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Public Policies in Higher Education in Brazil: From Hollow Inclusion to Social Transformation through the Curricularization of University Extension

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Abstract: *Brazilian higher education has recently emphasized the curricularization of university extension, mandating the integration of extension activities into undergraduate curricula to foster social engagement and inclusion. This article critically examines the policy's historical, legal, and theoretical foundations, highlighting its potential to address "hollow inclusion," a phenomenon where formal commitments to equity and community engagement remain superficial. Drawing on Paulo Freire and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the study employs a qualitative, document-based analysis of constitutional provisions, regulatory frameworks, and key theoretical texts. Findings reveal that while the legal framework is robust, implementation is hindered by entrenched academic culture, structural limitations, and inadequate resources. The study concludes that achieving meaningful curricular integration requires institutional support, faculty training, and genuine dialogue between universities and communities, ensuring extension fulfills its transformative educational and social mission.*

Keywords: *Higher Education; University Extension; Curricularization; Brazil; Hollow Inclusion; Public Policy; Social Engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Public policies for higher education in Brazil are perpetually evolving, reflecting the nation's dynamic social, political, and economic landscape. A recent, pivotal reform is the curricularization of university extension, a policy that mandates integrating extension activities into the core academic curriculum. This initiative aims to foster a more comprehensive, socially engaged education by bridging the gap between universities and society.

However, the effective implementation of this policy is often hampered by a phenomenon we might term "hollow inclusion", a rhetorical commitment to equity and social engagement that lacks substantive structural and pedagogical integration. This concept draws on critical education theorists like Paulo Freire (1983) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009), who argue that accurate educational equity requires not just access but a transformative dialogue between academic and community knowledge. Hollow inclusion occurs when policies like curricularization are adopted in principle but fail to disrupt the traditional hierarchies that privilege theoretical teaching over practical, community-oriented engagement.

This article examines Brazil's curricularization of university extension, its historical and legal roots, and its potential to overcome hollow inclusion. By analyzing implementation challenges and prospects, it contributes to shaping a higher education system that is genuinely inclusive, socially relevant, and responsive to Brazil's needs.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

The trajectory of Brazilian higher education is marked by distinct phases that reflect the nation's political and social struggles. From its elitist origins to its contemporary massification, the system's evolution contextualizes the current drive to curricularize extension.

Colonization and Jesuit Education

The foundations of Brazilian higher education were established during Portuguese colonization, initiated by the arrival of the Jesuits in the 16th century. These religious missionaries introduced a structured educational model focused on evangelization and the training of indigenous peoples, which ultimately served to shape the colonial elite. Institutions like the Colégio de São Paulo, founded in 1554 and a precursor to the University of São Paulo (USP), were central to this project. While their primary aim was the formation of priests, they also educated the sons of Portuguese settlers, providing instruction in classical humanities, sciences, and religion.

As emphasized by scholars such as Severino (2006), the Jesuits played an indispensable role in founding Brazil's first educational institutions and cultivating its initial class of intellectuals. Their pedagogical approach, rooted in Ignatian principles, left a profound and lasting imprint on Brazilian culture and institutional life. Beyond the Colégio de São Paulo, other institutions such as the Colégio de Salvador in Bahia and the Colégio de Olinda in Pernambuco were established, crucially disseminating both Catholic doctrine and formal knowledge among colonial populations.

However, this early system was intrinsically exclusionary. Jesuit education was designed for the elite, primarily serving to consolidate the power of the colonial administration and the Church, while systematically excluding the poorer strata of society and indigenous communities. As historian José Antônio Tobias (1972) notes, despite these limitations, the Jesuit model significantly contributed to an incipient cultural and national identity, laying the groundwork for the country's future educational development.

A significant shift occurred in 1759 with the expulsion of the Jesuits from Brazil by the Marquis of Pombal. This event triggered a reorganization of the colonial educational system, leading to its secularization and the creation of new institutions. Nevertheless, the Jesuit pedagogical legacy endured, continuing to influence the structure and culture of Brazilian education for centuries.

Throughout the subsequent colonial and imperial periods, access to advanced learning remained a privilege of the elite. Many wealthy Brazilians pursued their studies at metropolitan universities, such as the University of Coimbra in Portugal. It was only with the influence of Enlightenment ideals and European liberalism that the first secular higher education institutions began to emerge in Brazil, such as the Rio de Janeiro School of Medicine, founded in 1808.

The era of colonization and Jesuit education played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of higher education in Brazil. It left a dual legacy: fostering a literate elite and advancing the country's cultural and intellectual development, while simultaneously establishing an exclusionary, elitist model that would pose persistent challenges to the democratization of knowledge for centuries to come.

Empire and the First Institutions

The Imperial Period (1822–1889) marked a pivotal phase in the development of Brazilian higher education, characterized by the nation's pursuit of a distinct intellectual identity. Initially, the education of the country's elite depended on European institutions, particularly the University of Coimbra in Portugal. As historian Emília Viotti da Costa (2010) notes, this education exposed Brazilian students to Enlightenment ideals, fostering a nascent sense of national consciousness. However, this dependence on foreign institutions increasingly came to be seen as an obstacle to national sovereignty and progress. This recognition encouraged the creation of Brazil's own higher education system. A landmark initiative was the Law of August 11, 1827, which established the first law schools in São Paulo and Olinda. These academies were designed to cultivate a domestic class of jurists and administrators essential for state-building. As observed by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1990), this represented a significant step toward the formation of a local intellectual elite. Following this, other professional schools emerged in fields like medicine, engineering, and the fine arts, aiming to meet the technical demands of the growing empire.

Despite this institutional advancement, the system was fundamentally shaped by the era's profound social and economic inequalities. Access to these new academies remained almost exclusively reserved for the sons of the political and economic elite. While the creation of local institutions was a crucial advance, it did not signify democratization. The imperial higher education model thus served to consolidate an exclusionary social order, effectively reinforcing the very hierarchies it emerged from by limiting knowledge and professional training to a small, privileged segment of the population.

Republic and the Expansion of Higher Education

The Proclamation of the Republic in 1889 marked a transformative era for Brazilian higher education, driven by a state-led agenda of modernization and nation-building. During this period, the university system was deliberately expanded to produce professionals, engineers, doctors, and lawyers, considered essential for a modernizing and industrializing nation. The establishment of landmark institutions like the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in 1891 and the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1934 embodied this republican ideal, shifting the educational axis from ecclesiastical and imperial models toward a secular, public system (Schwartzman 1988). However, this expansion, while significant, was characterized by a fundamental tension between the rhetoric of democratization and the reality of persistent exclusion—a dynamic we can analyze through the theoretical lens of "hollow inclusion."

The concept of "hollow inclusion" describes policy implementations that achieve formal or rhetorical compliance with equity goals without enacting substantive, transformative integration. In the context of Republican Brazil, this meant creating new institutions and expanding enrollments, yet doing so in a way that largely reproduced existing social hierarchies. The expansion was not primarily designed as a tool for radical social mobility but for the formation of a technical and intellectual elite, thereby maintaining the university as a space for the privileged, though under a new, meritocratic appearance that often masked underlying socioeconomic barriers.

The Republican period saw the state actively assume the role of educational architect. The creation of UFRJ and USP represented a decisive move away from reliance on professional schools and on foreign education. These universities were designed as comprehensive centers for producing knowledge and national identity, central to the republican vision of progress. As Schwartzman (1988) argues, the organization of this system was deeply influenced by positivist and modernist ideals, where education was directly linked to national development. This was a top-down, state-driven process, focused on creating capacity rather than ensuring broad-based equity.

The expansion continued throughout the 20th century, particularly during the latter half, with the creation of more federal and state universities across the country's diverse regions. This geographical diversification was a crucial step to decentralize knowledge production and opportunities. Alongside institutional growth, the period also saw the genesis of future inclusion policies. While a comprehensive national quota system was a 21st-century development, the republican era laid the groundwork for such interventions by establishing the principle of the state's responsibility to broaden access, albeit initially through limited and often ineffective programs.

Despite these advances, the Republican model of expansion faced severe limitations, exposing its "hollow" character. The quality of education varied dramatically between new and established institutions, and a chronic lack of financial resources and adequate infrastructure plagued the system. Profound social and economic inequalities also circumscribed the promise of democratization. Access to the expanding university system remained limited primarily to the urban middle and upper classes, who were better prepared to pass the rigorous vestibular entrance exams. As a result, much of the population, including people living in poverty, as well as Black and Indigenous communities, were effectively excluded from the benefits of this educational expansion.

As scholars like Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro (1999) have highlighted, the expansion of higher education during this period was a double-edged sword. It undoubtedly contributed to national development and created a larger professional class. However, without concurrent, robust policies to address deep-seated social inequities, it also risked reinforcing them. The system expanded in size but often failed to transform in character, remaining an elite enclave rather than becoming a truly democratic platform for social mobility.

The Republican period fundamentally reshaped Brazilian higher education, replacing a colonial and imperial legacy with a modern, public university system designed to promote national development. The establishment of flagship universities and the expansion of higher education nationwide were significant achievements. However, this expansion was inherently limited. Its underlying logic often perpetuated a form of "hollow inclusion," in which the system grew in capacity but did not fundamentally challenge the social structures that governed access and success. The persistent challenges of quality, funding, and genuine equitable access during this era highlight that the democratization of higher education remained, and to a significant extent continues to remain, an incomplete project, setting the stage for the more targeted inclusion policies of the contemporary period.

Military Dictatorship and University Reforms

During the period of the Military Dictatorship in Brazil, which began in 1964 and lasted until the mid-1980s, higher education underwent significant transformations that reflected both setbacks and advances in the structure and functioning of academic institutions. The university reforms implemented during this time aimed to control the academic environment and direct higher education toward areas considered strategic for the regime, such as engineering and medicine.

The military government implemented a series of measures to suppress freedom of expression and control political activity on university campuses. Through Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5), enacted in 1968, constitutional guarantees were suspended, and the powers of the military regime were expanded, enabling intervention in universities and the persecution of students and professors deemed subversive. One of the most significant university reforms during the Military Dictatorship was the 1968 University Reform, which aimed to restructure higher education institutions to align with the regime's interests. This reform established governance structures that centralized power in government-appointed rectors, thereby reducing student and faculty participation in university decision-making.

Moreover, the 1968 University Reform brought changes to curricula and educational programs, aiming to direct student training toward areas considered strategic for national development, such as engineering, medicine, and exact sciences. Faculties and courses focused on these areas were established, while social sciences and humanities were marginalized, suffering from censorship and ideological persecution.

Despite the political repression and setbacks, the period of the Military Dictatorship also saw significant advancements in higher education in Brazil. During the 1960s and 1970s, the number of universities and higher education institutions in the country increased substantially, expanding access to higher education for more Brazilians.

Additionally, policies to encourage scientific and technological research were implemented to strengthen the country's science and technology sectors and promote industrial and economic development. Programs for research funding and scholarships for students and researchers were established, as were research support institutions such as the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).

Authors such as Florestan Fernandes (1975) and Paulo Freire criticized the military regime's instrumentalization of higher education, highlighting the negative impact of university reforms on the autonomy and quality of Brazilian higher education. They argued that the regime's changes sought to control critical thinking and promote a technical, alienated form of education at the expense of a humanistic, democratic model. In defending the importance of scientific research for university organization, Fernandes (1983) emphasized that:

> To keep up with the relentless progress in various branches of scientific knowledge, the university must produce, through its own means, at least some portion of that progress; to be able to communicate the techniques of scientific knowledge to the surrounding environment, the university needs internal avenues for the discovery, application, and evaluation of such techniques (p. 364).

It is important to note that Freire emphasized the need for universities to engage with society, recognizing that such engagement fosters meaningful cultural change. He argued that individuals, as social and political beings, transform the world through their work, and this transformation depends on a deep understanding of their craft, even if that understanding varies in depth. As Freire observed, "No one knows everything, just as no one is completely ignorant" (Freire 1983, 47). This issue remains central to public education today, as the persistent belief that "theory and practice are separate" continues, along with the notion that legitimate knowledge resides solely with academic authorities. In contrast, knowledge produced outside universities is often dismissed as mere folklore or belief.

Although university extension was not a priority during the Military Dictatorship and remained a peripheral concern in the early 1980s (Freire 2011, 11), a pivotal change occurred in 1985, as Sousa (2000, 97) notes: the introduction of direct elections for university leaders by popular vote. This reform enabled individuals dedicated to advancing university interests to attain leadership positions. Consequently, extension programs began to play a crucial role as intermediaries between teaching and research, focusing on societal transformation, particularly as awareness of public welfare grew.

Nonetheless, despite these developments and achievements during the Military Dictatorship, the period was characterized by repression and authoritarianism that restricted academic freedom and democratic discourse within universities. Political persecution and ideological censorship directly impacted the quality and autonomy of higher education in Brazil, leaving a legacy of resistance and advocacy for democracy and human rights within the academic sphere.

Redemocratization and the Constitutional Mandate

The end of the military dictatorship in the mid-1980s marked a profound turning point for Brazilian higher education, initiating a period of redemocratization defined by political opening and a renewed sense of social mission. This era was characterized by the restoration of university autonomy, including the election of rectors, and vibrant internal debates about the institution's relationship with society. It was within this context that the principle of the indissociability between teaching, research, and extension was elevated from a theoretical ideal to a constitutional mandate.

The 1988 Federal Constitution marks the foundation of this new era. Article 207 explicitly guarantees university autonomy and establishes the "indissociability of teaching, research, and extension" as a core principle for federal universities. This constitutional provision laid the legal groundwork for a wave of transformative policies. In the following decades, the higher education system experienced unprecedented expansion, driven by the establishment of new federal universities throughout the country's interior—a strategic effort to promote regional development and decentralize access.

This expansion was coupled with ambitious inclusion policies designed to combat the historical "hollow inclusion" of the past. Programs like the University for All Program (ProUni) and the Student Financing Fund (FIES) were launched to create pathways for low-income students into private institutions.

More significantly, the landmark Law No. 12,711/2012 (Brazilian Quotas Act),[1] which instituted a nationwide quota system in federal universities, represented a direct legal intervention to redress historical inequalities. By reserving spots for graduates of public schools, Black, Indigenous, and disabled students, this policy moved beyond rhetorical inclusion to mandate substantive representation.

Alongside this access-oriented expansion, the redemocratization period fostered the institutionalization of the university's third mission. The Forum of Pro-Rectors of Brazilian Public Higher Education Institutions (FORPROEX) emerged as a key actor, consolidating decades of academic activism into a coherent policy framework. This effort culminated in the 2012 National University Extension Policy, which provided a unified definition of extension as an "educational, cultural, and scientific process that integrates Teaching and Research in an inseparable manner." The policy was instrumental in elevating extension from a peripheral activity to a core academic function, directly operationalizing the constitutional principle of indissociability and laying the groundwork for its subsequent curricularization.

Despite these significant advancements, the implementation of this democratic project revealed enduring challenges. The rapid expansion often strained institutional capacity, leading to disparities in educational quality and infrastructure between new and established universities. Chronic underfunding threatened to create a new form of hollow inclusion, where access was granted but the conditions for meaningful academic success were compromised. Furthermore, the higher education system began confronting new global pressures, including the demands of internationalization, the precariousness of academic labor, and the tension between public mission and commercializing forces (Sobrinho 2002; Costin 2020).

The redemocratization period fundamentally redefined Brazilian higher education, embedding social inclusion and engagement into its legal and institutional framework. The constitutional mandate, the expansion of the federal university network, and the development of robust inclusion policies marked a decisive break with the country's elitist past. However, the persistence of funding crises and quality disparities demonstrates that legal and policy frameworks, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own. The enduring challenge is to ensure that the substantive integration of a diverse student body and the deep curricularization of community engagement are supported by sustainable resources and a sustained commitment to the university as a public good, thereby ensuring that the inclusion achieved is meaningful rather than hollow.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF CURRICULARIZATION

The interconnection between teaching, research, and extension is established in Article 207 of the 1988 Constitution of the Republic. Despite the complexity of the principles outlined in the constitutional text, in practice, these ideals are often appropriated only rhetorically. The current conception of the "tripod" of teaching, research, and extension falls short of the expectations of pre-constitutional movements. Rather than a balanced structure characterized by mutual coexistence and collaboration among the three elements, the reality is more uneven:

[1]The term "Brazilian Quotas Act" commonly refers to Law No. 12.711/2012, which requires that a minimum of 50% of places in public higher education institutions be reserved for students who graduated from public high schools.

teaching predominates as the primary axis, followed by research, while extension is relegated to a secondary, often marginal role. This is why the curricularization of extension has emerged as a process of integrating extension activities into the academic curriculum, recognizing it as a fundamental function of the university. The critical theories of Paulo Freire and Boaventura de Sousa Santos strongly influence this transformation. It challenges the traditional "banking" model of education, promoting instead a dialogical approach in which academic knowledge and community wisdom interact reciprocally. The aim is to replace a unidirectional transfer of information with a collaborative process of knowledge co-creation. In this context, curricularization serves as the practical mechanism to ensure that the university fulfills its social contract, shaping students into ethically grounded professionals and actively breaking down the barriers between the academy and society to foster genuine, equitable development.

Beyond Hollow Inclusion: A Theoretical Perspective

The term "hollow inclusion" refers to a policy implementation that is formalistic rather than substantive. In the context of Brazilian higher education, it highlights the gap between the constitutional ideal of teaching, research, and extension, and the reality in which extension is often a peripheral, underfunded activity. This creates a structure in which teaching dominates, research occupies a secondary role, and extension remains a weak, "hollow" third element, lacking real influence and integration. This concept aligns with Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2009) critique of the "university of excellence," which often prioritizes metrics over social relevance. It also resonates with Paulo Freire's (1983) seminal critique of "extension," which he associated with a banking model of education, where knowledge is "deposited" into passive communities rather than exchanged through a dialogical process of mutual learning. Curricularization, therefore, offers a potential remedy to hollow inclusion by legally and structurally ensuring that extension is a core, integrated element of the curriculum, fostering genuine dialogue between the university and society.

The Legal and Jurisprudential Dimension

The legal foundation for the curricularization of extension in Brazil is both robust and multi-layered, creating a compelling legal obligation for higher education institutions. This framework begins with the supreme law of the land: Article 207 of the 1988 Federal Constitution. This article is not a mere suggestion; it is a constitutional principle that guarantees university autonomy and, crucially, establishes the "indissociability of teaching, research, and extension" as a foundational pillar for federal universities. This elevated the concept of extension from a peripheral activity to a core function of the university, imbuing it with significant legal weight.

However, a constitutional principle requires specific regulation to become actionable policy. This is where CNE/CES Resolution No. 7/2018 serves as the critical linchpin. Issued by the National Council of Education, this resolution operationalizes the constitutional mandate by setting forth concrete, measurable guidelines for its implementation. Its provisions are deliberately designed to force structural change within academic curricula. Article 3 provides a transformative definition, characterizing extension as an educational process that "stimulates the

transformative interaction between higher education institutions and other sectors of society." This wording explicitly frames extension as a two-way, dialogical exchange, moving beyond a simple charity or outreach model.

The most impactful provision, however, is Article 4, which mandates that extension activities comprise at least 10% of the total course workload. This quantitative requirement is the legal engine of curricularization. It transforms an abstract constitutional ideal into a non-negotiable, measurable institutional requirement, forcing a fundamental re-evaluation of curriculum design and resource allocation. This 10% quota acts as a powerful legal lever to combat the phenomenon of "hollow inclusion." Without such a specific mandate, the principle of indissociability could remain a rhetorical commitment, easily sidelined by traditional academic priorities. The resolution forces institutions to create dedicated space, time, and credit for extension, ensuring it cannot be treated as an optional add-on.

The trajectory from Article 207 of the Constitution to Article 4 of Resolution No. 7/2018 reflects a deliberate and powerful legal strategy. It elevates the curricularization of extension from a philosophical ideal to a binding institutional obligation. This legal framework does not merely encourage integration; it mandates it, creating the necessary pressure to dismantle historical barriers and compelling universities to fulfill their social function in a structural sense. The effectiveness of this framework, however, ultimately depends on its enforcement and on a cultural shift within the academic community to ensure that integration is substantive and transformative, rather than a mere bureaucratic exercise.

Defining the Curricularization of Extension and Its Integration into the Curriculum

The foundational concept of university extension in Brazil is authoritatively defined by FORPROEX (2012) as "the educational, cultural, and scientific process that integrates Teaching and Research in an inseparable manner and facilitates the transformative relationship between the university and society." This definition is pivotal, as it positions extension not as a peripheral activity, but as an essential component of the academic mission, on equal footing with teaching and research. The emphasis on a "transformative relationship" positions the university not as a detached ivory tower, but as an active agent in a dynamic, two-way exchange with the community. This process is designed to be mutually beneficial: society gains access to academic knowledge, while the university is enriched and challenged by the practical wisdom and lived experiences of the community, thereby grounding its theoretical production in real-world contexts.

The curricularization of extension is a strategic and systematic process designed to implement this definition. It entails the mandatory, structured integration of extension activities into undergraduate curricula, moving them from the periphery of voluntary or extracurricular activities to the core of academic life. This institutionalization directly addresses the historical marginalization of extension, ensuring it receives formal recognition, a dedicated workload, and necessary resources.

The primary objective of this transformation is twofold. First, it seeks to strengthen the symbiotic relationship between the university and society, dismantling traditional barriers. Second, and more importantly, it aims to establish a new paradigm of professional training. By embedding community engagement into the curriculum, the process cultivates graduates who

are not only technically competent but also critically aware of societal structures, ethically grounded, and committed to addressing pressing social challenges. In doing so, education is transformed from a passive acquisition of knowledge into an active practice of citizenship and social responsibility.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, document-based methodology to critically examine Brazil's policy framework governing the curricular integration of university extension activities.

Therefore, a purposive sample of key documents was selected for analysis, including:

- Legal Documents: The 1988 Federal Constitution and CNE/CES Resolution No. 7/2018.
- Policy Frameworks: The National University Extension Policy (FORPROEX 2012).
- Theoretical Texts: Foundational works by authors such as Paulo Freire (1983), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009), and Florestan Fernandes (1975).

Additionally, the analysis followed a two-stage process. First, a content analysis of the legal and policy documents was conducted to identify key themes, mandates, and implementation guidelines. Second, a thematic analysis of the theoretical texts was performed to construct a conceptual framework around "hollow inclusion" and social transformation. Data triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing findings from these different types of sources (legal, policy, and theoretical) to build a coherent and critical narrative.

Finally, initial open coding of the documents identified recurring concepts, such as "indissociability," "social transformation," and "implementation challenges." These concepts were then grouped into axial codes, including "Legal Foundations," "Theoretical Critique," and "Institutional Barriers," which ultimately formed the structure of the analysis.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis results, exploring what the data reveal, the policy ideals underlying the framework, and the real-world obstacles to implementing those ideals. It examines how the policy's aspirations align with, or fail to align with, practice, discussing both strengths and weaknesses. Key findings show where the policy works in theory but breaks down in execution due to resource limitations, institutional constraints, or unintended consequences. The implications of these findings are then considered, highlighting what must change for the policy to achieve its goals. Finally, practical lessons are identified to inform future improvement efforts.

The Persistence of Hollow Inclusion

The document analysis reveals a striking gap between the legal-theoretical mandate and the lived realities of practice. Although the Constitution and Resolution 7/2018 provide a strong, formal commitment to integrating extension into university curricula, this promise is often unfulfilled in actual institutional practice. Extension tends to function not as a central, constitutive dimension of academic life, but rather as a superficial, "tacked-on" requirement.

One of the main barriers is a deeply entrenched academic culture that places overwhelming emphasis on traditional research and teaching. Within this culture, extension is often perceived as an unnecessary burden, seen as external or supplementary work rather than a core component of knowledge production. The prevailing mindset holds that scholarly prestige and career advancement are derived primarily from publications and teaching performance, while extension is secondary and undervalued. These attitudes are reinforced by institutional incentives, evaluation criteria, reward structures, and faculty expectations that privilege conventional scholarship.

Cultural resistance is further reinforced by misunderstandings about what university extension entails. Some actors perceive it solely as service or outreach rather than as a process of knowledge co-production, critical engagement, and transformation. This perspective often leads to tokenistic practices, such as offering extension activities without meaningfully integrating them into curricula or treating them as optional extras that students and faculty can easily ignore.

Scholars such as Freire (1983) and Santos (2009) argue that unless academic culture shifts to recognize extension as integral to the production and validation of knowledge, curricularization cannot realize its transformative potential. Freire's critique of the "banking model" of education, which treats learners as passive recipients of knowledge, underscores the importance of participatory, dialogic, and socially engaged practices. Similarly, Santos highlights the epistemological and institutional hierarchies that marginalize alternative, socially situated forms of knowledge.

Although the legal foundation for extension is robust, institutional norms, cultural resistance, conventional incentive structures, and narrow definitions of legitimate academic work impede full implementation. Without addressing these deep cultural and structural challenges, the curricularization of extension risks remaining symbolic rather than substantive—a mandate on paper but hollow in practice.

Structural and Resource-Based Barriers

The analysis reveals significant structural barriers that extend well beyond cultural resistance. Many educational institutions lack sufficient funding, administrative capacity, and faculty development to support extension work that is genuinely integrated into curricula. Without stable financial resources, initiatives struggle to move beyond pilot projects or occasional programs. Additionally, the absence of dedicated administrative offices or staff positions for extension weakens coordination and oversight, leading to poorly monitored projects, limited evaluation, and limited sustainability. On the faculty side, training and professional development in extension methodologies, community engagement, or participatory approaches are often insufficient, constraining the quality, creativity, and impact of extension activities.

The legal requirement, outlined in Article 4 of Resolution 7/2018, that extension activities account for at least 10% of undergraduate course workloads is often followed in form rather than in substance. Instead of creating innovative, dialogical extension projects integrated into course structures, many institutions relabel conventional activities as "extension." These may include occasional community outreach, service tasks, or events repurposed to fill the required

hours without altering the curriculum's core or pedagogy. Such strategies preserve the appearance of compliance while failing to engage students and faculty in transformative, socially responsive learning. In effect, the hollowing persists: extension exists in name but lacks integrity or impact. Thus, structural deficits, resource shortages, administrative neglect, and insufficient faculty preparation, combined with the superficial implementation of workload mandates, undermine the policy's transformative potential. To address these challenges, institutions must commit adequate resources, reconsider incentive structures, establish robust support mechanisms, and provide meaningful training, ensuring that the 10% requirement becomes an opportunity for curricular innovation rather than a mere checkbox.

Comparative Analysis: Ideals vs. Implementation

A comparative analysis of the policy's goals against these implementation challenges is instructive, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Policy–Implementation Gap in the Curricularization of University Extension in Brazil (Source: Author's depiction)

Foundational Policy Goals for University Extension in Brazil	Core Principles of the Curricularization Policy (FORPROEX 2012; Resolution 7/2018)
Policy goal (FORPROEX 2012; Resolution 7/2018)	Implementation challenge (as revealed by this analysis)
Transformative interaction between university and society	Tendency towards unidirectional outreach rather than dialogical collaboration
Indissociability of teaching, research, and extension	Compartmentalization of extension as a separate, secondary activity
Promotion of social equity and inclusion	Hollow inclusion due to a lack of resources and genuine pedagogical integration
Development of critical, civic-minded professionals	Difficulty in assessing and valuing the non-traditional learning outcomes of extension

This comparison underscores that the success of curricularization depends not only on overcoming legal and structural hurdles but also on addressing deeply ingrained cultural and pedagogical norms within the academy.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ultimate success of the curricularization of extension in Brazil hinges on a critical transition: moving beyond mere formal compliance with legal mandates to achieving deep, substantive integration. Realizing this transformative potential requires a concerted, multi-faceted approach that addresses the financial, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions of the challenge. Without such a comprehensive effort, the policy risks remaining a bureaucratic exercise in "hollow inclusion," fulfilling the letter of the law while leaving its spirit unfulfilled.

The first and most fundamental prerequisite is a robust, strategic commitment from the government that extends far beyond issuing mandates. While resolutions like CNE/CES 7/2018

provide the necessary legal pressure, they must be backed by adequate and sustained funding streams specifically earmarked for community-engaged work. This includes dedicated grants for extension projects that require partnership-building, materials, and community involvement. Crucially, funding must also support comprehensive faculty development programs in extension pedagogy. Professors, often trained within traditional disciplinary silos, require training in methodologies for participatory action research, community-based learning, and the ethical co-creation of knowledge. Without this support, even well-intentioned faculty may lack the tools to design and execute extension activities that are truly dialogical and transformative, rather than merely charitable.

Concurrently, higher education institutions must proactively engineer a cultural shift within their own walls. The prevailing academic reward structures, which overwhelmingly prioritize traditional research publications and individual scholarly achievement, present a significant barrier. To foster a genuine culture of engagement, universities must create and implement clear incentive structures that formally recognize and reward engaged scholarship in processes for career advancement, promotion, and tenure. This involves valuing community impact reports, co-authored publications with community partners, and other forms of scholarship that demonstrate public impact. This strategic alignment of institutional incentives is essential to validate extension as a legitimate and prestigious academic pursuit, directly addressing the theoretical imperative articulated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009) to value the knowledge produced at the dynamic interface between the university and society.

Finally, and most importantly, truly addressing the phenomenon of hollow inclusion requires a radical democratization of the entire process. This entails moving beyond a model in which the university unilaterally "provides" solutions to a community seen as a passive recipient. Instead, active and meaningful community participation must be embedded from the outset, with communities recognized as co-creators and essential partners in co-designing projects, defining research priorities, and evaluating outcomes. This collaborative approach transforms extension from a service delivered by the university into a genuine dialogue where all parties are both teachers and learners. It is in this reciprocal exchange that the Freirean (1983) ideal of a mutually educative encounter is fulfilled. In this model, the university does not merely impact society; it is itself transformed by the encounter, leading to a more critical self-understanding and a curriculum that is continuously renewed and relevant. This democratic deepening is the ultimate safeguard against hollow inclusion, ensuring that the curricularization of extension becomes a powerful force for building a more just, equitable, and responsive higher education system.

CONCLUSION

The curricularization of university extension in Brazil represents a profound paradigm shift with the potential to redefine the social contract of higher education. Conceived as a direct legal and pedagogical response to the historical problem of "hollow inclusion," this policy mandates integrating community engagement into the core curriculum, thereby challenging the academy to embody its constitutional role as an agent of social transformation. This analysis elucidates both the transformative potential of this mandate and the significant systemic barriers that threaten its substantive implementation.

The primary findings of this study reveal a critical tension between policy ideals and institutional practice. While the policy goals, such as fostering dialogical collaboration and ensuring the indissolubility of teaching, research, and extension, are ambitious, their implementation is hindered by deeply entrenched academic cultures. The analysis identifies key obstacles, including the compartmentalization of extension as a secondary activity, a tendency toward unidirectional outreach rather than reciprocal collaboration, and the practical difficulty of assessing the complex, non-traditional learning outcomes that engagement produces. Without addressing these foundational issues, the policy risks perpetuating a new form of hollow inclusion, in which procedural compliance replaces genuine pedagogical transformation.

The broader implications of this research extend beyond the Brazilian context, contributing to global debates on the civic mission of universities. It demonstrates that legal mandates, while necessary, are insufficient to drive cultural change. The relevance of this study lies in its demonstration that, for engagement to be truly transformative, it must be supported by a coherent ecosystem of sustainable funding, robust administrative support, and comprehensive faculty development in community-engaged methodologies. This underscores the need for a holistic approach to institutional reform that aligns resources, incentives, and pedagogical practices with the stated policy objectives.

As a qualitative document analysis, this study has certain limitations. Its findings are based on policy texts and institutional documents, and thus capture the normative dimensions and challenges at a macro level. The lived experiences of faculty, students, and community partners, the micro level interactions that ultimately define success, represent a critical area for future research. Subsequent studies should employ ethnographic, case study, or mixed-methods approaches to investigate the on-the-ground realities of implementation and its impact on learning and community development.

The success of curricularization cannot be measured solely through quantitative metrics. Its accurate measure will be qualitative, reflected in the authenticity of the university community dialogue and the development of critically aware, ethically committed citizens. Therefore, future efforts must include the creation of nuanced qualitative indicators to assess this impact. If supported by the necessary commitment and critical reflection, this policy can move beyond a mere administrative adjustment to become a powerful instrument for building a higher education system that is not only more equitable in its composition but also more relevant and democratic in its purpose, thereby fulfilling the promise of a university that truly serves all Brazilians.

CONTRIBUTOR

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