



Perceptions of Innovation and Educational Quality: A Study in a Higher Education Institution

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Received: 17 December 2026 / Revised: 13 January 2026 / Accepted: 10 March 2026 / Published: 25 March 2026
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Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv13n101

Abstract

Educational innovation is understood as the integration of pedagogical methodologies, strategies, and resources that transform teaching practices and foster meaningful learning. Beyond the refinement of existing techniques, it involves structural changes that respond to contemporary challenges in higher education. In this context, educational quality is conceived as a multidimensional construct that encompasses inclusive, contextualized, and up-to-date learning processes, in which students play a central role within a positive institutional climate. This study examines how methodological innovation, educational leadership, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and learning-centered pedagogical approaches contribute to educational quality in a Brazilian university. Active learning methodologies supported by digital resources are shown to strengthen key competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, while continuous professional development enables teachers to act effectively as mediators of learning. The findings suggest that the alignment between innovative teaching practices and institutional conditions enhances the effectiveness, equity, and relevance of the teaching-learning process, contributing to the preparation of students for the social, technological, and cultural challenges of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Educational innovation; Educational quality; Higher education; Active learning methodologies

1. Introduction

Educational innovation has become a central driver of change across all levels of education, and its relevance is particularly evident in contemporary higher education. In a Brazilian university located in the state of São Paulo, the growing demands placed on academic communities including administrators, faculty, students, families and society at large require increasingly specialized, adaptive and future oriented competencies. These demands call for the continuous incorporation of new academic experiences that are closely linked to the core dimensions of educational quality, including effective leadership, innovative pedagogical practices, updated disciplinary knowledge and the meaningful use of digital technologies. In this context, innovation is not merely an option but a strategic mechanism for academic development, as the pedagogical strategies and professional dispositions adopted by faculty members directly shape the quality of the teaching and learning process.

For higher education institutions to fulfill their social and educational missions, university teachers must cultivate creative and reflective professional practices that foster inquiry, critical thinking and openness to change, rather than relying on mechanical, routine or purely transmissive approaches to instruction. Predominantly theoretical and lecture based classes tend to provide limited feedback, restrict student engagement and insufficiently address individual learning needs, thereby constraining the potential for deep and meaningful learning. In contrast, pedagogical innovation integrates theory and practice through active, student centered and context sensitive approaches that promote continuous

improvement in educational quality, equity and relevance. Through such innovative teaching practices, both faculty and students can co construct richer learning experiences, enabling higher education to respond more effectively to contemporary challenges and to support the comprehensive academic, professional and personal development of learners. Within this context, this study examines how methodological innovation, institutional climate and leadership practices interact to shape educational quality in a Brazilian university.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Educational innovation and quality in higher education

Educational innovation is commonly associated with the introduction of improvements in teaching materials, instructional methods, assessment practices and institutional organization. However, not every improvement constitutes innovation. While improvement involves optimizing existing practices, innovation implies the incorporation of new, creative and transformative elements that substantially reshape educational processes. From this perspective, educational innovation is best understood as an active and continuous process of inquiry, experimentation and implementation of new pedagogical practices, aimed at addressing contextual challenges and enhancing teaching and learning outcomes (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves and Shirley, 2012).

In higher education, innovation plays a strategic role in strengthening educational quality. Universities are expected not only to transmit knowledge, but also to develop critical, creative and socially responsible professionals. This requires teaching practices that are pedagogically sound, technologically supported and institutionally aligned with broader quality assurance frameworks. In Brazil, these expectations are reinforced by the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education, which promotes continuous improvement through institutional self evaluation, external review and performance indicators. Within this framework, educational quality is conceived as a multidimensional construct that integrates teaching effectiveness, institutional governance and student centered learning environments.

2.2 Institutional climate, active learning and student engagement

A growing body of research demonstrates that the quality of learning in higher education is strongly influenced by the institutional climate in which teaching and learning take place. Learning environments that support active and collaborative learning foster not only cognitive development, but also students' socio emotional skills, sense of belonging and academic motivation (Freeman et al., 2014; Prince and Felder, 2006). Empirical studies show that collaborative and problem based methodologies increase student engagement and critical thinking by enabling learners to co construct knowledge through interaction and shared responsibility (Loes and Pascarella, 2017; OECD, 2019).

Such environments are essential for educational quality because they strengthen pedagogical relationships, promote trust and enhance academic well being. When students perceive their institution as supportive, respectful and intellectually stimulating, they are more likely to persist in their studies and achieve deeper learning outcomes (Zepke and Leach, 2010; Tinto, 2017). Consequently, institutional climate functions as a structural component of educational quality, mediating the impact of teaching methods on student learning.

2.3 Leadership and the professional development of university teachers

Educational innovation and institutional climate do not emerge spontaneously; they are shaped by leadership and faculty practices. In higher education, leadership is a key driver of pedagogical change, requiring continuous professional learning, adaptability, empathy and self efficacy to guide institutions through complex and uncertain contexts (Leithwood and Sun, 2012; Bush, 2020). Effective leaders create the conditions that enable innovation by supporting collaboration, encouraging experimentation and aligning organizational goals with teaching and learning priorities.

At the same time, the quality of higher education depends directly on the professional development of university teachers. Academic staff must combine disciplinary expertise with pedagogical competence to design meaningful, student centered learning experiences. Continuous professional development oriented toward reflective practice, instructional innovation and collaborative learning is therefore essential for sustaining high quality institutional environments (Nóvoa, 2017; Tardif, 2014; Gatti et al., 2019). When leadership and faculty development are aligned, universities are better positioned to implement innovative methodologies that enhance both institutional effectiveness and student learning.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory, cross-sectional research design with a predominantly quantitative approach, complemented by interpretive elements. The exploratory nature of the study is justified by the limited empirical evidence on methodological innovation and educational quality within Brazilian higher education institutions, particularly from the perspective of institutional actors. Rather than testing hypotheses or establishing causal relationships, the research aims to generate initial empirical insights that may inform future theory-building and hypothesis-driven investigations.

3.1 *Research context and sample*

The study was conducted in a Brazilian public university located in the state of São Paulo. The institutional context was selected due to its ongoing initiatives related to pedagogical innovation, the use of active learning methodologies, and the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in teaching practices.

Participants were selected through non-probabilistic, convenience sampling, based on accessibility and willingness to participate. The sample included teachers from different academic areas, with diversity in gender, age, academic background, and teaching experience, in order to capture a broad range of perspectives on methodological innovation and educational quality. Although the sample size does not allow for statistical generalization, it is considered adequate for the exploratory objectives of the study, enabling analytical generalization within the specific institutional context examined.

3.2 *Data collection instrument*

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions with four-point Likert-type response scales. The instrument was designed to capture respondents' perceptions regarding: (i) the frequency of use of innovative teaching methodologies; (ii) the effectiveness of pedagogical and technological resources; (iii) the impact of innovative practices on student motivation, participation, and meaningful learning; and (iv) institutional conditions related to leadership, infrastructure, and teacher–student interaction.

The development of the questionnaire was theoretically grounded in the literature on educational innovation, active learning methodologies, and educational quality in higher education. The items were constructed to reflect key dimensions identified in prior studies, ensuring conceptual coherence between the research objectives and the measurement instrument. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed to assess clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's analytical focus, contributing to its content validity.

Although formal procedures for construct validation and reliability testing were not conducted, this limitation is consistent with the exploratory nature of the research and is explicitly acknowledged. Future studies are encouraged to apply validation techniques such as pilot testing, factor analysis, and reliability measures to strengthen the psychometric properties of the instrument.

3.3 *Data collection procedures*

The questionnaire was administered electronically, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation. Respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses. Data collection occurred at a single point in time, characterizing the study as cross-sectional.

3.4 *Population and sample*

The study population consisted of 30 faculty members from a higher education institution located in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, who teach in different undergraduate and postgraduate programs in an urban context. Participants were selected through purposive and convenience sampling, prioritizing instructors with at least two years of teaching experience and prior engagement with at least one innovative teaching strategy.

Diversity in gender, age, academic background and teaching area was sought in order to capture a broad range of perspectives on methodological innovation and teaching quality.

3.5 *Data collection instrument*

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of closed ended items and four point response scales. The instrument was designed to capture information on the frequency of use of innovative teaching methods, the pedagogical resources employed, and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness and impact of these practices on educational quality and student learning.

The questionnaire also included a sociodemographic section to characterize the participants and support the contextual interpretation of the results.

3.6 *Data analysis*

Data analysis relied primarily on descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentage analyses. This analytical strategy is appropriate for exploratory research, as it enables the identification of patterns, tendencies, and perceived relationships among key variables without imposing restrictive statistical assumptions.

The results were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework on educational innovation and quality, allowing for a contextualized discussion of how methodological innovations are perceived and enacted within the institution studied. The analysis does not seek to establish causal inferences, but rather to map perceptions and generate insights that may inform future empirical and theoretical developments.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

Before presenting the empirical findings, it is important to clarify the analytical perspective that guides the discussion. The results of this study should be interpreted in light of the institutional and contextual conditions in which they were produced. Although several findings resonate with existing literature on educational innovation and active learning methodologies, this convergence should not be understood as a straightforward confirmation of established models.

Instead, the analysis adopts a contextual and institutional lens, recognizing that the adoption, diffusion, and perceived effectiveness of innovative pedagogical practices are shaped by organizational structures, cultural norms, leadership arrangements, and available resources. From this perspective, innovation in higher education is not a uniform or linear process, but one marked by variation, unevenness, and local adaptations.

This analytical framing is particularly relevant given that the study is based on a single institutional context. Accordingly, the findings are discussed as analytically generalizable insights, rather than empirically generalizable results. The following sections explore how methodological innovation and perceptions of educational quality are unevenly institutionalized across the organization, highlighting both enabling conditions and structural constraints.

4.1 *Uneven Institutionalization of Innovative Methodologies*

For the question "*How often are innovative methodologies used in your classroom?*" the results obtained indicate that the implementation of innovative methodologies in the institution's classes are not homogeneous, but rather present different levels of application according to the respondents' perceptions. Twenty percent of participants indicated that these methodologies are always used, reflecting a group of teachers who have systematically and consistently integrated innovative strategies into their teaching practices, ensuring active and participatory learning for students. The largest proportion, 47%, indicated that innovative methodologies are applied frequently, which shows that, although there has been significant progress in incorporating these strategies, their use still depends on certain factors such as the subject, available resources, or teaching planning. On the other hand, 23% of respondents believe that methodologies are implemented sometimes, showing that there are times when traditional practices are used or that not all content is addressed through innovative strategies, which could limit student motivation and comprehensive development in those areas. Finally, 10% stated that innovative methodologies are never applied, highlighting that barriers still exist, such as lack of training, limited resources, or resistance to change, which prevent the full adoption of educational innovations. Taken together, these results suggest that the institution has made progress toward integrating innovative methodologies, but it is necessary to strengthen their uniform application, train teaching staff, and ensure adequate resources so that innovation translates into a more consistent impact on educational quality, meaningful learning, and the development of competencies students.

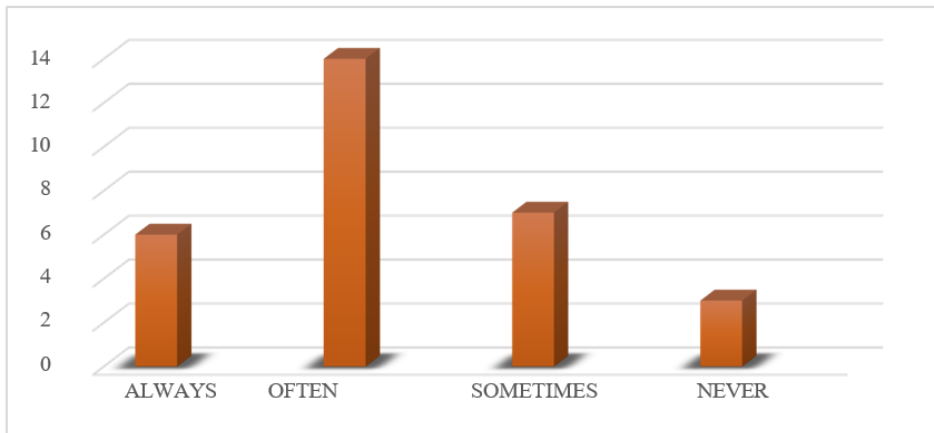


Figure 1. Frequency of innovative methodologies in class

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2 Perceived Effectiveness of Educational Resources

For the question “How effective do you consider the educational resources (technological, teaching materials, laboratories, ICTs) used in these innovative methodologies to be?” the results show that the majority of respondents, 63%, consider the educational resources used in innovative methodologies to be very effective, reflecting that technological tools, teaching materials, laboratories, and ICTs are contributing significantly to student learning and skills development. Twenty-seven percent of participants felt that the resources are effective, indicating that, although a positive impact is perceived, some elements could still be optimized to achieve greater pedagogical benefit. On the other hand, 10% of respondents consider them to be ineffective, which shows that certain resources may have limitations or may not be fully adapted to students’ needs, pointing to areas for improvement in the availability, updating, or use of these materials. It is important to note that no respondent rated the resources as ineffective, indicating that, in general, the resources implemented are viewed positively and contribute to strengthening educational quality and the effectiveness of innovative methodologies within the institution.

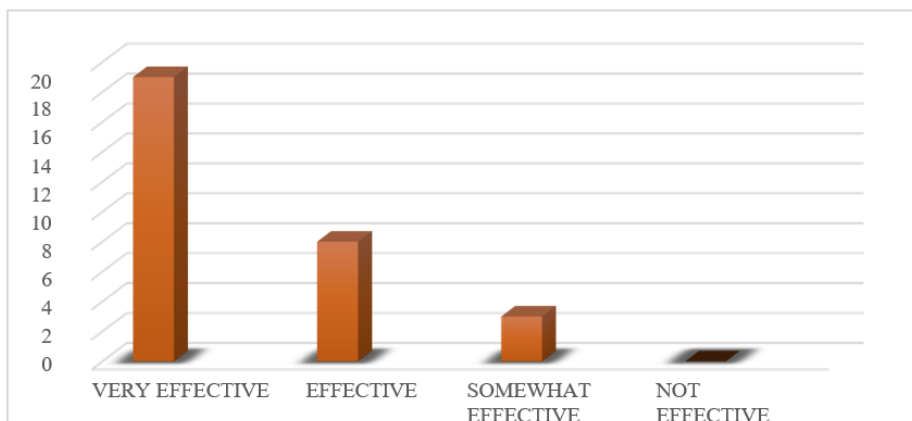


Figure 2. Effective educational resources

Source: Own elaboration.

4.3 Motivation and Student Engagement

For the question “Do you think that the use of innovative methodologies has increased your motivation and participation in class?” the results show that 70% of respondents believe that the use of innovative methodologies has greatly increased their motivation and participation in class, indicating that these strategies capture students’ attention and encourage active, meaningful, and participatory learning. Thirteen percent perceive a moderate increase, suggesting that, although there is a positive impact, in some cases motivation or participation could be improved by adapting methods, varying activities, or using educational resources more strategically. Ten percent of respondents believe that these methodologies have generated little motivation, which may be associated with personal preferences, difficulties in understanding the activities, or limitations in the application of the methodology. Finally, 7% indicated that they have not generated any changes in their motivation, which shows that there are still students who require a more personalized approach or additional support to take full advantage of innovative strategies. Overall, these results reflect that innovative methodologies have a considerable positive impact on student motivation and participation, although it is necessary to continue adapting strategies to address the diversity of needs and learning styles present in the classroom.

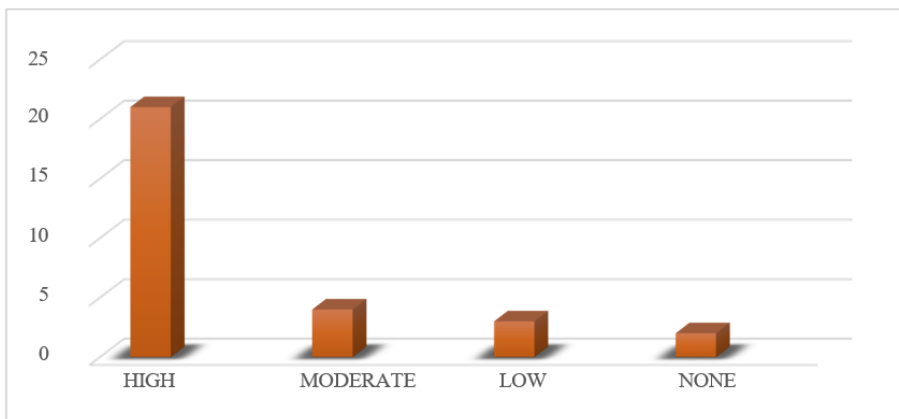


Figure 3. Motivation and participation
Source: Own elaboration.

4.4 Contribution to Meaningful Learning

For the question “To what extent have methodological innovations improved your understanding of content and meaningful learning?” the results indicate that 90% of respondents believe that methodological innovations have greatly improved their understanding of the content and promoted meaningful learning, which shows that innovative strategies applied in the classroom are highly effective in strengthening knowledge assimilation and developing cognitive skills in a profound and lasting way. Ten percent of participants perceive a moderate improvement, suggesting that, although the impact is positive, some methodologies or resources could still be adjusted to better address the diversity of learning styles and ensure that all students achieve maximum academic success. No responses indicating little or no improvement were recorded, reflecting that virtually all students recognize the value of these innovations in consolidating their learning. Taken together, these results reinforce the importance of implementing innovative methodologies as a key component in achieving quality education, where meaningful understanding and comprehensive student development are effectively enhanced.

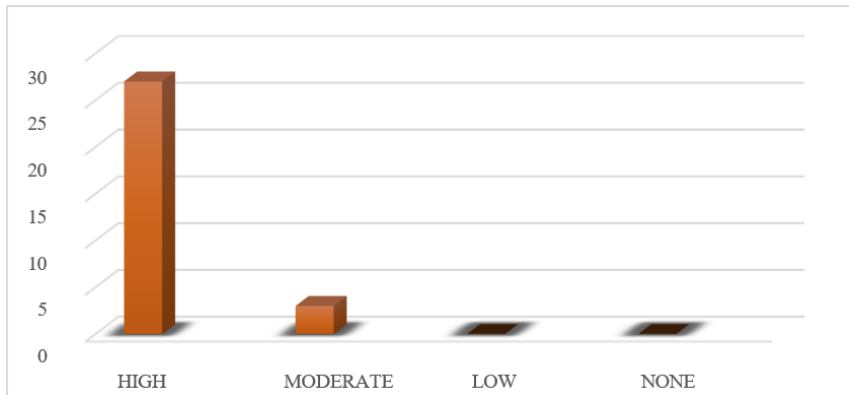


Figure 4. Comprehension of content and learning
Source: Own elaboration.

4.5 Adaptation to Students' Needs and Learning Pace

For the question “Do you think teachers adapt innovative strategies to students' needs, interests, and learning pace?” the results show that 40% of respondents believe that teachers always adapt innovative strategies to students' needs, interests, and learning pace, reflecting a strong commitment by the teaching staff to personalize learning and address classroom diversity. Fifty percent indicated that teachers sometimes make these adaptations, suggesting that although there is a significant effort, there is still room to improve the consistency with which differentiated methodologies are applied to meet all learning styles.

Seven percent reported that these adaptations are rarely implemented, and 3% stated that strategies are never adjusted to students' needs, indicating that some learners may not be receiving the personalized attention necessary to maximize their learning. Overall, the findings suggest that while there is a clear effort by teachers to implement student-centered innovative strategies, it is essential to strengthen teacher training and instructional planning to ensure that adaptation to diversity is consistent and effective, thereby promoting inclusive and equitable quality education.

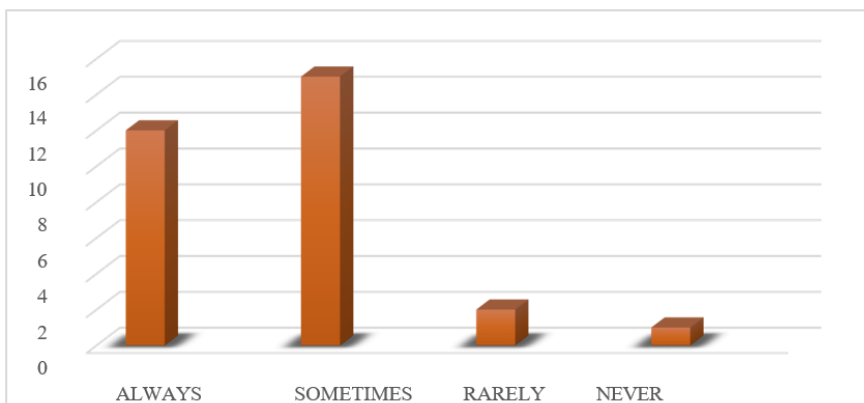


Figure 5. Needs, interests and learning pace
Source: Own elaboration.

4.6 Impact on Educational Quality

For the question “Do you feel that the implementation of innovative methodologies has had a positive impact on the educational quality of the institution?” the results show that 53% of respondents perceive that the implementation of innovative methodologies has had a very high impact on the educational quality of the institution, indicating that more than half of the participants recognize significant improvements in teaching-learning processes, student engagement, and the efficiency of pedagogical practices. Thirty-three percent consider the impact to be high, reinforcing the positive perception of the effectiveness of innovative strategies, although their degree of influence may vary depending on the subject, available resources, and teacher-student interaction. Ten percent of respondents perceive a moderate impact, while only 3% consider it low, suggesting that there are specific areas where innovations could be strengthened to ensure a more uniform effect across the educational community. Taken together, these results show that the adoption of innovative methodologies contributes substantially to raising educational quality, but they also highlight the need to continue improving teacher training, resource availability, and consistency in the application of these strategies to maximize their benefits throughout the institution.

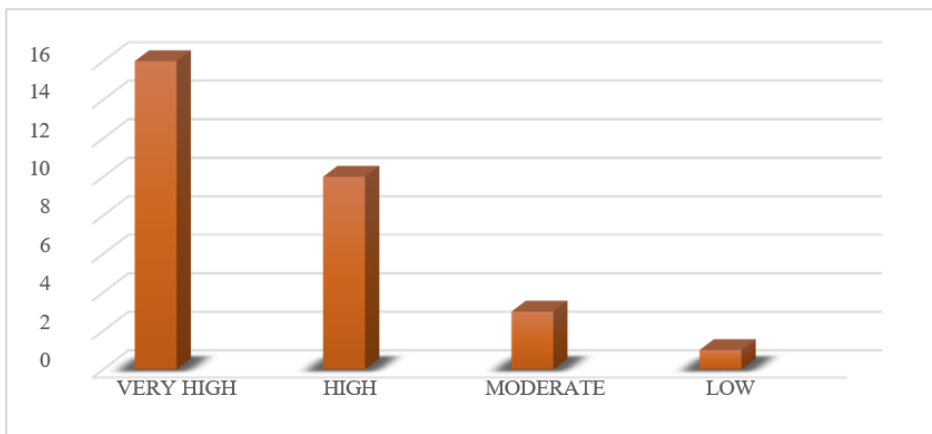


Figure 6. Positive impact on educational quality

Source: Own elaboration.

4.7 Role of Leadership and Management

For the question “How would you rate leadership and management in promoting and supporting innovative methodologies?” the results indicate that 27% of respondents consider leadership and management in the promotion and support of innovative methodologies to be excellent, showing that more than a quarter perceive solid and effective support from management to implement innovative teaching strategies. Thirty-three percent rate this leadership as good, reflecting that there is an adequate level of support, although there is room for improvement in strengthening supervision, guidance, and support for teachers in the application of new methodologies. Another 33% consider it fair, indicating that there is a significant group of teachers who perceive limitations or inconsistencies in leadership, which could affect the consistent and effective implementation of innovations in teaching. Finally, 7% perceive leadership as poor, showing that some teachers feel they lack the guidance and support necessary to develop innovative methodologies in an optimal way. Taken together, these results suggest that, although managerial leadership has a positive impact on the promotion of pedagogical innovations, it is important to strengthen training, strategic planning, and ongoing support to ensure that all teachers feel supported and motivated to apply innovative educational practices consistently.



Figure 7. Leadership and management
Source: Own elaboration.

4.8 Adequacy of Physical and Technological Infrastructure

For the question “Do you think that the spaces and resources at the school (classrooms, ICTs, libraries, laboratories) facilitate the application of innovative methodologies?” the results show that 36% of respondents believe that the school's facilities and resources fully facilitate the application of innovative methodologies, indicating that more than a third perceive classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and ICTs to be adequately equipped to support modern teaching strategies. Thirty-two percent believe that these spaces and resources do so partially, reflecting that, although some availability and usefulness is recognized, there are limitations or needs for improvement that could optimize the implementation of educational innovations. Twenty-three percent consider that the resources facilitate implementation to a small extent, suggesting that there are significant shortcomings that affect the effective development of innovative methodologies, creating barriers to active and participatory learning. Finally, 10% believe that the spaces and resources do not facilitate the application of innovations at all, indicating that some teachers perceive critical limitations in infrastructure and tools that hinder the implementation of modern teaching strategies. Taken together, these results show that while there is general recognition of the usefulness of available resources, it is necessary to continue improving infrastructure and access to educational technologies to maximize the impact of innovative methodologies on student learning.

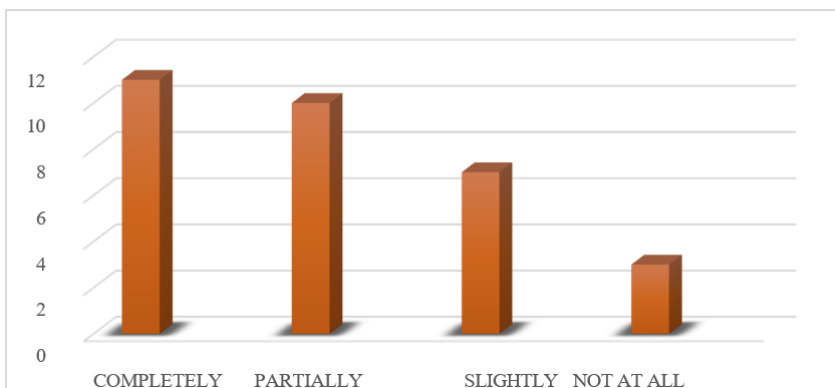


Figure 8. School spaces and resources
Source: Own elaboration.

4.9 Teacher–Student Interaction

For the question “How do you perceive teacher-student interaction in the context of applying innovative methodologies?” the results show that teacher-student interaction in the context of innovative methodologies is perceived mostly positively, as 50% of respondents consider this interaction to be positive and 30% rate it as very positive, indicating that most students perceive effective, collaborative, and motivating communication within the classroom. This suggests that innovative teaching strategies encourage active participation, dialogue, and constant feedback between teachers and students, which are fundamental aspects for strengthening meaningful learning.

On the other hand, 17% of respondents rate the interaction as fair, which shows that there is still room for improvement in the educational relationship, possibly due to limitations in the implementation of certain methodologies, insufficient resources, or differences in learning rates. Finally, only 3% consider interaction to be negative, indicating that very few students perceive communication barriers or difficulties in the teacher-student dynamic. Overall, these data show that innovative methodologies contribute positively to the learning environment, but require adjustments and constant monitoring to ensure that all students benefit equally.

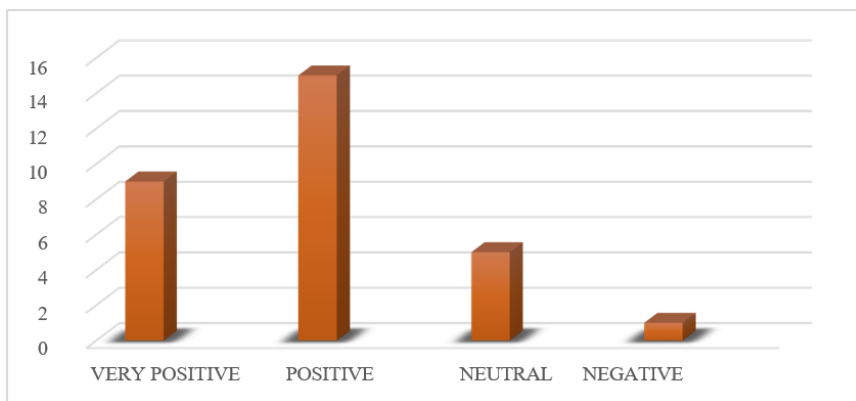


Figure 9. Teacher-student interaction

Source: Own elaboration.

4.10 Development of Cognitive, Procedural, and Attitudinal Competencies

For the question “How significant do you consider the impact of these methodological innovations to be on the development of students’ cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal skills?” the results show that most students perceive a positive impact of methodological innovations on the development of cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal skills. Fifty-three percent consider the impact to be significant, while 20% rate it as very significant, which shows that more than half of the students recognize the usefulness and effectiveness of these strategies in consolidating knowledge, practical skills, and attitudes essential to their comprehensive education.

However, 27% perceive the impact as insignificant, indicating that there are still areas where innovations are not fully adapted to individual needs, learning rhythms, or student styles. This group points to the need for adjustments in implementation, greater teacher support, or diversification of strategies to make the benefits of innovative methodologies more equitable. It should be noted that no student perceives the impact as nil, which reinforces the idea that, in general terms, methodological innovations contribute positively to the comprehensive development of students.

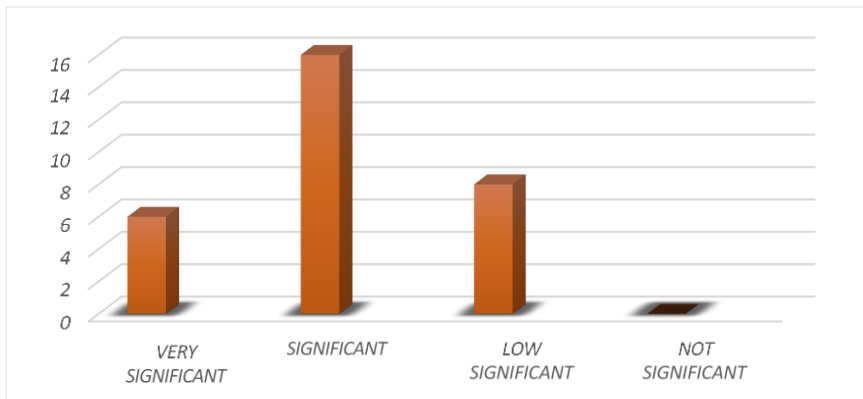


Figure 10. Impact of methodological innovations
Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study demonstrates that innovation is a central driver of educational quality. The results show that innovative methodologies contribute significantly to more engaging, meaningful, and effective learning environments by transforming routine academic practices into processes based on dialogue, reflection, creativity, and active participation. When supported by strong school leadership, a positive institutional climate, and family–school connections, these methodologies strengthen students’ cognitive, procedural, and attitudinal competencies while also enhancing teachers’ pedagogical effectiveness.

The findings further suggest that innovation is not merely a technical intervention, but a systemic process shaped by the interaction between school management, classroom practices, and the sociocultural and family contexts of learners. Innovative methodologies are most effective when they are aligned with students’ individual needs, learning rhythms, and social realities, reinforcing the idea that educational quality depends on contextualized and learner-centered approaches.

Overall, the study confirms that the ethical and pedagogical integration of innovative methodologies fosters a more dynamic, inclusive, and high-quality teaching–learning process. Teachers play a critical mediating role by creating learning opportunities, stimulating curiosity, and adapting instructional strategies to diverse learners, thereby contributing to sustainable educational improvement.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings are based on participants’ perceptions, which may be influenced by subjective interpretations, institutional culture, or social desirability bias. Second, the sample was restricted to a specific institutional and contextual setting, which limits the generalizability of the results to other educational systems or regions. Third, the study focused primarily on self-reported data rather than direct classroom observations or longitudinal learning outcomes, which could provide a more robust assessment of the impact of innovative methodologies.

Future research should therefore incorporate mixed-methods designs, include multiple institutions and cultural contexts, and examine long-term learning effects to deepen understanding of how innovative methodologies influence educational quality across diverse settings.

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