



Brazilian EdTechs: possibilities for a Bourdieusian understanding

As EdTechs brasileiras: aproximações a partir de Bourdieu
EdTechs Brasileñas: posibilidades de comprensión desde Bourdieu

GISELLE DE MORAIS LIMA¹

GISELLE MARTINS DOS SANTOS FERREIRA²

Abstract: This article discusses correspondences between the workings of Brazilian Educational Technology companies (edtechs) and Bourdieusian field dynamics. The text suggests that the challenge to an education that is simplistically considered inadequate for contemporary times is one of the pillars of these new agents in the field, whose relevance would be defended based on the urgency to innovate education. The discussion is illustrated with excerpts from documents and clippings from the websites of some edtechs. It is argued that the promotion of technology as a solution to complex problems masks interests and obscures the need to guarantee the constitutional right to education.

Keywords: Educational technologies; edtechs; Bourdieusian field.

Resumo: O artigo discute aproximações entre a atuação de empresas de tecnologia educacional nacionais (edtechs) e dinâmicas de campos bourdieusianos. Sugere que a contestação de uma educação dita inadequada para a atualidade é um dos pilares do campo, cuja relevância é defendida a partir de uma alegada urgência de inovar a educação. Ilustra-se a discussão com excertos de documentos e recortes dos sites de edtechs. Argumenta-se que a promoção da tecnologia como solução de problemas complexos mascara conflitos de interesse e obscurece a necessidade de garantir o direito constitucional à educação.

Palavras-chave: Tecnologias educacionais; edtechs; campo bourdieusiano.

1 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4770-7114> . Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Departamento de Educação, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.

2 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8498-5390> . Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Departamento de Educação, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil.

Resumen: *El artículo discute acercamientos entre el desempeño de las empresas nacionales de tecnología educativa (edtechs) y la dinámica de los campos bourdieusianos. Sugiere que el desafío a una educación considerada inadecuada para la actualidad es uno de los pilares del campo, cuya relevancia se defiende a partir de una supuesta urgencia de innovar la educación. La discusión se ilustra con extractos de documentos y recortes de los sitios web de algunas edtechs. Se argumenta que la promoción de la tecnología como solución a problemas complejos enmascara conflictos de intereses y oscurece la necesidad de garantizar el derecho constitucional a la educación.*

Palabras clave: *Tecnologías educativas; edtechs; campo en Bourdieu.*

INTRODUCTION

Recent technological advancements have given us a profusion of new artifacts, some of which permeate our daily routines in such a way as to make it difficult to imagine our lives without their favors. They perform manual and even intellectual tasks previously performed only by humans, collect data, and drive economic transformation, even sustaining modifications in work regimes. Since the meteoric rise and spread of Uber's business model, which generated the already widely used neologism "Uberization", the power of platforming to materialize restructurings of labor relations, in practice for decades, has been a topic of discussion. Huge contingents of workers are controlled by companies that operate through platforms (Abílio, Amorim, and Grohmann, 2021).

In Education, technologies emerge daily with the promise of improving day-to-day school life. However, this is not a recent development. Barreto (2019) recalls that, in the first half of the twentieth century, serial albums and overhead projectors were already present in classrooms. Subsequently, with behaviorist-based programmed instruction and, more recently, with digital devices, the relationship between education and technology has become more complex. According to Watters (2021, p. 246), teaching machines are not only "a short-lived fad but rather a recurring trend".

But, different from what was observed with the popularization of ridesharing applications – which generated protests, a division of opinions and many discussions about the hiring formats of the platforms –, in education, technological investments operated both by business conglomerates that already worked in the sector and by new *startups*³ do not seem to arouse much suspicion. We seem to be facing the scenario observed by Selwyn (2014) in an Anglophone context: compared to other issues such

3 According to the Brazilian Association of Startups (Abstartups) (2017), *startups* are companies that are in their initial phase, seeking to develop a product or service considered innovative in its segment, from a technological base and a business model that can be replicated and scalable without a corresponding increase in costs.

as curriculum reform, social reproduction, identity policies, inclusion, and the right to schooling, the formulation of critical questions about technology has gained little attention.

Carvalho, Rosado, and Ferreira (2020) identify comparable problems in the context of Brazilian academic production, where the idea that technology will modify school practices seems to predominate, without, however, problematization related to curriculum and evaluation, for example. The *corpus* analyzed by the authors reveals the need for greater contextualization and the development of a more solid critique of the relationship between education and technology. Silva (2022) also points to these needs, noting that, although a large number of works can be found that mostly consider technology as a new issue for education, there is no greater depth.

Meanwhile, Silicon Valley developers, who mobilize large sums of capital, work with the conviction that “all it takes to revolutionize education for the future is a few million lines of software code and big piles of digital data” (Williamson, 2017, p. 3). Many of the current educational reformers in the Valley, according to Watters (2021, p. 7), “have launched or invested educational businesses, often proudly ignorant of the history of education or the history of educational technology”, reproducing maxims that have no grip on reality.

In Silicon Valley and Brazil, companies are developing digital technologies from Solutionist perspectives (Morozov, 2013), that is, from the idea that artifacts are sufficient to solve complex social problems. In education, such companies are known as *edtech*, a term that results from the agglutination of the words *Educational* and *Technology*. Imported from English, the word is associated with a range of different meanings, which reflects the complexity of the very concept of technology (Selwyn, 2011; Mirrlees; Alvi, 2020). While some conceptions focus solely on artifacts, there are contexts in which the term generally refers to “the use of hardware, software, digital content, data, and information systems in education-[that] supports and enriches teaching and learning and improves the management and delivery” (World Bank, 2020, p. 6, emphasis added). In general, the neologism has been used in Brazil to designate companies that offer “technology as a facilitator of learning processes and improvement of educational systems, generating effectiveness and efficacy” (Abstartups; CIEB, 2020, p. 9). In other words, they are “companies that use technology to solve problems in the education sector, presenting solutions ranging from access to content and infrastructure to education financing” (Distrito, 2022, p. 5).

In Brazil, reports from the technological sector have promoted, with great optimism, the significant growth of the area. Distrito (2020, p. 26) reports that there was a “*boom* of innovative solutions in edtech during 2012-2017, when more than 200 startups were founded”. This same report estimates that, globally, “the edtech market will more than double in five years, totaling at least US\$ \$400 billion in revenue” (Distrito, 2020, p. 64). It is, without a doubt, a highly profitable scenario with the potential to modify education considerably, as can be seen in other sectors.

This text explores this scenario in correspondence with select notions of Pierre Bourdieu. The article discusses how such companies, especially those focused on Basic Education (BE), have positioned themselves in Brazil, identifying some of the main actors involved in the promotion of digital technologies as a solution to educational problems, as well as the ideas that circulate in support of these new agents within the educational field.

The notion of field appears in several works by Bourdieu to designate the “structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position in these spaces and which can be analyzed independently of the characteristics of their occupants” (Bourdieu, 2019a, p. 109). According to the author, there is an ongoing struggle in every field, there are more dominant actors and competition, as well as properties specific to each field. According to Bourdieu (2019a, p. 109-110), “there must be challenges and people ready to play the game”, contributing to its perpetuation. Even if they disagree with some aspects of the field itself and at some point yearn to make a revolution, the participants agree with it enough to remain there: “to want to make revolution in a field is to agree with the essence of what is tacitly demanded by that field, namely that it is important, that what is at stake there is so important as to want to make revolution there” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 140). Despite being applied to various types of analysis, the concept of field, according to Nogueira and Nogueira (2006), is better used to refer to spaces and social positions where goods’ production, consumption, and classification occur.

According to Bourdieu, other concepts further structure the idea of the field, such as symbolic capital and *habitus*. According to Pereira (2015), as a field is a place of struggle, participants seek to maintain their positions within it through the dispute of Capitals (cultural or social), which are valued, depending on the characteristics of each field, and correspond to “cultural heritages, possibilities of access and insertion, as well as intimacy with certain practices, attitudes, institutions, subjects, knowledge” (Pereira, 2015, p. 345).

In the following discussion, we consider the scenario of Brazilian digital technology companies focused on education and edtechs, which are inserted within a broader economic field. In this sense, we argue that the scenario presented is consistent with that of a Bourdieu field, with diverse actors who articulate and dispute similar objectives. Informed by contributions from Critical Studies of Education and Technology, the discussion is illustrated with excerpts from documents produced by entities promoting these companies, as well as clippings from the websites of some edtechs.⁴

EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS: FROM ANALOG TO DIGITAL

The performance of edtechs can be seen as part of a broader theme that concerns the products and services provided, sold, and promoted for education, traditionally including the schooling of Basic or Higher Education, but also extended beyond the formal stages of Education⁵. The textbook, “one of the most familiar educational technologies of the past hundred years” (Selwyn, 2011, p. 9, historically represents a large share of this sector. According to Melo (2016), the textbook went through several phases from the first half of the nineteenth century until it was instituted as a public policy for Brazilian education, constituting a powerful means of propagating hegemonic thought. According to Bittencourt (2010), despite being the object of contradictory evaluations by teachers and researchers, the textbook endures as a reference teaching material, sometimes acting as a commodity, as a repository of school content that systematizes curricular proposals, as a pedagogical instrument that elaborates the structures and teaching conditions for teachers and as a vehicle that carries a whole system of values.

During the military dictatorship, under the justification of cheapening and distributing the textbook to everyone, its standardization was implemented, although at the detriment of the particular approaches to the different contexts that make up this continental country. Thus, from 1971, the military government was able to ensure a stable market for publishers, which began to expand (Melo, 2016). With the end of the dictatorship, the National Textbook Program (PNLD) was left in charge of public policy regarding textbooks, created to offer books to all students enrolled in public schools in the country. After a restricted beginning and some changes in the evaluation model of materials, the PNLD, together with the National School Library Program (PNBE), was transferred from federal policy to state policy in 2010

⁴ The illustrative clippings were taken from a piece of research that focused on EdTech marketing discourses from the perspective of Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis.

⁵ According to the Distrito report (2022), most of the edtechs operating in Brazil today are focused on continuing education, promoting professional training outside formal technical and higher education institutions.

(Vitiello and Cacete, 2021). In 2023, PNLD alone provided access to school materials to 30,733,374 students from early childhood to High School, distributing more than 102 million textbooks, which generated a cost of almost 1.2 billion Brazilian real for the state. The literary PNLD, in turn, which acquires literary books for students in the final years of elementary and High School, distributed more than 28.5 million copies at a cost of more than 332 million Brazilian real in the same year (Brazil, 2023).

These figures suggest huge opportunities for publishers, but Adrian *et al.* (2022) note that, in addition to the textbooks and literature offered by the state via PNLD and literary PNLD for public networks, public administrations also allocate their budgets for Basic Education to large companies to acquire “private education systems”, that is, packages with various other types of materials and services, such as teaching content for students and professionals, advice for support networks, performance evaluations for students and schools, and even guidelines for the organization of education, with the use of virtual resources being a striking feature of the adopted packages.

Adrião *et al.* (2022) suggest, based on data collected from the National Union of Municipal Education Leaders (UNDIME) and the state audit courts, that 339 Brazilian municipalities have adopted private education systems. Comparing spending on private education systems belonging to the five groups considered most important⁶ and the total investment in education in selected municipalities, Adrião *et al.* (2022) observe that municipalities allocated approximately 2% to 6% of the budget to private education systems in 2013, which also represents between 2.31% and 7.03% of total costs per student, expenses possibly comparable, in some municipalities, to the expenses of construction of Early Childhood Education Units or renovation and qualification of existing schools. The authors argue that this movement expresses a tendency towards privatization of public education, facilitated by the sudden and poorly planned municipalization of elementary education in recent decades, in addition to the fragility of Educational Management, now associated with programs that provide for a proliferation of private logic in the public education sector.

⁶ The groups considered in the research were: *Santillana Group*, *Abril Education*, *Pearson*, *Objetivo Group* and *Positivo Group* (Adrião *et al.*, 2022).

NEW PRODUCTS, OLD ACTORS

The scenario suggests that private groups that sell products and services for Education find opportunities for promising financial gains in public education itself, where, until recently, as Melo (2016) and Vitiello and Cacete (2021) showed, control over materials intended for students was quite strict. In this environment, we can find both the large companies that supply private education systems as well as edtechs that are still in the process of financial consolidation, as indicated in the Distrito report (2022). In addition to books, the “educational market” has been expanding with the offer of digital artifacts, especially platforms.

The incentive to adopt digital technologies at different levels of education comes not only from companies but, for decades, from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and UNESCO. A study in recontextualization⁷ from the discourses of the World Bank (WB) on Higher Education from reports published in 1994, 2000, 2002 and 2003, Barreto and Leher (2008, p. 425) pointed out that the institution had long been putting pressure on states with varied formulations ranging from urging countries to replace Higher Education for underprivileged groups with low-cost training, requiring that institutions that host this stage of education and the “new suppliers of the sector” be differentiated, to pressuring that countries facilitate distance education on a global scale, in a process of increasing commodification of education, reconfiguring the role of the teacher.

In the multiple recontextualizations involved, there is an underlying criticism of public universities based on the teaching-research-extension tripod, which the documents consider excessively traditional, as well as costly and insufficient for the demands of the new times. In Brazil, the authors continue, these discourses had their impacts, among them the recognition of “the country’s backwardness in the ‘tertiary’ level of Education, which constitutes an obstacle to entry into the select group of ‘knowledge economies’” (Barreto; Leher, 2009, p. 433), which led to the creation of the Open University of Brazil (UAB), structured from a consortium between state, municipal, public and private universities, where business presence is seen as essential (Barreto; Leher, 2009).

This is an example of how WB materials impose themselves as conditions for the construction of public policies in developing countries. A more recent WB document states that the world is in the midst of a technological revolution in which educational technologies are an imperative. In this context, the only possible

⁷ The authors work with the concept of recontextualization from Fairclough (2006), who understands it as “a complex phenomenon, involving, beyond a simple colonization, a process of appropriation whose characteristics and results depend on the concrete circumstances of the various contexts” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 101 *apud* Barreto; Leher, 2008).

questions begin with “how”, never “if”: “how” to integrate technologies, never “if” this integration is coherent or even necessary (and for what). Based on the difficulties encountered in emergency Remote Education adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic, when there was a greater recurrence of technologies, it is suggested that greater investments in them “can make education systems more resilient to future shocks and help reform and reimagine the way education is delivered” (World Bank, 2020, p. 6). Far beyond emergency adjustments to the continuity of educational activities in a critical period, educational technology “supports countries pursuing educational reforms concerning access, skills, teachers, assessment, content, data, and community engagement” (World Bank, 2020, p. 10). At one point, the document even prophesies: “although technology won’t replace today’s teachers, teachers who use technology will” (World Bank, 2020, p. 23).

In this sense, the scenario drawn by the WB is one in which it is not only urgent that educational systems incorporate the use of technologies to ensure quality education, but also one in which teachers must make use of them, at the risk of becoming obsolete. However, the suggestion of replacing teachers with technologies has been recurrent in WB formulations for a long time before the Covid-19 pandemic. Barreto (2009) already observed that the organism increasingly speaks more of learning and less of teaching, presenting technologies as the safest way for developing countries to enter the economic, political, and social context of the so-called “knowledge society” or “information society”.

EDTECHS AS EMERGING ACTORS IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD?

In the context outlined above, new edtechs defend technology as key to breaking with past times and practices. In particular, they criticize the “mass” teaching of schools as a premise to offer resources for identifying specific needs, under the term “personalization”, which would allow teachers to act more efficiently, ideas commonly found on company websites. In this perspective, educational technology would be closely related to innovation, a concept that often appears in the spotlight. There are even cases in which the mere existence of technology seems to be defended as sufficient to affirm the innovative character of an educational experience: “more and more sectors of the government and the TCU itself (Court of Auditors of the Union) are recognizing the positive impact that technologies can have on educational challenges and opening opportunities for innovation” (Abstartups; CIEB, 2020, p. 3).

Edtechs are presented in the educational field from a broad context that questions education, companies are positioned as protagonists of a, supposedly long desired, revolution of Brazilian education, breaking with structures that are said to no longer meet the needs of the contemporary world, and, therefore, no longer manage to keep students committed to their schooling. In addition to companies and multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank, various institutions that produce data, reports, campaigns, and different incentives for educational technologies are also participants in the “game”, some of which have been previously cited as authors of the documents that endorse edtechs. Among them, the Innovation Center for Brazilian Education (CIEB) presents itself as a non-profit association that acts in support of the formulation of public policies and articulates actors related to the WB, while defending the use of technologies to carry out transformations in learning processes. The CIEB is maintained by organizations such as the Natura Institute, Lemann Foundation, Itaú Foundation, among others (CIEB, not dated), markedly social arms of large companies operating in the country. The Brazilian Association of Startups (Abstartup), a class entity that brings together and advocates for companies, and Distrito’s Startup (Distrito) present themselves as entities⁸ that promote, connect, empower, and produce data on Brazilian startups, including edtechs.

Far from being “portraits” of reality, the discourses produced by these groups constitute instruments in the construction of an argumentation that positions educational technologies at the center of a so-called “revolution” for education. These productions help build the authority of edtechs in a context of inevitable, essentially innovative, technological advancement where technology catalyzes the rupture with conventional teaching practices and promotes reforms to solve a series of educational problems. The materials produced by these groups go beyond the socio-historical justifications for existing problems in Brazilian education, only commenting on, but not deepening discussions on issues such as the need for Public Power involvement in solving important challenges in our country, including the low rate of entry and permanence of students in higher education. The formulations present in the texts propose simplistic solutions that have few links to real and complex social problems, in a perspective that approaches the technological solutionism pointed out by Morozov (2013).

The report of Distrito (2022), which mapped 678 edtechs, illustrates the “problems” that these companies propose to solve: at the administrative level of schools, organizational efficiency; communication with families, which would increase the engagement of students and guardians with academic activities; at the

8 Available at <<https://abstartups.com.br/sobre/>> and <<https://distrito.me/quem-somos/>>. Accessed on Dec. 16, 2024.

pedagogical level, teaching through games as a strategy to increase “learning retention”; professional training targeted at areas with less available trained professionals (where current higher education institutions are insufficient); even preparation for entrance exams, which would democratize access to higher education and reduce high school dropouts.

In keeping with this solutionist tone, Adrião’s (2017) discussion of the initiatives of privatization of Education, which are associated with numerous forms of corporate control over the performance of teachers and schoolwork. Mendonça Neto, Vieira, and Antunes (2018, p. 164) also identify that educational technologies accelerate the process of industrialization of education to the extent that “surveillance, control and training devices (*dressage*) are introduced into the educational environment”. Crucially, Turmena and Nunes (2022) recall that the largest private companies focused on Brazilian education participate in the movement of large sums in the financial market. The authors suggest that many publicly traded educational groups are maintained and controlled by investment funds, in a process of financializing Education. In this regard, education is traded in stock exchanges, aimed at profitability and capital accumulation on a larger scale. In the main private educational groups, technology is revered as a means to reduce the costs related to teaching work.

Another class of actors that make up the educational field and tend to argue similarly to edtechs is that of non-governmental foundations and institutes, which often constitute social arms of other large companies from the national scene and support or are supported by educational technology companies, reverberating their solutionist formulations. Such institutions, as Avelar and Ball (2017) observe, now constitute a “new philanthropy”, treating donations as investments and results as returns, involving themselves in decisions about how money is used and influencing the formulation and implementation of public policies. Adrião (2017, p. 138) mentions some such institutions that work in the field of “social responsibility” focused on education: the Lemann Foundation, the Natura Institute, the Itaú Foundation, and PorVir, among others.

Analyzing metaphors about data-based technologies conveyed by the PorVir website, specifically, Ferreira *et al.* (2019) note that the website often disseminates startups, digital technologies, events, and educational actions considered “innovative”, just using digital artifacts. According to the authors, PorVir follows the international trend of promoting digital technologies as a panacea for structural problems, and does so by disseminating individualism, reducing education to learning, and giving little attention to pedagogical issues. All this would already be worrying if it worked only as

marketing for interested companies, but PorVir, like other groups mentioned above, influenced actions such as the development of the common National Curriculum Base (BNCC) and other educational policies (Ferreira *et al.*, 2019).

The Lemann Foundation, specifically, is, according to Brito and Martins (2020), one of the main supporters⁹ of the connected Education Innovation Program, launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Education (MEC) with “the objective of supporting the universalization of high-speed internet access and fostering the pedagogical use of digital technologies in basic education” (Brazil, 2017, p. 1). According to the authors, with its great capillarity in public networks, the foundation can influence both the business world and a larger social scope, acting in the program to make it reaffirm guidelines of business logic, while supporting the accumulation of capital, deepening the entrepreneurship of public space. In this way, it can contribute to making access to knowledge even more precarious, in addition to fostering a rethinking of the organization of didactic work, essentially from a technological configuration.

Edtechs, the newest arrivals in commoditized education, are positioned concerning transformations intended for the WB, presented in their marketing materials and publications such as the Edtech District Report (2022). According to the report, because of the ten Brazilian edtechs focused on basic education that stood out in 2022 (Distrato, 2022, p. 29), it is possible to identify companies that offer products aimed at preparing for entrance exams, book reading platforms, and platforms for teaching programming, among others. Each of them is favored by some form of economic capital and occupies certain positions within the field, claiming to have the solution to specific problems, and reproducing ideas that endorse technologies as a means of educational transformation to overcome challenges experienced by schools.

From the *homepage* of the *website* of one of the edtechs listed in the report mentioned above¹⁰, it is difficult to clearly understand what exactly the company offers, since the terms used to describe it are very vague: “We are experts in articulating activities hand in hand with the school curriculum”. But the company claims to have developed “a Curricular basis for innovation culture” through which it helps schools to apply a “culture of innovation” with the use of “different technologies and approaches”, to provide “more meaningful and innovative learning”, all this with

9 In addition to the Itaú Cultural Foundation, The Innovation Center for Brazilian Education (CIEB), the National Council of Secretaries of Education (Consed) and the National Union of Municipal Education Leaders (Undime) (Bruto; Martins, 2020), the first two previously mentioned as agents of the edtech field.

10 Excerpts were taken from the homepage of the website <<https://www.naveavela.com.br/>> on June 18, 2023.

“a unique theoretical foundation” structured from Bloom’s taxonomy¹¹. Another company¹² in the report, Google’s direct partner, as stated on its website, says its mission is to “inspire the change of digital culture through educational innovation, impacting and benefiting the greatest number of students, teachers and educational institutions by training teachers for the use of technologies”. In both cases, the positioning of technology as a driving force for innovation and teaching quality or simply learning is strong, which seems to be a very expensive notion for the field, as Barreto (2009) has already said.

The *sites* and institutional videos from these and other companies listed in the report suggest the prevalence of an argument that insists on the need for changes in education, which would be made possible by pedagogical innovation supported by digital technologies. Companies offer, for example, didactic or complementary materials to meet school curricula (it is common to refer to the BNCC) or to increase the curriculum, creating a “culture of innovation”, as in one of the examples given above; pedagogical consulting for “teachers’ continuing education”; resources for frequent student evaluation and data on student performance taken from tests carried out on their platforms; in addition to other digital functionalities or actions that would allow for teaching personalization, a concept that appears frequently in the field¹³.

Edtechs present a diversity of sales arguments, but despite this diversity, they continue to “play a game” common to all. The companies seem to agree on what is necessary to consolidate themselves as new actors within the field, founded on basic concepts: in general, they affirm an urgency for educational transformation; they present the idea of innovation as central to their practices, with technology as a basis; and a few emphasize offering some type of teaching personalization, as opposed to the massive teaching that they dispute. There seems to be a guiding axis that ensures the field’s stability and the game’s viability for these new agents: the ideas of “innovation”, “educational transformation” through technology, and “teaching personalization”. Among others, these notions ratify the relevance of technologies. The type of product sold for educational purposes can vary greatly, as well as details

11 Bloom’s taxonomy is a hierarchical scheme of learning objectives organized into three domains. The taxonomy was created by a team of American educational psychologists, between the late 1940s and early 1950s, with the purpose of subsidizing large-scale evaluation (Bloom, 1976; 1982). The scheme generated multiple derivations and adaptations used, mainly, in Distance Education.

12 Excerpts were taken from the homepage of the website <<https://www.naveavela.com.br/>> on June 18, 2023.

13 Personalization presents itself as a core business concept on the Geekie page (<<https://www.geekie.com.br/>>), but also appears on the SAS education platform (<<https://saseducacao.com.br/>>) and in the Arvore platform (<<https://www.arvore.com.br/>>). Accessed on: Jun. 18, 2023.

of their sales arguments, but the ideas that guide their practices and sustain their permanence in the market of digital products and enrollment in the internal struggles of the educational field continue to aim at the same objectives.

But what is at stake in the recurrent promotion of technologies as a solution to so many problems in education? First of all, the basics: economic interests. Edtechs maintain their relevance by reinforcing ideas that question an education that no longer serves today, to guarantee their interests, survive, and grow economically. It seems obvious that private companies seek economic success, but, as Bourdieu emphasizes (2019b, p. 188), “the particular difficulty of sociology comes from the fact that it teaches things that everyone knows in a certain way, but that one does not want to know or cannot know because the law of the system is to hide them”. What seems obvious is masked by the commercial positioning of companies, which present technologies as objects endowed with neutrality, and not built by agents who have interests that possibly conflict with the greater social good.

As the materials promoting edtechs illustrate, little is said, for example, about the possible conflicts between the profitability requirements of companies and public interest, or even about the democratization of access to the internet and digital technological devices for students, a premise which makes the use of educational technologies possible. Edtechs are presented as a solution to various ills from which education suffers without questioning the social roots of these ills, without thinking about possible ways to face these issues through public policies and collective action. From this perspective, betting on simple answers to complex problems may not be very rewarding. Bowles and Gintis (2002) remind us that not even the educational reforms engendered in the nineteenth century in the United States, as part of social welfare policies, generated forceful effects in reducing social inequalities. What, then, can we expect from perspectives of technological determinism applied to a country marked by inequality, with historical social difficulties to face?

FINAL REMARKS

This article presents a first approach to edtechs and their performance in the Brazilian context as emerging actors of a field, as defined by Bourdieu. The concept of field allowed us to shed some light on the articulations of these companies as agents around shared objectives and interests that permeate their context of action. In it, specific ideas are mobilized to build legitimacy concerning an “opponent” that the agents share and from which the field is built. We suggest that the performance of these companies is driven by an idea of contesting the education that is now offered to most students, considered little innovative, massive, and insufficient when facing the requirements of the contemporary world. The arguments that support the need and

even the urgency of using educational technologies defend building a more innovative education, one able to meet a world in constant change, which requires skills beyond those that schools have fostered.

To illustrate the discussion, we use clippings of materials taken from edtech websites and relevant documents, which suggest that companies can present nuances in their market positions, but remain “in the game” by agreeing on certain ideas: the transformation of education is necessary for new times, educational innovation is technologically-founded and, in many cases, there is a need for teaching personalization. Edtechs, as economically interested agents, seem to build their relevance when facing potential customers by mobilizing these ideas and offering technological products that claim to solve serious educational issues, benefiting from ideas about technological inevitability propagated by transnational entities. We maintain that, while we do not cast a critical eye, this argument may lose sight of the commercial interests at stake and the possible conflicts between the interests of agents and the notion of education as a public good.

Since education in Brazil is the right of all and the duty of the state, as stated in the Constitution (Brazil, 1988), the fact that increasingly profitable private companies are mobilizing their efforts to identify and solve problems without the wide involvement of public power or society at large requires attention. Such involvement is critical so that education does not fall victim to simplistic solutions to the complex problems it faces.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Giselle de Moraes Lima

Doutoranda e Mestre em Educação pela PUC-Rio, Graduada em Letras Portuguesas e literaturas de Língua Portuguesa pela UFPI.

E-mail: gis6le@gmail.com

Giselle Martins dos Santos Ferreira

Pós-Doutora em Educação pela Open University do Reino Unido. Atualmente, é Professora Adjunta no Departamento de Educação da PUC-Rio.

E-mail: gmdsferreira@gmail.com

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