the research, as expressed in the table below:

Table 2 – Number of works found in BDTD by descriptors (2005–2022)

Search Terms	Number of Studies
“ <i>escola multisseriada</i> ” AND “ <i>educação do campo</i> ”	27
“ <i>multisseriada</i> ” AND “ <i>educação do campo</i> ”	82

Source: BDTD (December 2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

We chose to access as many studies as possible linked to the subject because it allows a detailed analysis of the works, considering the criteria established for selection.

Some records in this platform, including the author's own published dissertation, appeared twice, as did other duplicates, which interfered in the final sum of the works found, remaining with 76 researches, 60 dissertations, and 16 theses. However, in general, the files found were added to the others searched on the CAPES portal.

For the initial and final selection of the research found in the BDTD, the same criteria used in the CAPES portal were employed. Thus, following the logic of the criteria used, seven dissertations remained, grouped in the table below.

Table 3 – *Stricto sensu* graduate works on multigrade schools/rural education and closure/consolidation/suspension (2009–2022)

Type of research	Title	Author	Year	Institution
Dissertation	Nucleação das escolas do campo: o caso do município de São Gabriel/RS	Eduardo Pastório	2015	Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM)
Dissertation	O fechamento das escolas do campo em Sergipe: territórios em disputa (2007-2015)	Elis Santos Correia	2018	Federal University of Sergipe (UFS)
Dissertation	Entre números e narrativas, um estudo sobre o fechamento de escolas em localidades rurais na Amazônia paraense	Josiane Nascimento da Silva	2019	Federal University of Pará (UFPA)

Type of research	Title	Author	Year	Institution
Dissertation	A gestão e a organização das escolas/turmas multisseriadas nos municípios de Barra de Santana e Boqueirão - Paraíba	Rosa Amélia de Queiroz Barros	2020	Federal University of Campina Grande (UFCG)
Dissertation	Formação continuada das professoras das escolas multisseriadas do campo de Goioxim-PR: tensões e desafios na transformação da escola	Daniele Aparecida Ferreira de Moraes	2020	Midwest State University (UNICENTRO)
Dissertation	Políticas públicas educacionais: A Educação do Campo e os impactos da multissérie na educação básica da Escola Municipal Conceição do Formoso, no município de Santos Dumont - MG	Vianna, Deiviane Priscila Amaral Araújo	2020	Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF)
Dissertation	O direito à educação das comunidades campesinas em contexto de fechamento de escolas públicas: uma análise a partir de Solânea - PB	Neto, José Euríquies de Vasconcelos	2021	Federal University of Campina Grande (UFCG)

Source: BDTD (reference: December /2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

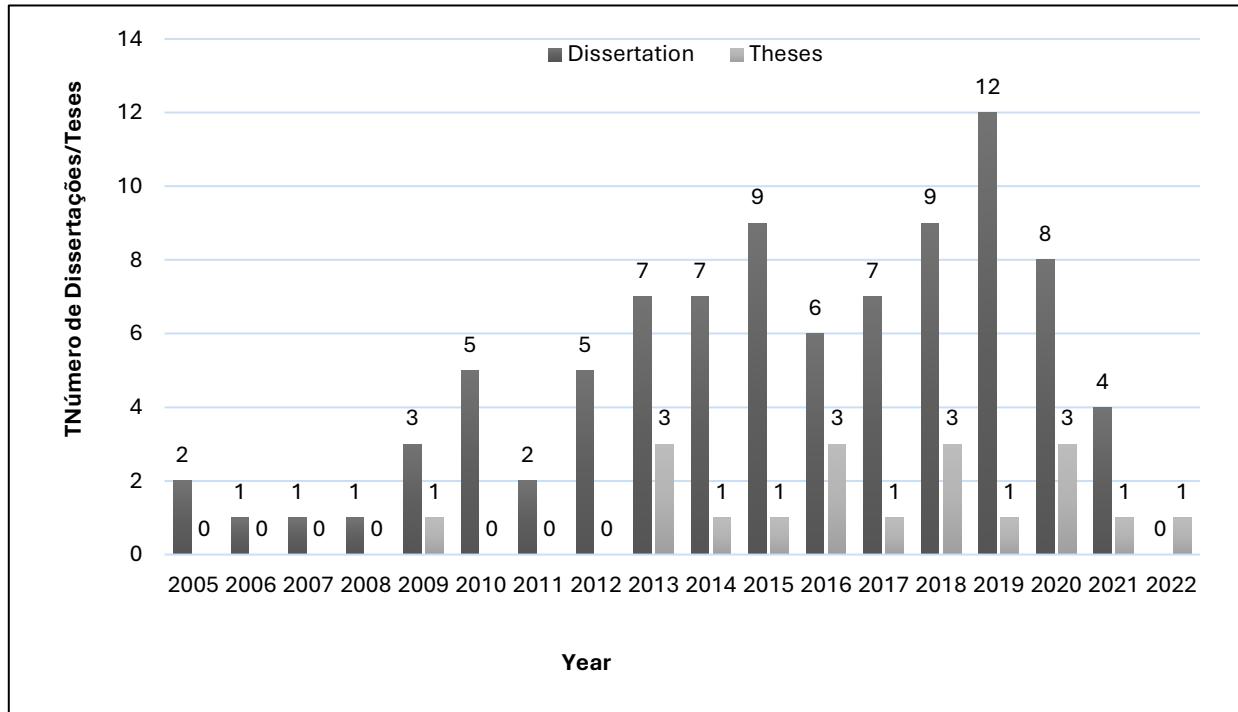
Because our research drew on both CAPES and BDTD, we combined all retrieved studies to analyze how the theme “*escola multisseriada/multisseriada AND educação do campo*” is represented across these two databases—considering their geographic and quantitative scope for interpreting the findings.

Information sources and their interfaces

The searches of the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Catalog and the BDTD yielded a total of 108 studies, of which 89 were master's dissertations and 19 were doctoral theses (using CAPES terms “*escola multisseriada*” AND “*educação do campo*” and BDTD terms “*multisseriada*” AND “*educação do campo*”).

Graph 1 illustrates the temporal evolution of graduate research on multigrade schools and rural education from 2005 to 2022.

Graph 1 – Stricto sensu graduate studies on multigrade schools and rural education (2005–2022)



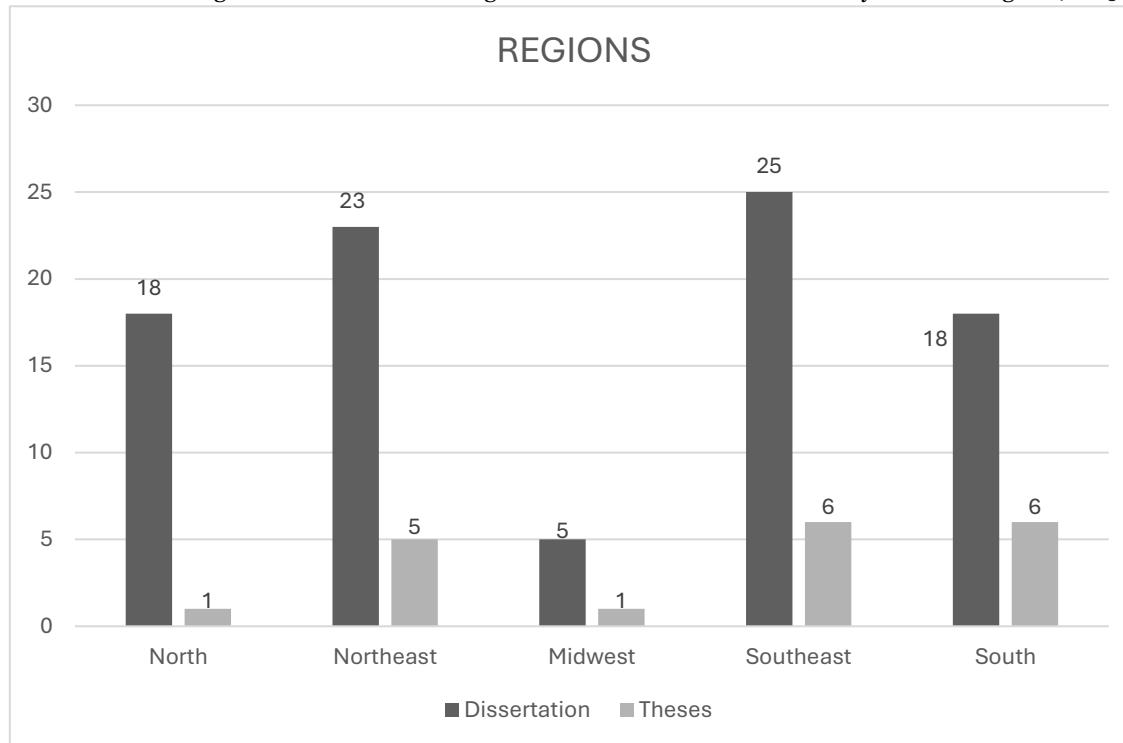
Source: BDTD/CAPES (reference: December 2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

This graph shows a steady increase in master's-level research on these topics—except for a dip in 2020–2022, likely linked to disruptions from the COVID-19⁷ pandemic.

Regarding doctoral-level research, we observed a scarcity of studies which, when compared to the number of master's dissertations, highlights a discontinuity in research on the topic.

As for the geographic distribution of academic output, there is a higher concentration of publications from researchers affiliated with higher education institutions in the Southeast region, which accounts for 29% of the master's and doctoral studies identified.

Graph 2 – *Stricto sensu* graduate studies on multigrade schools and rural education by Brazilian region (2005–2022).



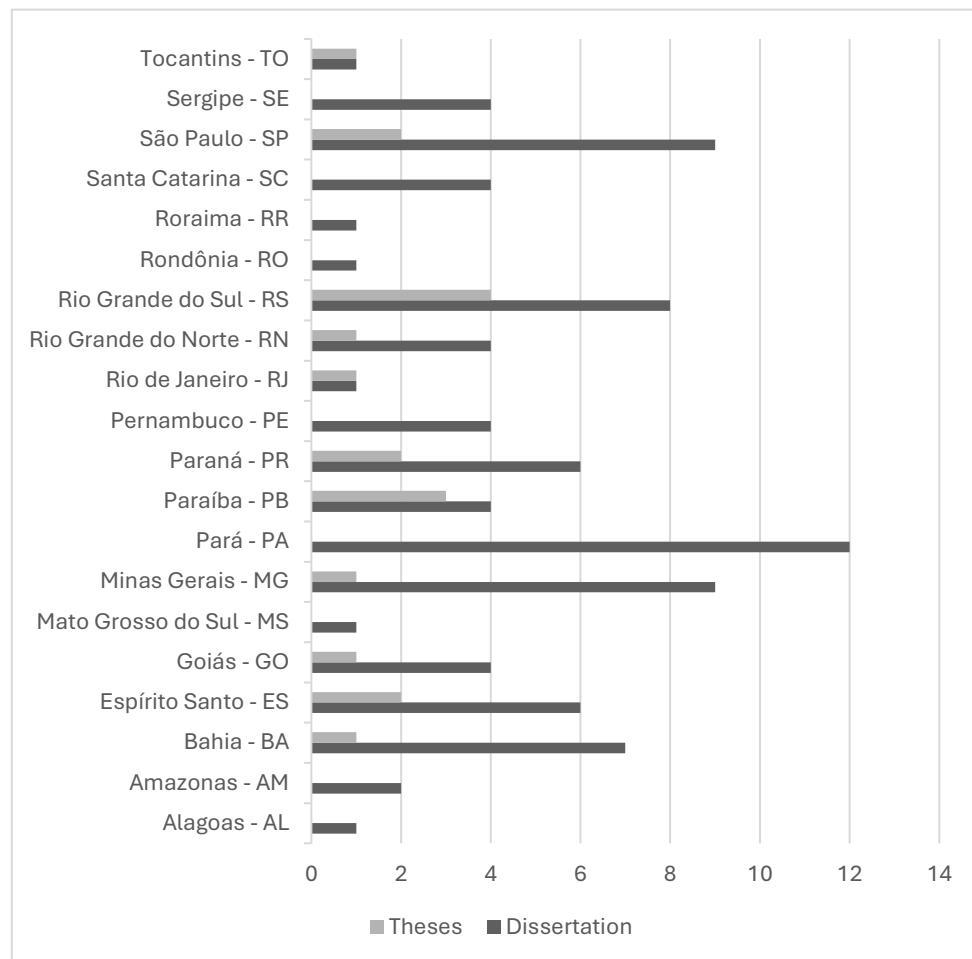
Source: BDTD/CAPES (reference: December 2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

The northeast (26%) and south (22%) regions show progress in these studies, both at the master's and doctoral levels. However, the significant number of studies in master's degrees does not represent the continuity of these studies in the doctorate, when we analyze the quantity in an equivalent manner between master's and doctorate. The North region (18%), on the other hand, appears next with a significant number of master's studies and only one research at the doctoral level, which may indicate the absence of *stricto sensu* programs at the doctoral level.

The graph below highlights the studies conducted in the various Brazilian states, complementing the graph presented by regions.

⁷ The disease caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) appeared for the first time in 2019, in the city of Wuhan, China, being characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020. The first case in Brazil was on February 26, 2020. The guidance of health authorities, including World Health Organization (WHO), Brazilian National Health Council (CNS), among others, was maintaining social distancing, as a way to slow down the spread of the virus and avoid overloading health systems. In this pandemic scenario, many institutions were closed in 2020 and 2021, which weakened the continuity and start of several surveys.

Graph 3 – *Stricto sensu* graduate studies on multigrade schools and rural education by Brazilian state (2005–2022).



Source: BDTD/CAPES (reference: December 2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

In this territorial breakdown by state, it is noteworthy that, based on the procedures adopted, no studies on multigrade schools and rural education were identified in seven Brazilian states: Acre, Amapá, Ceará, the Federal District, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, and Piauí. Nevertheless, research on the topic is present across all regions of Brazil.

Accordingly, there is a predominance of studies in the Southeast region, particularly in the states of Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, and São Paulo, which have served as key centers for the production and dissemination of knowledge on the subject. In the northern region, we found a highlight of research on the subject in master's courses in the state of Pará.

Although research on multigrade schools and rural education can be found throughout Brazil, the continuation of studies on this topic is essential in order to deepen the understanding of specific situations within each state and/or municipality, especially considering that the overall findings of this study indicate a limited number of doctoral-level investigations.

Multigrade schools in the context of closure: what the CAPES and BDTD research shows

The investigation of the CAPES and BDTD databases made it possible to measure the scope of research on multigrade school and rural education from 2005 to 2022, yielding a total of 108 works—89 master's dissertations and 19 doctoral theses.

In this context, we observed a lack of continuity in research efforts, as master's studies have maintained a regular output, in contrast to doctoral studies, which have experienced a significant decline.

On the other hand, the selection of studies followed specific criteria to identify research that addressed the topic of closure of multigrade schools in rural education. In other words, a general search was first conducted in the CAPES and BDTD databases, after which additional selection criteria were applied to further refine the focus.

Through this process, we identified 10 master's dissertations, which were examined using a full-text search to identify the presence of key terms such as “prática pedagógica,” “prática docente,” “trabalho docente,” “fechamento,” “nucleação,” “paralisação,” “extinção,” and “políticas públicas” (in English, “pedagogical practice,” “teaching practice,” “teaching work,” “closure,” “school consolidation,” “school deactivation,” “extinction,” and “public policy,” respectively). The table below presents the selected studies:

Table 4 – *Stricto sensu* graduate works addressing key terms

Types of research	Title	Author	Year	Program / Institution	Platform
Dissertation	As escolas no campo e as salas multisseriadas no estado de São Paulo: um estudo sobre as condições da educação escolar	BASSO, Jaqueline Daniela	2013	Graduate Program in Education / Federal University of São Carlos	CAPE/BDTD
Dissertation	Nucleação das escolas do campo: o caso do município de São Gabriel/RS	PASTÓRIO, Eduardo	2015	Graduate Program in Geography / Federal University of Santa Maria – RS	BDTD
Dissertation	O fechamento das escolas do campo em Sergipe: territórios em disputa (2007-2015)	CORREIA, Elis Santos	2018	Graduate Program in Education / Federal University of Sergipe	BDTD
Dissertation	Saberes da experiência em salas multisseriadas	PIMENTA, Adailza Mendes Holanda	2018	Graduate Program in Education / State University of Rio Grande do Norte	CAPE/BDTD
Dissertation	Entre números e narrativas, um estudo sobre o fechamento de escolas em localidades rurais na Amazônia paraense	SILVA, Josiane Nascimento da	2019	Graduate Program in Anthropological Studies in the Amazon / Federal University of Pará	BDTD
Dissertation	A gestão e a organização das escolas/turmas multisseriadas nos municípios de Barra de Santana e Boqueirão - Paraíba	BARROS, Rosa Amélia de Queiroz	2020	Graduate Program in Education / Federal University of Campina Grande	BDTD
Dissertation	O processo de ensino-aprendizagem em sala multisseriada: símbolo de luta	JESUS, Irani da Silva de	2020	Professional Master's Program in Education / Federal University of Espírito Santo	CAPES

Types of research	Title	Author	Year	Program / Institution	Platform
	e resistência para a educação do campo				
Dissertation	Formação continuada das professoras das escolas multisseriadas do campo de Goioxim-PR: tensões e desafios na transformação da escola	MORAIS, Daniele Aparecida Ferreira de	2020	Graduate Program in Education / Midwest State University	BDTD
Dissertation	Políticas públicas educacionais: A Educação do Campo e os impactos da multissérie na educação básica da Escola Municipal Conceição do Formoso, no município de Santos Dumont - MG	Vianna, Deiviane Priscila Amaral Araújo	2020	Graduate Program in Education / Federal University of Juiz de Fora	BDTD
Dissertation	O direito à educação das comunidades campesinas em contexto de fechamento de escolas públicas: uma análise a partir de Solânea - PB	Neto, José Euríquies de Vasconcelos	2021	Graduate Program in Education / Federal University of Campina Grande	BDTD

Source: BDTD/CAPES (reference: December 2022). Compiled by the authors (2022).

In this phase of the study, we conducted a detailed reading of the retrieved works—that is, we closely engaged with the 10 texts in order to assess their alignment with the theme of closure of multigrade schools in rural education, with particular emphasis on the closure of rural schools.

This final criterion is justified by the fact that school closures in rural areas often unfold by a process that includes the stages of consolidation (nucleação), suspension, and ultimately extinction of the school unit. These stages are not always linear and do not unfold in the same way across all locations. In some cases, suspension and consolidation occur; in others, only suspension or closure happens, without any consolidation. All these phases significantly impact students' educational experiences by relocating them—typically via school transportation—to other rural or urban schools.

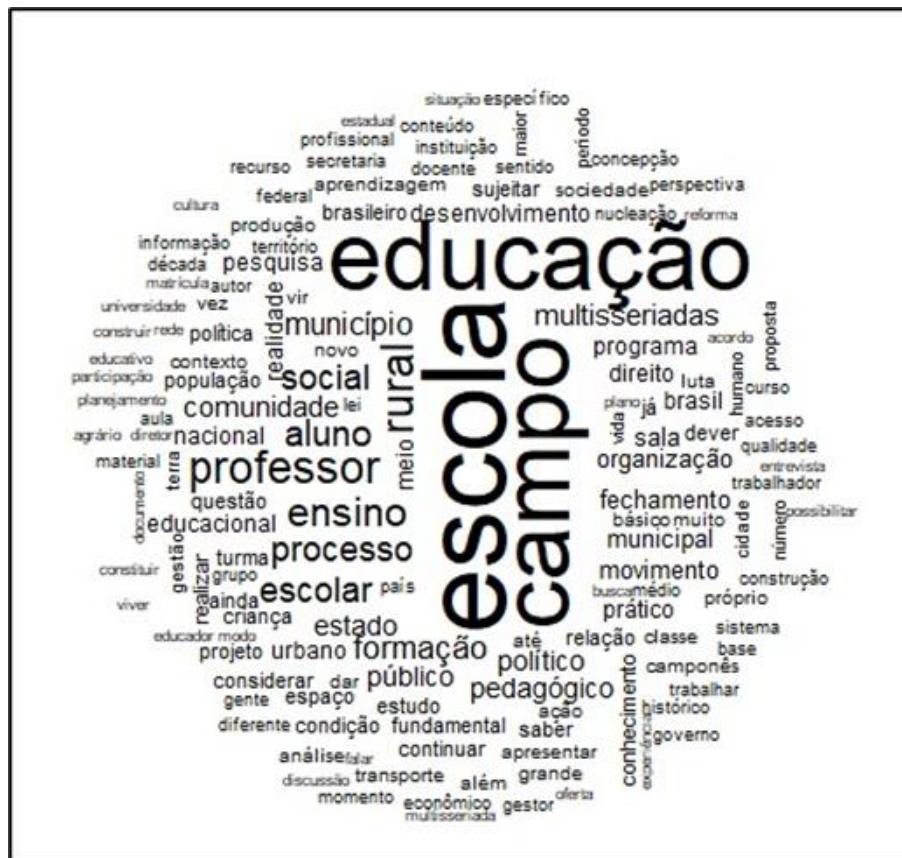
Thus, the reading of the selected works forms the basis of the final selection of studies that engage most closely with the topic.

In addition to reading the full texts, we also conducted a textual analysis using *IRaMuTeQ*⁸, a software tool designed for multidimensional textual and questionnaire analysis. The program enables both basic lexicographic analysis, such as word frequency counts, and more complex multivariate analyses, such as descending hierarchical classification and similarity analysis (Camargo; Justo, 2013). Moreover, *IRaMuTeQ* presents the textual distribution in a clear and accessible visual format, such as similarity graphs and word clouds.

In this analysis, we considered the entire corpus of the 10 selected researches, for which the *IRaMuTeQ* generated the following word cloud:

⁸ *IRaMuTeQ* (an acronym for *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*) is an open-source software linked to the R statistical package. It enables various types of textual data analysis, ranging from basic procedures such as lexicography (word frequency calculation) to multivariate analyses, including descending hierarchical classification and similarity analysis.

Figure 1 – Word cloud generated from the selected dissertations



Source: CAPES and BDTD dissertations (reference: December 2022).
Compiled by the authors - *IRaMuTeQ* software (2023).

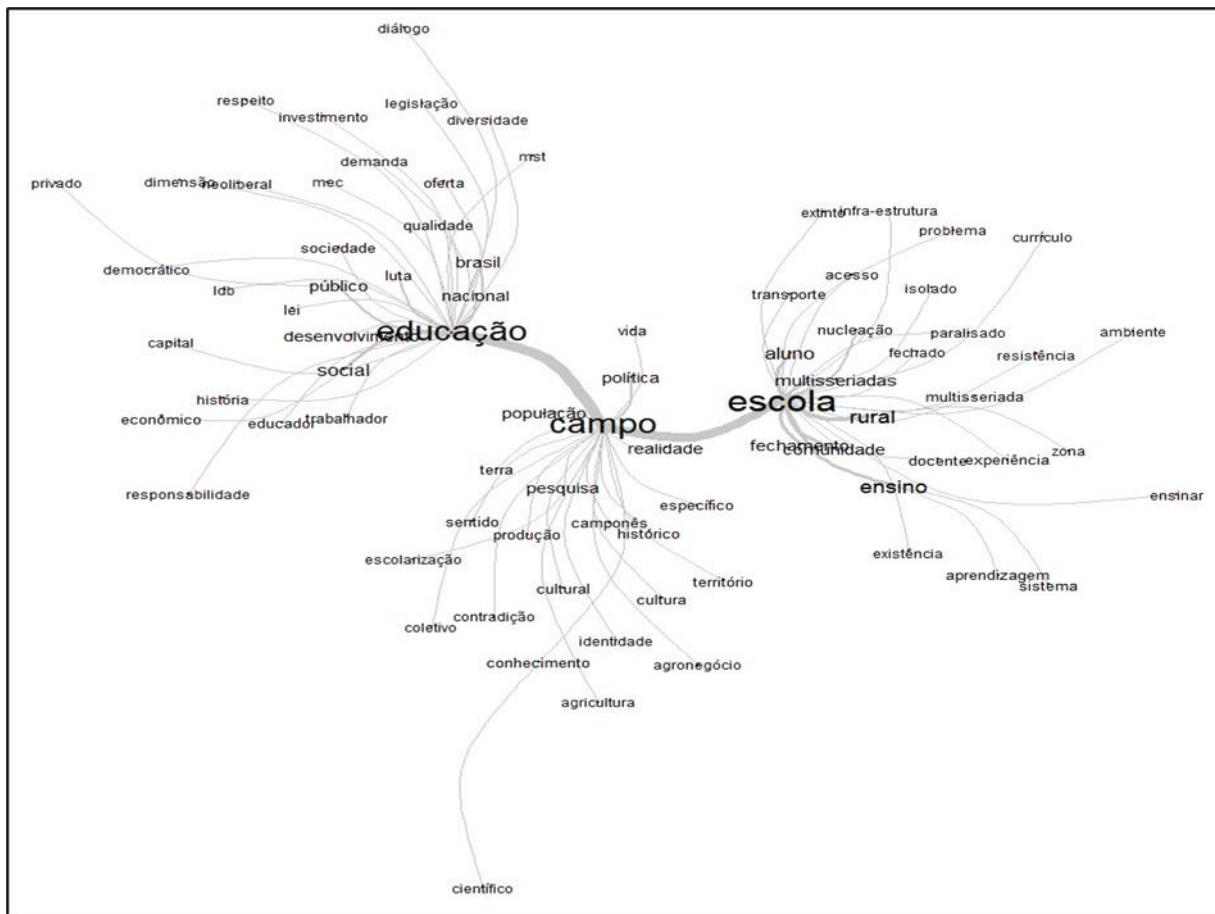
The word cloud exhibits specific characteristics through which the software graphically organizes and groups words based on their frequency within the analyzed document corpus.

The more frequently a word appears in the analyzed texts, the larger it is represented in the word cloud generated by the software. Thus, each word's size is determined by the number of occurrences in the textual corpus.

In this sense, the most prominent words in the word cloud were education, school, and rural, which represent the broader context to which the theme of multigrade school is linked. In a second, smaller cluster, we identified the words process, social, rural, teaching, schooling, teacher, and student. A third cluster revealed the words multigrade and closure, which appeared smaller, suggesting a possible thematic distance in the selected studies with regard to the specific issue of multigrade school closures. Although the studies do, at certain points, address the issue of school closures, their reflections more broadly encompass rural education.

In this analytical flow, we entered the selected studies into the software, which also generated the following similarity analysis map:

Figure 2 – Similarity analysis of the selected dissertations via IRaMuTeQ



Source: CAPES and BDTD dissertations (reference: December 2022). Compiled by the authors - IRaMuTeQ software (2023).

The similarity analysis allows us to visualize the connections between textual elements based on the co-occurrence of words. Accordingly, the larger the word appears, the greater its frequency and contribution to the construction of the network diagram. The branching structures evident in the similarity analysis enabled us to identify, in general terms, three main thematic axes—already anticipated in the word cloud—which coalesced around the terms school, rural, and education.

The similarity map corroborated the information shown in the word cloud. It grouped the data into word clusters and offered an opportunity to reflect on the research topic through a diversity of interconnected themes, all of which relate to the *Movimento da Educação do Campo* (Rural Education Movement).

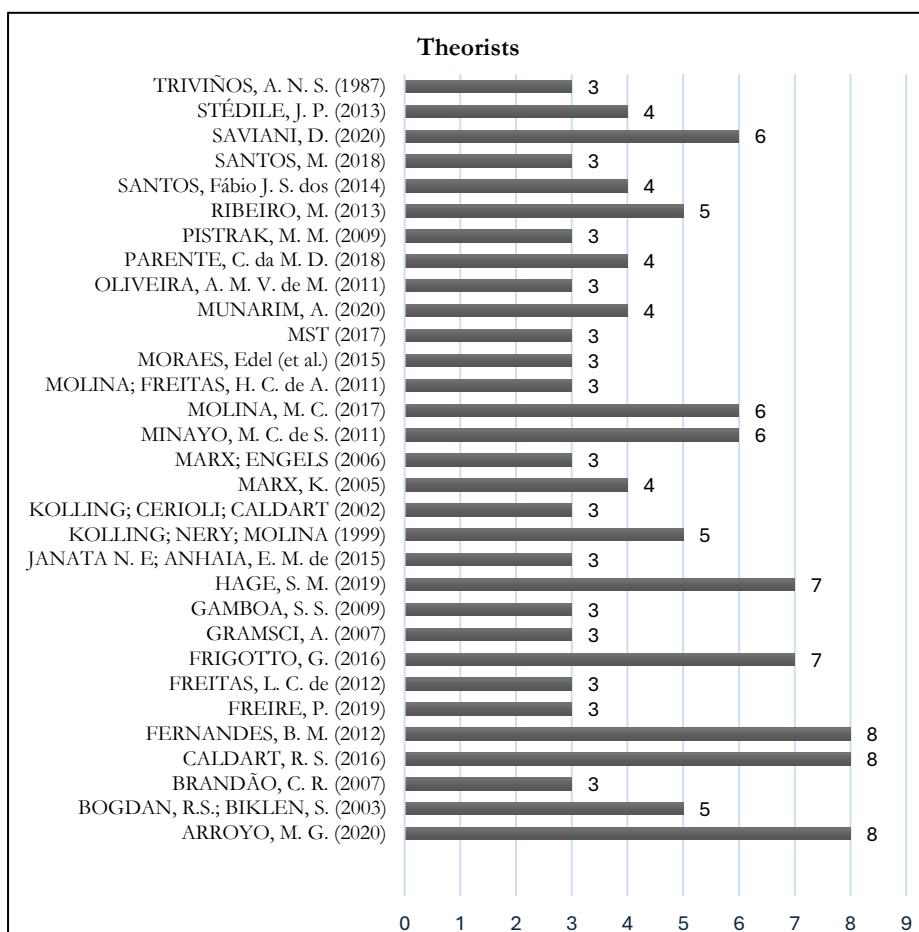
Beyond the textual analysis conducted with the software, we also performed a full reading of the dissertations to identify the key contributions of the selected studies, as well as the theoretical and methodological frameworks adopted.

Regarding the theoretical and methodological frameworks present in the dissertations, we organized the graph based on theorists cited in more than three studies. Within this theoretical framework, the most frequently referenced authors were Arroyo (2020)⁹, Caldart (2016), and Fernandes (2012), each cited in eight dissertations; followed by Hage (2019) and Frigotto (2016), referenced in seven; and Molina (2017) and Saviani (2020), cited in six. All of these authors contribute to the understanding of the origins of the Rural Education Movement in Brazil.

⁹ As a parameter, we used the author's most recent year of publication and followed this criterion for the other authors.

In addition, we found a group of theorists cited in three to five dissertations who engage with themes such as rural education, multigrade school, school closure, capitalist projects, public policy, agrarian issues, and other dimensions that shape schooling in rural territories.

Graph 4 – Theorists cited in the studies analyzed (2005–2022)



Source: CAPES and BDTD dissertations (reference: April 2022). Compiled by the authors (2023).

As for methodological approaches, all ten studies employed a qualitative research design. Three of them adopted a dialectical historical materialist perspective (involving bibliographic research, document analysis, and interviews); five combined documentary and field research (using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and observation); one conducted bibliographic and documentary research; and another employed the thematic oral history method. The most commonly referenced methodological authors—featured in the graph—were Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Gamboa (2009), Minayo (2011), and Triviños (1987).

It is worth noting that this state-of-the-art review of accumulated research on multigrade schools and school closures contributes to mapping and understanding the current academic production on the topic. It enables dialogues, points of convergence, and divergences among the various stakeholders engaged in the subject.

Main results

The dissertation “*As escolas no campo e as salas multisseriadas no estado de São Paulo: um estudo sobre as condições da educação escolar*” by Jaqueline Daniela Basso (2013) examines the influence of

neoliberalism and the World Bank on Brazil's economy and education. The study addresses rural or "of the countryside" education, as well as the processes of school consolidation and closure in São Paulo State.

In her concluding observations, Basso (2013) highlights a historical pattern of rural school closures in São Paulo, neglect of infrastructure, and insufficient teacher training. This historical scenario of "rural school closures in São Paulo culminated in the strengthening of student transport policies to urban centers and a reduction in the number of rural schools" (p. 141; our translation).

Eduardo Pastório's (2015) dissertation, "*Nucleação das escolas do campo: o caso do município de São Gabriel/RS*," investigates the consolidation ("nucleation") movement in the municipality of São Gabriel, RS.

As results, Pastório emphasizes the policy of municipalization, which leads to the consolidation and closure of schools driven by a narrow economic perspective, disregarding pedagogical work and, above all, the stakeholders involved. Thus, school transportation becomes a critical element, serving as the basis for consolidation by enabling students and teachers to travel to hub schools (Pastório, 2015).

In "*O fechamento das escolas do campo em Sergipe: territórios em disputa (2007-2015)*," Elis Santos Correia (2018) discusses the historical and social foundations driving the closure of rural schools in Sergipe from 2007 to 2015.

According to Correia, there is a shortage of schools offering the upper years of elementary education or secondary education in rural areas. Conversely, the predominance of multigrade classes and the closure of numerous educational units characterize the rural education landscape in Sergipe, where 404 schools closed between 2007 and 2015—296 were extinguished¹⁰ and 108 acquired the status of "suspended rural schools"¹¹ (Correia, 2018)—constituting a veritable boycott of the historic struggle for Rural Education.

Adailza Mendes Holanda Pimenta's (2018) study, "*Saberes da experiência em salas multisserieadas*," investigates how a teacher mobilizes experiential knowledge in a multigrade classroom.

In her final considerations, Pimenta stresses that experiential knowledge in a multigrade setting goes beyond developed pedagogical practices: it permeates daily school life, making theory and practice essential to knowledge construction.

Josiane Nascimento da Silva's (2019) research, "*Entre números e narrativas, um estudo sobre o fechamento de escolas em localidades rurais na Amazônia paraense*," highlights reflections on the closure of schools in five municipalities in Pará, referencing data from the "disk denúncia"¹² (report hotline) against rural school closures.

As research outcomes, Silva notes that school closures in Pará share similar factors with other Brazilian states, in which closure indicators involve multigrade schools managed by municipal governments (Silva, 2019). In this context, school transportation represents the main strategy used by governments to ensure continued schooling in communities affected by closures.

Rosa Amélia de Queiroz Barros's (2020) dissertation, "*A gestão e a organização das escolas/turmas multisserieadas nos municípios de Barra de Santana e Boqueirão - Paraíba*," examines the presence of the Rural Education paradigm in the educational policies of those municipalities, as well as in the organization and management of their multigrade classrooms.

Barros's main considerations include: the weakened use of the Rural Education concept in municipal policy; the stereotyped view of multigrade classes as problems to be solved via consolidation and closure; a variety of organizational models for multigrade classes; the presence of a Rural Education coordination within the education secretariat that does not reflect the modality's principles; and the absence of debate on multigrade heterogeneity (Barros, 2020).

¹⁰ The term "extinta" is used in the school census to characterize the school that has ceased to exist and has a decree of extinction.

¹¹ A school classified as "paralisada" in the school census indicates the absence of student enrollments for that unit, which is temporarily not in operation.

¹² The Fórum Paraense de Educação do Campo (FPEC) launched the campaign "Nenhuma Escola a Menos" (No More School Closures), featuring a hotline to report the closure of rural schools. The Hotline is used with the Pará State Public Ministry (MP/PA), operating via complaints of irregularities committed by the government, which can lead to the closure of schools (Silva, 2019, p. 20).

Irani da Silva de Jesus's (2020) dissertation, "*O processo de ensino-aprendizagem em sala multisseriada: símbolo de luta e resistência para a Educação do Campo*," investigates the teaching–learning process in a multigrade classroom in Linhares, Espírito Santo.

In her concluding remarks, Jesus (2020) points to the absence of a curriculum that addresses the specificities of rural multigrade schools in the municipality and calls for the development of a methodological guidebook to support critical, dialogue-based teaching via generative themes. Regarding closures, these school units have resisted ongoing efforts by public managers to terminate their activities in local communities.

Daniele Aparecida Ferreira de Moraes's (2020) study, "*Formação continuada das professoras das escolas multisseriadas do campo de Goioxim-PR: tensões e desafios na transformação da escola*," explores contradictions in the continuing education of teachers in Goioxim's municipal rural schools from 1999 to 2018.

As results, Moraes shows that continuing education from 1999 to 2015 focused on general rural education and only from 2015 to 2018 did studies specifically address Rural Education and the pedagogical project of multigrade schools. From the perspective of school closures, her research documented the closure of 33 municipal schools from 1999 to 2013.

Deiviane Priscila Amaral Araújo Vianna's (2020) dissertation, "*Políticas públicas educacionais: A Educação do Campo e os impactos da multissérie na educação básica da Escola Municipal Conceição do Formoso, no município de Santos Dumont - MG*," aims to understand, analyze, and record the social aspects and impacts of multigrade classes.

In her conclusions, Vianna notes the absence of continued education on Rural Education, yet she observes partnerships with neoliberal companies and adoption of corporate-oriented professional development courses for rural schools. She argues that the multigrade school itself is not the main problem in Rural Education, but rather the lack of effective policies tailored to this teaching modality.

José Euriques de Vasconcelos Neto's (2021) research, "*O direito à educação das comunidades campesinas em contexto de fechamento de escolas públicas: uma análise a partir de Solânea - PB*," examines "whether and how the right to education is guaranteed in the face of economic-financial rationality and state retrenchment, as expressed by the closure of public rural schools" (Neto, 2021, p. 36; our translation).

As outcomes, Neto (2021) highlights that the school-closure process reflects the effects of neoliberal policy and market ideology directly impacting Brazilian education. The discourse of state minimization, public-spending restraint, and efficiency in management has guided both public administration and, in particular, educational governance.

Reviewing these studies as a *corpus* reveals interwoven challenges and opportunities surrounding multigrade schooling and school closures. The Brazilian Rural Education Movement continues to emphasize the principles of rural pedagogy, the right to education in rural territories, and the valorization of rural cultures and knowledges. In this vein, stakeholders advocate for political-pedagogical projects, continuing teacher education, school infrastructure improvements, teacher recognition, and other rights related to rural education.

Research indicates that the approach taken by public administrators toward multigrade schools reflects neglect and disregard, which undermines the sustainability of these educational units in rural territories. In addition, it is often suggested that the solution for these schools is their closure and the transfer of students via school transportation to a hub school located elsewhere—whether in a rural or urban area—without considering travel time or other vulnerabilities that negatively impact students' learning.

Furthermore, Hage (2018) emphasizes that Brazilian educational legislation offers a legal basis for the implementation of public policies that meet the particularities of life in the countryside. In this case, the Law on Brazilian Education Guidelines and Bases (Law No. 9,394/96) establishes in Articles 23 and 28 that public education systems must implement the necessary adaptations to ensure that basic education is

provided in accordance with local specificities. The law allows for flexibility in defining the curriculum, school organization, academic calendar, and teaching methodologies, considering students' realities, including the agricultural cycle, climate conditions, and labor practices in rural territories.

Within rural education legislation, the “*Diretrizes Operacionais para a Educação Básica nas Escolas do Campo*” (Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in Rural Schools) direct the development of public policies that respect cultural, political, economic, gender, generational, and ethnic diversity in rural areas. This document outlines principles to legitimize rural schools' unique identities, closely linked to rural peoples' temporalities, memories, and knowledges (Hage, 2018). Beyond legal frameworks, Hage (2018) calls for more research on multigrade schooling, arguing that debates must extend past structural precariousness, teaching practice, or graded-model critiques to include reflection on pedagogical management, curriculum design, and methodologies that truly serve rural school communities (Hage, 2018).

Final considerations

The research conducted via the CAPES and BDTD platforms granted access to 108 studies, providing an overall picture of multigrade schools in Rural Education. This broad analysis revealed the need for sustained inquiry into this theme, given that multigrade schooling often represents the initial access to education in rural territories—and, over ten years (1998–2018), the Brazilian National Rural Education Forum (FONEC) reported the closure of 32,512 schools in those areas (Santos *et al.*, 2020).

Accordingly, guided by our state-of-knowledge objective, we narrowed our focus via a four-stage search and categorization process to ten key works addressing the closure of multigrade schools in Rural Education. We observed, however, that research on this topic remains limited and requires extension into areas that explore the very essence of multigrade schooling in rural contexts. Several themes were evidenced in the researched works that point to the fragility faced by multigrade schools, considering the lack of implementation of public policies and investments by public agencies. The themes that need attention to enhance multigrade schools were: the poor quality of instruction; lack of teacher training for multigrade environments; heavy reliance on school transportation to move rural students; absence of targeted public policies and investments; misaligned Political Pedagogical Project; the pervasive use of neoliberal rationales to justify school closures; the municipalization and consolidation/closure of rural schools; among other topics.

The scarcity and discontinuity of scholarly work on multigrade schooling—its structure, the impacts on educational delivery, and its relationship with rural territories—underscore the urgent need for further research in Brazil.

Meanwhile, the Rural Education Movement continues to fight for the strengthening and continued presence of schools in rural communities, recognizing that a local school embodies the integration of knowledge and culture, fosters community life, and provides initial—and sometimes sole—educational opportunities for those who otherwise lack access at the appropriate age.

In this scenario, we highlight the importance of research, in which Pimenta (1999, p. 22;) links research to the art of producing new forms of development; that is, for rural multigrade schools, research must serve to catalyze public policies that are still absent from this educational domain.

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