Active Learning Methodologies And Educational Equity: An Integrative Literature Review

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Abstract
Background: *Educational equity has become a central challenge in contemporary education systems, particularly in contexts marked by social and cultural inequalities. In response to these challenges, active learning methodologies have emerged as pedagogical approaches aimed at promoting student engagement, autonomy, and meaningful learning, with potential implications for more inclusive educational practices.*
Methods: *This study was conducted as an integrative literature review. Searches were performed in the SciELO, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases, including peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024. Studies available in full text and written in Portuguese, English, or Spanish that explicitly addressed the relationship between active learning methodologies and educational equity were selected and analyzed.*
Results: *The findings indicate that approaches such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, flipped classroom, and collaborative methodologies are frequently associated with inclusive pedagogical practices. These methodologies demonstrate potential to support educational equity by considering different learning paces, learning styles, and sociocultural contexts. However, the literature also identifies challenges related to teacher professional development, institutional support, and school infrastructure, which may limit the effective implementation of these approaches.*
Conclusion: *Active learning methodologies contribute to the promotion of educational equity when they are integrated into coherent pedagogical projects and supported by continuous teacher education and educational policies committed to social justice.*

I.   Introduction

Educational inequalities constitute a historical and persistent problem in education systems, manifesting themselves in students' access to education, school retention, and academic success across different social groups. Factors such as socioeconomic background, cultural conditions, unequal access to pedagogical resources, and school trajectories marked by exclusion directly affect learning opportunities, challenging schools to develop more equitable and inclusive pedagogical practices.

Within contemporary educational debates, active learning methodologies have emerged as approaches that seek to overcome traditional models centered on content transmission by repositioning students as active subjects in the learning process. These methodologies emphasize participation, autonomy, collaboration, and problem-solving, fostering more meaningful and contextualized learning experiences (Bacich & Moran, 2018; Moran, 2018). By shifting the focus from teaching to learning, such approaches expand opportunities for student engagement and collective knowledge construction.

From a pedagogical perspective, authors such as Perrenoud (1999) and Zabala and Arnau (2010) argue that educational practices oriented toward the mobilization of knowledge in real-life situations contribute to the development of competencies and to the recognition of individual differences. In this sense, active learning methodologies demonstrate potential to align with the principle of educational equity by considering diverse learning paces, learning styles, and sociocultural contexts, enabling pedagogical strategies that are more responsive to diversity within school environments.

Despite the significant growth in scientific production on active learning methodologies, studies that explicitly address their relationship with educational equity remain fragmented and dispersed. Part of the literature focuses on the impacts of these methodologies on academic performance and student engagement, while another body of research discusses educational equity in broader terms, without establishing consistent connections with innovative pedagogical practices (Fullan, 2020; OECD, 2018).

In light of this context, there is a clear need to systematize the knowledge produced on the interface between active learning methodologies and educational equity in order to understand how these approaches have been mobilized as strategies to promote educational justice. An integrative literature review is an appropriate method for this purpose, as it allows the inclusion and analysis of studies with different methodological designs, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, 2010).

Accordingly, the guiding research question of this study is: how have active learning methodologies been addressed in the scientific literature as strategies for promoting educational equity? The objective of this article is to analyze, through an integrative literature review, the contributions, limitations, and implications of active learning methodologies for the promotion of educational equity within contemporary pedagogical practices.

The relevance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the theoretical and pedagogical debate on the relationship between methodological innovation and educational justice, offering insights for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers committed to the development of more equitable and socially responsive educational practices.

II.   Material And Methods

This study is characterized as an integrative literature review, a method that allows the collection, analysis, and synthesis of findings from empirical and theoretical studies with different methodological designs, enabling a broad and in-depth understanding of the investigated phenomenon. The integrative review is distinguished by its ability to integrate knowledge produced in diverse contexts and approaches, favoring the identification of convergences, gaps, and trends within the scientific field (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, 2010).

The review was guided by the following research question: how have active learning methodologies been addressed in the scientific literature as strategies for promoting educational equity?

The search for studies was conducted in nationally and internationally recognized databases in the field of Education, namely: SciELO, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The selection of these databases is justified by their scope, academic relevance, and widespread use in educational research. Descriptors related to the central themes of the study were combined using Boolean operators, including the terms *"active learning methodologies"*, *"active learning"*, *"educational equity"*, and *"educational inequality"*.

Studies published between 2014 and 2024, available in full text, peer-reviewed, and written in Portuguese, English, or Spanish were included, provided that they explicitly addressed the relationship between

active learning methodologies and educational equity in formal educational contexts. Duplicate studies, papers lacking minimum methodological description, non–peer-reviewed publications, institutional documents, editorials, reviews, and studies that addressed active learning methodologies without articulation with the theme of educational equity were excluded.

The study selection process occurred in successive stages, beginning with the screening of titles and abstracts, followed by full-text reading of studies that met the inclusion criteria. The selected studies were analyzed in a systematic and interpretative manner, aiming to identify analytical categories related to the contributions of active learning methodologies to the promotion of educational equity, as well as the limitations and challenges highlighted in the literature.

Data synthesis was performed through **q**ualitative integrative analysis, allowing the organization of findings into thematic axes and the construction of an articulated understanding of the pedagogical implications of active learning methodologies in addressing educational inequalities.
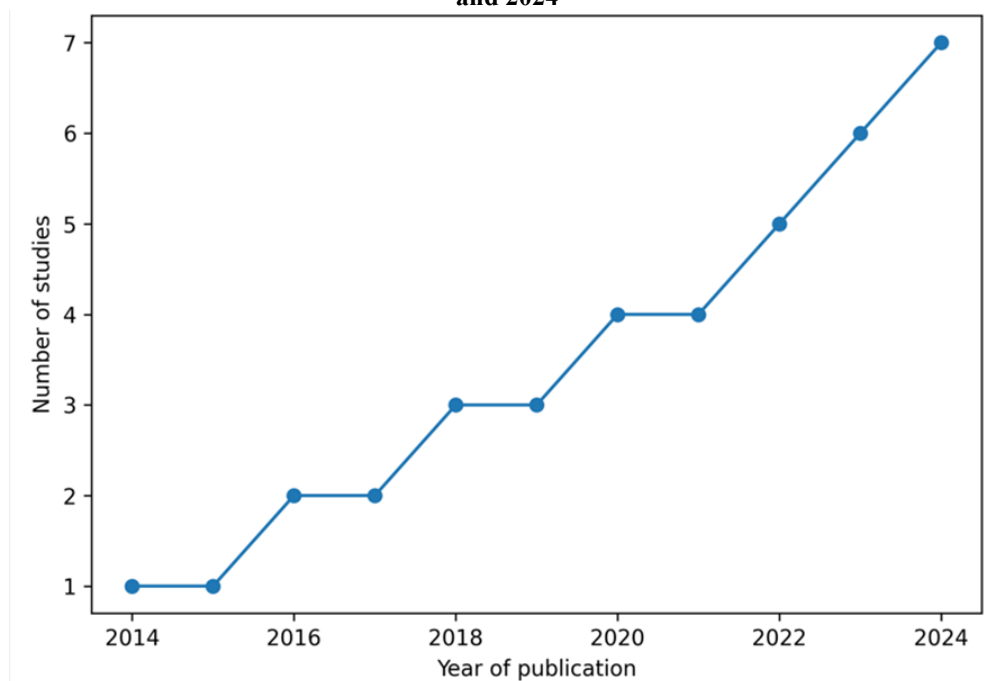
As this study is based exclusively on secondary data from publicly available sources and does not involve direct participation of human subjects, approval by a Research Ethics Committee was not required, in accordance with current ethical guidelines.

III. Results

The analysis of the selected studies allowed the organization of findings into thematic categories based on a systematic and integrative reading of the material, considering the objectives, educational contexts investigated, and pedagogical approaches adopted. The results reveal different ways in which active learning methodologies have been mobilized in the literature as strategies associated with the promotion of educational equity.

General characteristics of the analyzed studies

Figure 2. Evolution of publications on active learning methodologies and educational equity between 2014 and 2024
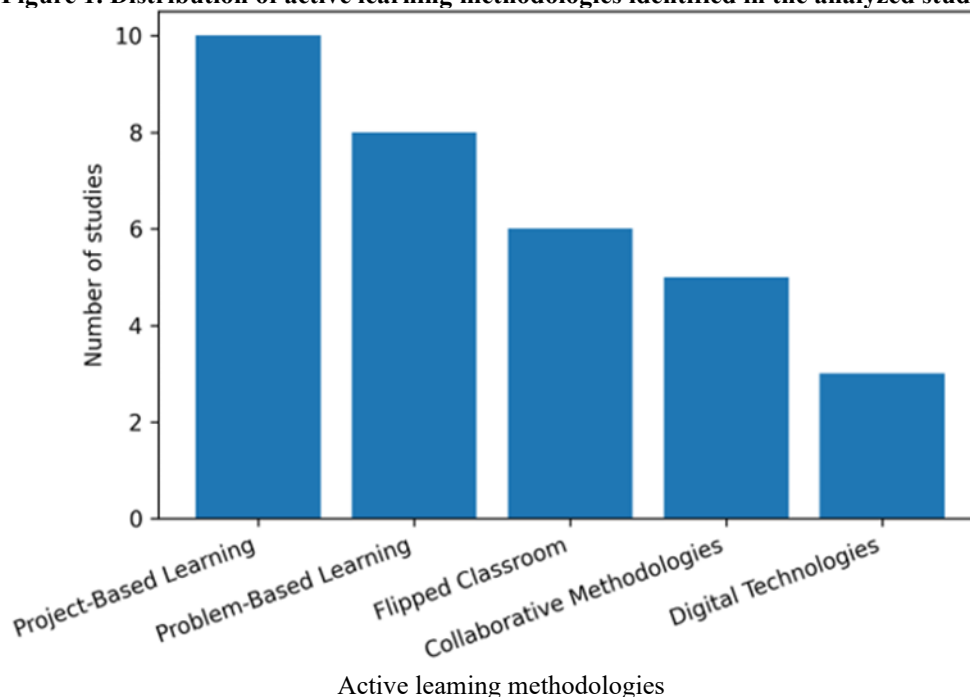

The temporal evolution of publications reveals a gradual and consistent increase in scientific interest in the relationship between active learning methodologies and educational equity over the analyzed period. This trend indicates a growing recognition of the relevance of pedagogical innovation as a strategy to address educational inequalities, particularly in contexts marked by social and cultural diversity (Figure 2. Evolution of publications on active learning methodologies and educational equity between 2014 and 2024).

The studies included in the review predominantly addressed contexts of basic education and higher education, with a greater concentration in public institutions and in settings marked by sociocultural diversity. Methodological diversity was observed, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies, as well as theoretical and empirical research, reinforcing the suitability of the integrative review approach for synthesizing the knowledge produced on the topic.

Most recurrent active learning methodologies

The distribution of active learning methodologies identified in the analyzed studies highlights the predominance of project-based learning, problem-based learning, flipped classroom, collaborative methodologies, and the pedagogical use of digital technologies. This distribution reflects the emphasis placed in the literature on pedagogical approaches that promote student protagonism, active participation, and contextualized learning experiences, reinforcing their relevance for inclusive and equitable educational practices (Figure 1. Distribution of active learning methodologies identified in the analyzed studies).

Figure 1. Distribution of active learning methodologies identified in the analyzed studies

Active leaming methodologies

Among the active learning methodologies identified, project-based learning, problem-based learning, flipped classroom, collaborative methodologies, and the pedagogical use of digital technologies were the most frequently reported. These approaches were associated with the promotion of student protagonism, increased student participation in the learning process, and the appreciation of contextualized educational experiences.

Dimensions of educational equity addressed

The analyzed studies related educational equity to different dimensions, including the appreciation of sociocultural diversity, the reduction of inequalities in access to knowledge, the adaptation of pedagogical practices to different learning paces and learning styles, and the expansion of opportunities for active student participation. Educational equity was understood not merely as equality of conditions, but as the provision of differentiated pedagogical strategies that consider the specific needs of learners.

Challenges and limitations identified in the studies

Despite the contributions highlighted, the studies also revealed significant challenges in the implementation of active learning methodologies. The main limitations included insufficient specific teacher training, inadequate infrastructure in some institutions, resistance to pedagogical change, and difficulties in integrating active learning methodologies into traditional curricula. These factors were identified as elements that may compromise the potential of these approaches to promote educational equity.

IV.   Discussion

The results of this integrative review indicate convergence between the principles underlying active learning methodologies and those of educational equity, as they highlight pedagogical practices that seek to recognize and value the diversity present in school contexts. By promoting student protagonism and active participation, active learning methodologies contribute to the construction of more inclusive learning environments in which different trajectories, forms of knowledge, and experiences are considered within the educational process (Bacich & Moran, 2018; Moran, 2018).

The recurrence of methodologies such as project-based learning and problem-based learning reinforces the perspective proposed by Perrenoud (1999), according to which meaningful learning occurs when students are challenged to mobilize knowledge in real and contextualized situations. This approach favors educational equity by allowing students to progress according to their own learning paces and experiences, breaking away from homogeneous teaching models that tend to deepen educational inequalities.

The analysis of the dimensions of educational equity addressed in the studies aligns with the understanding that equity is not limited to the equal distribution of resources, but rather involves the adoption of differentiated pedagogical strategies capable of meeting the specific needs of learners (Zabala & Arnau, 2010). In this sense, active learning methodologies are aligned with contemporary conceptions of educational justice, as they promote collaborative, inclusive practices that are sensitive to students' sociocultural contexts.

However, the challenges identified in the analyzed studies indicate that the adoption of active learning methodologies alone does not guarantee the promotion of educational equity. The literature highlights that the lack of continuous teacher professional development, combined with structural and institutional limitations, may reduce the reach of these methodologies and even reinforce inequalities, particularly when access to technologies and pedagogical resources is uneven (Fullan, 2020; OECD, 2018).

In this context, the findings emphasize the need to understand active learning methodologies as part of a broader pedagogical project, articulated with educational policies, curricular reorganization, and sustained investment in teacher education. As emphasized by UNESCO (2015), the construction of more equitable education systems requires integrated actions that connect pedagogical innovation, teacher professional development, and adequate institutional conditions.

Thus, the discussion of the findings demonstrates that active learning methodologies present significant potential for promoting educational equity, provided that they are implemented critically and contextually, and supported by institutional policies. The analyzed literature converges in indicating that educational equity depends less on the isolated adoption of innovative methodologies and more on the articulation between pedagogical practices, teacher education, and political commitment to social justice within the educational field.

V. Conclusion

This integrative review made it possible to analyze how active learning methodologies have been addressed in the scientific literature as strategies with potential to promote educational equity. The synthesis of the analyzed studies showed that these methodologies have been associated with pedagogical practices that value student protagonism, active participation, and the contextualization of learning, which are fundamental aspects for the construction of more inclusive educational environments that are sensitive to diversity.

The findings indicate that approaches such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, flipped classroom, and collaborative methodologies have the potential to contribute to the reduction of educational inequalities by considering different learning paces, learning styles, and students' sociocultural contexts. In this sense, active learning methodologies align with contemporary conceptions of educational equity, which understand pedagogical justice as the provision of differentiated strategies adapted to learners' specific needs.

However, the analyzed literature also reveals that the effectiveness of active learning methodologies in promoting educational equity is conditioned by structural, institutional, and formative factors. Insufficient specific teacher training, limitations in infrastructure, and resistance to pedagogical change emerge as recurring challenges, indicating that the isolated adoption of these methodologies is not sufficient to ensure equitable educational practices.

Therefore, it is concluded that active learning methodologies should be understood as part of a broader pedagogical project, articulated with curricular reorganization, the valorization of continuous teacher professional development, and the implementation of educational policies committed to social justice. The promotion of educational equity requires integrated actions that go beyond the methodological scope and involve sustainable institutional and policy decisions.

As a contribution, this study systematizes the knowledge produced on the interface between active learning methodologies and educational equity, offering theoretical and pedagogical insights for teachers, school administrators, and researchers interested in more equitable educational practices. Future research is recommended to deepen empirical investigations on the implementation of these methodologies in different educational contexts, as well as to analyze their long-term impacts on reducing educational inequalities.

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