

Pop Culture in Education: A Bibliometric Study of Trends, Uses, and Gaps of Brazilian Research on Manga (2014–2024)

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Abstract

Given the demand for diverse didactic resources that promote engagement, identification, and effective cultural mediation, products of pop culture, such as Japanese comics (or *manga*), have drawn increasing interest from educators. This bibliometric study investigates how Brazilian academic research has addressed *manga* as an object of study over the past ten years, especially in the field of Education. Using the descriptor “*mangá*,” we surveyed the Thesis and Dissertation Catalog of the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (Capes), identifying 73 Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations produced in Brazil between 2014 and 2024. Results show a rise in scholarly interest beginning in 2020, mainly in Brazil’s Southeast region. We developed a categorization matrix to classify the studies by focus: Reception and reinterpretation of *manga* (11%); Visual/aesthetic aspects (9.6%); Representation studies (31.5%); Intermedia adaptation and/or comparative literature (15.1%); Translation (4.1%); Informal education (2.7%); and Formal education (26%), the primary category of interest in this research. Out of the 19 studies focused on formal education, the majority (13) explored the use of specific *manga* titles as didactic tools for teaching content or form. Only four works examined *manga* as a collaborative creative process, proposing the production of *manga* during classroom activities. Most of these 19 studies (14) addressed Elementary or Secondary education, with none focusing on Higher Education. This absence points to a gap in the literature and highlights an opportunity for original research on *manga* creation as a pedagogical practice within the context of Higher Education.

Keywords: pop culture, *manga*, bibliometric study, education, Brazil

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Introduction

What is broadly referred to as pop culture can be understood as a set of cultural expressions conceived for wide-scale dissemination and mass consumption, embedded within an industrial and capitalist logic of distribution in which symbolic goods assume the status of what we could call commodities, as explained by Strinati (1999). Despite this critical perspective on the production and circulation of pop culture, we argue that cultural products belonging to this domain may also acquire pedagogical value when intentionally incorporated by teachers into their classroom practices. Evidence in support of this claim is provided by a study conducted in 2021 at a communitarian university¹ in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, in which 94.6% of participating faculty members agreed (totally or partially) with the premise that pop culture products have potential as supplementary teaching materials in educational contexts, while 72.8% reported having already used such references in their classes (Profeta et al., 2023). It is therefore unsurprising that pop culture can be a part of everyday school life, including in Higher Education, particularly in pedagogical scenarios guided by active learning methodologies and competency-based education, developed through concrete learning situations in which students are not conceived as passive agents.

From this perspective, pop culture products may be understood as generative themes, that is, nuclei of meaning drawn from the experienced realities of learners themselves, which function as starting points for critical dialogue and knowledge construction, in accordance with the theoretical premises of the renowned Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Freire, 2004). These are references that students already bring from out-of-school contexts (such as media environments) and which, precisely because they are infused with personal and social meanings, tend to foster contextualized and—ideally—more meaningful learning processes. Regarding educators who effectively incorporate pop culture products into their pedagogical practices, we argue that such incorporation may operate as a strategy of curricular flexibilization, whereby openings are created within more restrictive curricular arrangements and intentionally filled with cultural references that are recognizable and meaningful to the students involved. This process has been previously conceptualized as “crafting flexibilities” (Profeta et al., 2023).

The term *manga* refers to comics produced in Japan, whose roots may be associated with earlier forms of Japanese graphic arts, particularly *chōjūgiga* and *ukiyo-e*. Over time, additional elements were incorporated, including those resulting from international influences (Alvarenga, 2023). In contemporary contexts, however, manga has become significantly detached from these traditional artistic forms, taking shape through a set of recurring features (that function less as rigid rules, as they can be subverted freely, and more as observable recurring patterns). These include the predominance of black-and-white printing; character design through simplified lines, intentionally distorted at certain moments within the narrative; the use of kinetic lines to suggest movement or dramatic intensification; the application of tonal screens in the composition of shadows and textures; the graphic incorporation of onomatopoeia; the organization of panels into dynamic layouts, characterized by free arrangements on the page and overlapping elements; etc.

¹Communitarian universities constitute a type of non-profit, locally governed Higher Education institution typical of Brazil. They are managed by community councils composed of different segments of civil society and fulfill a social role analogous to that of public universities. Their academic scope is comparable to that of public or private universities, and they should not be confused with U.S.-style community colleges.

Manga constitutes a highly relevant segment of pop culture in editorial terms, not only in Japan but also in other parts of the world. Relatively recent data published by the website *Publish News*, in September 2024, indicate that *manga* accounted for 71% of the best-selling comics in the Brazilian market over the preceding 12-month period (2023 to 2024). This percentage also includes the so-called “Brazilian *manga*,” understood as national productions that adopt the aesthetic and narrative conventions characteristic of Japanese comics (Sardinha, 2024). Despite this strong commercial performance, comics—and *manga* in particular—appear to remain underutilized in classroom practices. According to Profeta et al. (2023), at the same communitarian university mentioned earlier, only 2.9% of participating faculty members identified comics as their preferred medium when selecting pop culture products for use in their teaching. When contrasted with commercial performance data, this discrepancy suggests the existence of a research and practice gap.

This paper is grounded in the assumption that there is a continuous need to adopt a diverse range of teaching resources capable of promoting student engagement, identification, and effective cultural mediation in support of genuinely meaningful learning. Products of pop culture have increasingly attracted the interest of educators, including in Higher Education, as demonstrated by previous studies. Among these potential alternative teaching materials are Japanese comics, known as *manga*. Accordingly, this paper presents a bibliometric study designed to investigate how Brazilian academic research has addressed *manga* as an object of study over the past ten years, with particular attention to the field of Education. Beyond this mapping effort, the paper introduces a tested and validated categorization matrix for the classification of academic research on *manga*, enabling the systematic visualization and analysis of large bodies of studies. By identifying patterns and gaps in this body of literature, this study aims at providing a foundation for future research that may expand our understanding of the use of *manga* as a didactic resource in formal educational contexts.

Methods

This is a bibliometric study that compiles and systematizes data from segmented publications (in this case, Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations defended in Brazil between years 2014 and 2024), thus aiming at mapping the academic production on the topic under investigation, specifically scholarly research on *manga* developed within Brazilian territory, and thereby providing a broader view of how the Brazilian scientific community in the field of Education has addressed *manga* as an object of study. Based on the collection and organization of these bibliographic records, a content analysis (Bardin, 2004) of the identified works was conducted, from which analytical categories emerged. This procedure resulted in the development of a categorization matrix, accompanied by explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, in order to ensure analytical consistency and replicability.

Theses and dissertations were selected as the focus of this study because they provide a means to measure and interpret the academic output of a specific community. The choice to focus on these types of works represents a deliberate delimitation of the *corpus*. It should be noted, however, that this selection does not encompass the entirety of scientific production, as research is also conducted and disseminated through other venues (such as papers published in journals and conference proceedings, for example).

Regarding the bibliometric stage, in December 2024 a search was conducted in the Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations of the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (Capes, in the Portuguese acronym). This catalogue is an official

database of the Brazilian government that compiles together information on Master's theses and doctoral dissertations defended in graduate programs all over Brazil, thus functioning as a centralized national repository of academic metadata. In this search, the descriptor “*mangá*” (spelled in Portuguese with a diacritical mark on the final letter *a*) was used, covering the period from 2014 to 2024.

The initial survey yielded a total of 814 entries; however, an error stemming from limitations in the data retrieval system—which does not properly correctly recognize the diacritical mark—was identified. As a result, the search encompassed other cognates and homographs in Portuguese, generating records that were unrelated to the object of the research. In light of this issue, the data cleaning stage required the isolation and systematic exclusion of these records in order to ensure the consistency of the *corpus*. This procedure involved reading each title to ensure that only works that effectively addressed the topic of *manga* were actually retained. After excluding titles that did not correspond to the scope of the research, 73 results meeting the established criteria were identified, constituting the final *corpus* for analysis.

For these 73 selected studies, the subsequent stage consisted of an analysis of titles, abstracts, and keywords, followed by a skimming reading of the full texts, when available (especially in cases where the analysis of the other data proved insufficient). These data were organized using an electronic spreadsheet, allowing similarities among the studies to be grouped into patterns. All categories were constructed *a posteriori*, that is, derived from the *corpus* itself rather than being defined beforehand. In this way, a categorization matrix was produced, with inclusion criteria for each category, as discussed in the following subsections.

To ensure triangulation and reduce interpretive bias, thereby increasing the reliability of the results, this process was conducted by two researchers in the field of Education, both authors of this study. The results presented in the “Results and Discussion” section, following the introduction of the categorization matrix, reflect this consensus when it comes to their shared interpretation.

Proposal of a Categorization Matrix

Based on the step-by-step procedure outlined previously, a categorization matrix was developed in order to organize the study *corpus*. This matrix establishes explicit inclusion rules for each category, allowing patterns that emerge from the set of analyzed studies to be observed and grouped together, thereby enabling a comprehensive reading of the academic research in the field when it comes to *manga* as a topic of interest, as well as allowing other works (from different *corpora* and/or published after 2024) to be later classified. In this way, this proposed matrix functions instrumentally for the present research, while also constituting a contribution to the literature (since its application is not restricted to this specific study).

Here are the seven categories that were identified, along with their descriptions.

I. Reception and Reinterpretation of Manga, Especially in Brazil

This category includes research focused on the reception and re-signification of *manga*, especially in Brazil, emphasizing the reading, socialization, and/or consumption practices of readers/consumers—whether exclusively Brazilian or in comparison with Japanese readers/consumers. These studies often have ethnographic contours, aiming at understanding

the identity of these readers and their relationship with the medium within Brazilian territory and/or culture.

II. Visual/Aesthetic Aspects of Manga

This category includes research focused on studying *manga* as form (rather than its content), for example: editorial design strategies and visual language features specific to this medium.

III. Representation Studies

This category includes research focused on the representation of concepts, groups of people, and/or historical moments/episodes in specific *manga* titles. As a rule, these studies are structured in the following way: “X as represented in Y,” where X is a topic of interest and Y is the title of a specific work. The category particularly includes research on historical *manga* (with emphasis on representations of World War II) and/or on representations of certain aspects of Japanese culture in selected works.

IV. Intermedia Adaptation and/or Comparative Literature

This category includes research focused on comparisons between two different media, one of which is *manga*. As a rule, it includes studies addressing the adaptation of various original works (literary ones, for example) into *manga*, or conversely, *manga* as the original work being adapted into other media (such as animations or video games, for example). This category also includes studies in comparative literature that analyze *manga* alongside other literary texts from different cultures, historical periods, languages, or genres, in order to identify relationships, influences, and differences among them.

V. Translation

This category includes research focused on analyzing the process of translating *manga* from Japanese into Portuguese, addressing the linguistic choices made by translators when transposing a work into another language (and not the term “translation” when used in the sense of intermedia adaptation, although some studies may also compare *manga* translations with their animated versions).

VI. Informal Education

This category includes research focused on studying *manga* (either in general or specific titles) regarding its potential role as a medium for science outreach and/or informal education—namely, that form of education that takes place outside school settings.

VII. Formal Education (School Education)

This category includes research focused on the applications of *manga* (either in general or specific titles) within the context of formal education—namely, that form of education that takes place within school settings, at various levels. Some of these studies may draw on approaches encompassed by previous categories (for example, representations of certain themes or intermedia adaptations); however, what distinguishes them is their educational intent (the pursuit of applications for school-based learning), which is not necessarily a central concern in other studies.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented as follows: in order to organize and graphically display the categorization of the works that constituted the *corpus*, a table was adopted in which each thesis or dissertation (identified by the author's surname and year of publication) is included in its respective category, out of the seven possibilities previously outlined (see categories from I to VII). Readers interested in specific categories may refer to the list of references at the end of this paper, where each thesis or dissertation is identified by its original title, as well as by an English translation (not necessarily official, since they were provided by the authors of this paper).

Table 1
Categories and Corresponding Theses or Dissertations

Category	Corresponding works
I. Reception and reinterpretation of <i>manga</i> , especially in Brazil	Issa (2014); Oliveira (2014); Pereira (2015); Costa (2015); Simon (2015); Coutinho (2022); Passos (2022); Silva (2024)
II. Visual/aesthetic aspects of <i>manga</i>	Tamekuni (2015); Nakagawa (2016); Araujo (2021); Rezende (2021); Oliveira (2023); Fontenele (2023); Ribeiro (2024)
III. Representation studies	Batistella (2014); Moreira (2014); Yamada (2014); Gregorio (2016); Teixeira (2017); Israel (2017); Ramos (2017); Kanno (2018); Oliveira (2018); Espírito Santo (2018); Martins (2018); Wesseloski (2019); Malafaia (2019); Nascimento (2020); Motta (2020); Antunes (2021); Costa (2021); Zanoni (2021); Yanaguiya (2022); Castello Branco (2023); Carvalho (2023a); Sato (2023); Silva (2024)
IV. Intermedia adaptation and/or comparative literature	Nascimento (2014); Torquato (2014); Zanotti (2017); Carvalho (2019); Santos (2021); Figueiredo (2021); Saita (2022); Alvarenga (2022); Bezerra (2023); Aguiar (2023); Testoni (2024)
V. Translation	Freire (2020); Pinheiro (2021); Lopes (2023)
VI. Informal education	Iwara (2020); Batista (2023)
VII. Formal education (school education)	Coelho (2014); Santos (2014); Gomes (2015); Jesus (2015); Dalmolin (2016); Santoni (2017); Pinto (2018); Pereira (2019a); Pereira (2019b); Silva (2021); Oliveira (2021); Cruz (2022); Loureiro (2022); Castro Junior (2023); Carvalho (2023b); Funakura (2023); Paris (2023); Arnaud (2024); Canova Junior (2024)

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

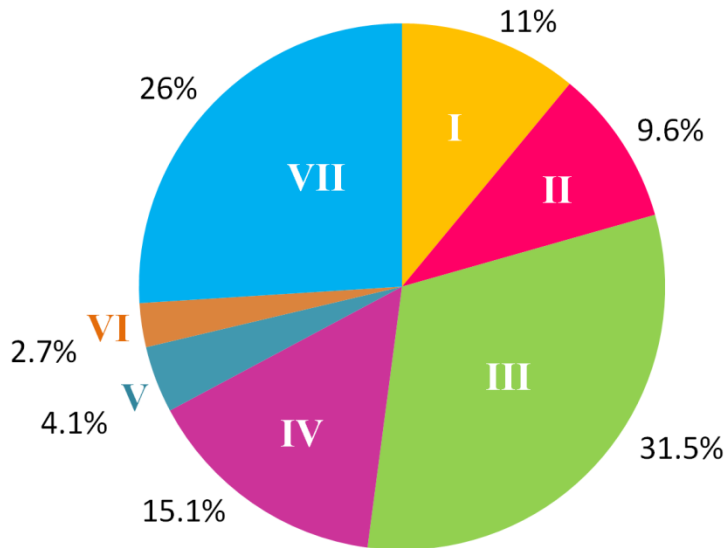
The percentage distribution of results by category is as follows:

- (I)** Reception and reinterpretation of *manga*, especially in Brazil: **11%** of all studies;
- (II)** Visual/aesthetic aspects of *manga*: **9.6%** of all studies;
- (III)** Representation studies: **31.5%** of all studies;
- (IV)** Intermedia adaptation and/or comparative literature: **15.1%** of all studies;
- (V)** Translation: **4.1%** of all studies;

- (VI) Informal education: **2.7%** of all studies;
- (VII) Formal education (school education): **26%** of all studies.

These results can also be visualized in the chart below (see Figure 1).

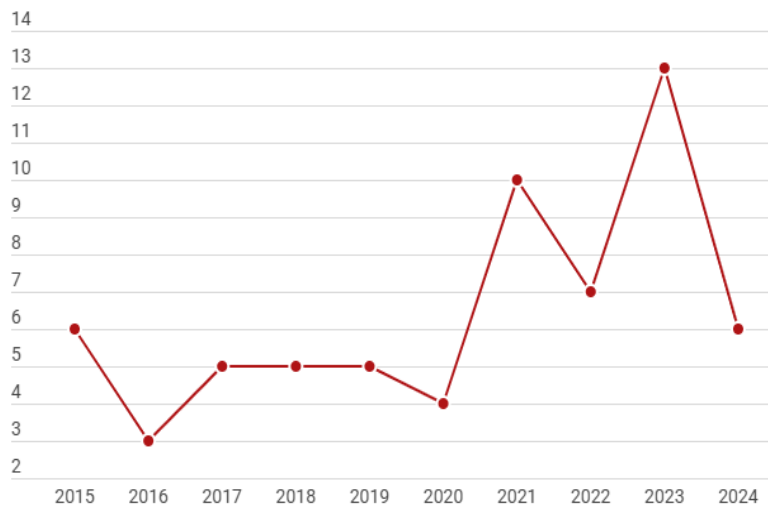
Figure 1
Percentage Breakdown by Category



Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

In addition to the distribution by categories, the published works can also be organized by year, as shown in the following graph (see Figure 2), allowing for an examination of fluctuations in the overall interest in the topic of *manga* by Brazilian graduate students over time. Overall, the graph indicates a relative increase in scholarly interest in the topic over the past years.

Figure 2
Total Number of Theses and Dissertations on Manga Defended in Brazil per Year (Not Stratified by Category)

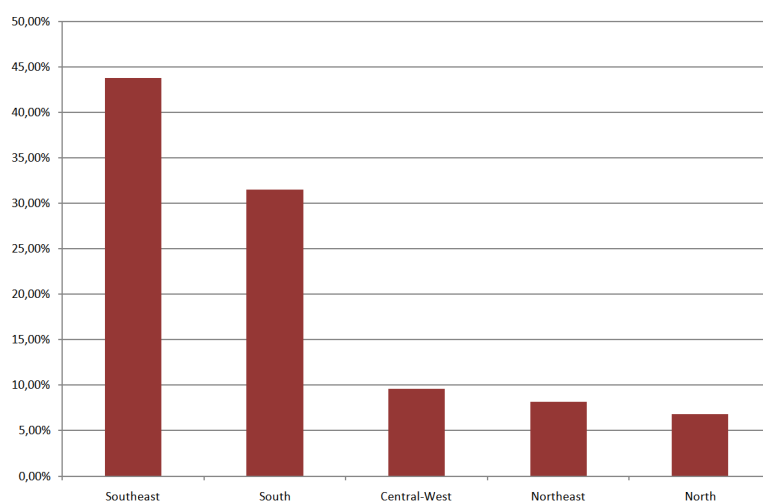


Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

Regarding geographical distribution, the data reveal an uneven distribution in the number of Master's and doctoral studies on *manga* in Brazil, with a higher concentration in the Southeast region, which accounts for 43.84% of the total. This is followed by the South region, with 31.51% of the studies. The remaining regions present significantly lower percentages: the Central-West contributes 9.59%, the Northeast 8.22%, and the North 6.85%. These results indicate that the Southeast and South regions concentrate the majority of academic investigations on this particular topic when it comes to Brazil, a pattern that may be explained, perhaps, by the overlap between the geographic concentration of Japanese descendants in Brazil and the presence of universities with Education programs and research groups suited to host this type of investigation (a hypothesis that may be explored in future studies).

Figure 3

Percentage of Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations on Manga Defended in Brazil, by Geographic Region



Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

Following the presentation of the table summarizing the overall results, we now turn to a more detailed examination of the final category identified (VII), which comprises studies situated within the field of school education and constitutes the primary interest of this particular investigation. All studies included in this specific category are presented below, with their titles translated to English (original titles, in Portuguese, can also be found in the list of references, along with the respective links for accessing the full texts, when available.):

Table 2

Breakdown of Research About Manga in School Education (Category VII) in the Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations of the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education

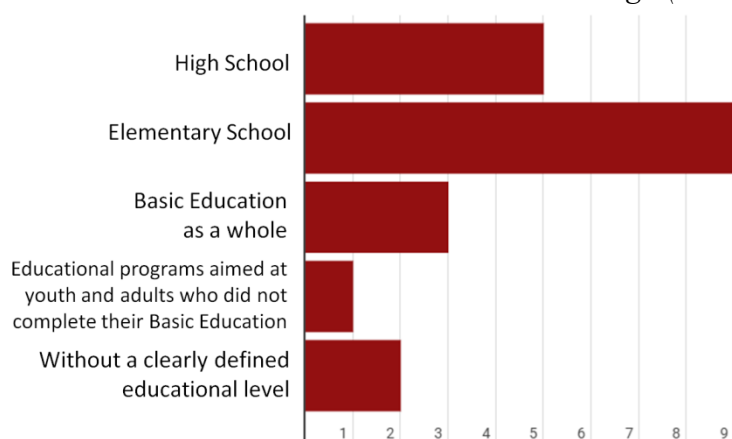
Entry as listed in the References	Title of the study (translated to English)
Coelho (2014)	“ <i>Manga</i> : Potentials and possibilities for the teaching of Geography in Elementary School”
Santos (2014)	“ <i>Manga</i> reading practices among young readers: An ethnographic investigation”
Gomes (2015)	“Cross-discourse relations and multimodality in the process of building textual meaning: teaching the manga genre in Portuguese language classes”
Jesus (2015)	“Literacies through classic short stories and its adaptation into <i>manga</i> ”
Dalmolin (2016)	“From conceptions to the construction of a manga-style comic about the respiratory system”
Santoni (2017)	“ <i>Anime</i> and <i>manga</i> : Teenagers’ identity”
Pinto (2018)	“Making and use of <i>manga</i> for teaching magnetism in the 3 rd year of High School”
Pereira (2019a)	“ <i>Manga</i> drawings and paper toys: Otaku culture and audiovisual language articulating mathematics and art in school education”
Pereira (2019b)	“Graphic narratives in environmental educational practices with integrated High School students at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia - Ji-Paraná Campus”
Silva (2021)	“Toward affective knowledge at school: The use of the <i>manga</i> Claymore (2001-2014) as a study of femininity in History teaching”
Oliveira (2021)	“Teaching electrodynamics in youth and adult education through <i>manga</i> -based comics”
Cruz (2022)	“The <i>anime</i> and <i>manga</i> ‘Naruto’ as devices for enhancing native language learning”
Loureiro (2022)	“A didactic sequence for the teaching of Physics in the final years of Elementary School using mini comics”
Castro Junior (2023)	“Zarathustra in <i>manga</i> : An analysis of the processes of adapting philosophical texts and reflections for teaching”
Paris (2023)	“The <i>manga</i> and <i>anime</i> Naruto in Sociology classes: a proposal for a teaching and learning methodology”
Carvalho (2023b)	“ <i>Anime</i> and <i>manga</i> mobilizing emotional responses and imagination at school”
Funakura (2023)	“Studies on <i>manga</i> and <i>anime</i> in education: contemporary trends and challenges”
Arnaud (2024)	“ <i>Manga</i> as a multimodal literacy practice in the Portuguese language classroom in lower Secondary Education”
Canova Junior (2024)	“ <i>Manga</i> through the teaching of History: Sensitive stories and the traumas of World War II based on Barefoot Gen”

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

Considering exclusively the studies included in the school education category (and listed by title in table 2), the next step was to identify the educational level to which these studies refer. The analysis indicates that, when it comes to school education research on *manga*, Elementary School is the primary level of interest (nine studies), followed by High School (five studies). Basic Education as a whole appears next (three studies), followed by studies without a clearly defined educational level (two studies). One study addressed educational programs aimed at youth and adults who did not complete Basic Education—commonly referred to in Portuguese as *Educação de Jovens e Adultos* (EJA). It is important to note that none of the theses or dissertations specifically addressed Higher Education, indicating a potential gap when it comes to this kind of research, one that future researchers may wish to explore.

Figure 4

Educational Level Addressed in Research on Manga (in the School Education Category)



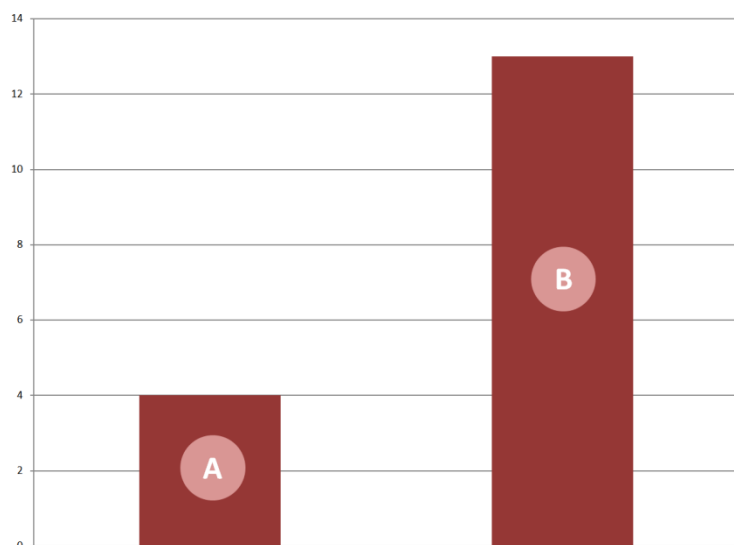
Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

Also considering exclusively the studies included in the school education category, we observed that most research included in the *corpus* approached *manga* as finished, already published, ready-to-use products, while only a small number of studies actually addressed the process of creating *manga* from scratch, which initially appeared as another potential gap in the literature.

Out of the 19 studies within the school education category, 17 focus on educational practices involving *manga* (the remaining two aim at understanding teenagers' identities and reading practices and, despite their potential educational applicability, do not address educational practices themselves, either by documenting or proposing them). The 17 studies that do examine educational practices were then divided into two groups: studies that examined *manga* as a collaborative creative process, proposing the production of original works during classroom activities (**group A**, with 4 results), and studies that explored the use of specific *manga* titles as didactic tools for teaching either content or form, in which *manga* were treated as ready-to-use products (**group B**, with 13 results). Therefore, these results confirmed the aforementioned gap in the literature (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Studies That Address the Process of Creating Manga (A) Versus Studies That Treat Manga As Finished, Ready-to-Use Products (B)



Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

The data presented in this study identified and organized all the works (Master's theses and doctoral dissertations on *manga*) into groups, thus making them readily accessible to other scholars (especially those who do not speak Portuguese) who may be interested in understanding how Brazilian academia approaches the phenomenon of *manga*, particularly within the field of school education, which constitutes the main category of interest and accounts for more than one quarter (26%) of Brazilian research on the subject. Once systematized and published as part of the conference proceedings, these data become available for comparison with data obtained in other studies conducted worldwide.

As stated in the Methods section, theses and dissertations were selected as the focus of this study as a means of examining the academic output of a specific scholarly community. This deliberate delimitation of the *corpus* does not encompass the entirety of scientific production. Nevertheless, this choice allows for drawing conclusions and identifying trends and gaps within the academic production. While it does constitute a limitation, it also represents an opportunity for future research, which may employ the categorization matrix presented here to extend the analysis to other *corpora*.

Therefore, having being tested and validated, the categorization matrix presented in this paper may also be applied in other contexts, also enabling comparisons across different academic traditions that focus on the same subject. Furthermore, the gaps identified by this research may serve as a foundation for future investigations. In this regard, the study points to the need for practice-oriented methodologies that observe and document classroom practices, especially those that address the creative process underlying *manga* production, as well as those developed within the context of Higher Education, an education level at which—at least in Brazil—such studies seem to remain largely absent.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that ChatGPT, an Artificial Intelligence-based language model, was used during the preparation of the final manuscript, specifically to support the translation from Portuguese into English, thus improving its overall fluency through suggestions of more natural phrasing. All stages of conceptualization, methodological design, data curation, formal analysis, and discussion were conducted by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the final text as the outcome of their entire research process, in accordance with the principle of human-centered governance in academic research.

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