

# The construction of the concept of educational innovation through semantic adherences

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**Abstract:** The challenge of defining the term *innovation* can be approached from different angles. One of these is semantics, which focuses on the linguistic act of conveying an idea through language units. In this paper, the concept of *innovation* is approached from this perspective, studying the terms most frequently used to search for innovation in the main scientific engines related to education.

To this end, four of the main search engines in Spanish education were selected and searches were carried out for words according to semantic adherence criteria, based on their use as analogues of *innovation*. Articles were selected without temporal bias, taking into account the appearance of the adhered terms in their titles. The resulting calculation is a set of articles that shows the use of four major terms: *change*, *improvement*, *novelty*, and *transformation*. Finally, these terms were analysed to understand the impact of their presence and how they provide meaning to a concept that is not defined from a universal perspective.

To this end, we investigated how these terms are present in various educational programmes, institutions, and agents, which explains their vision of innovation and, in turn, process other visions. It also highlights how this permeable construction allows us to glimpse the future of innovation, as well as the main obstacles to constructing critical perspectives on it. This work aims to delve into the need to conceptualise innovation and how the concretisation of language in the field of education translates into practices, policies and relationships between the agents involved in it.

**Keywords:** innovation, education, educational change, educational improvement, semantics.

## ES La construcción del concepto de innovación educativa a través de las adherencias semánticas

**ES Resumen:** El reto de definir el término *innovación* puede asumirse desde diferentes enfoques. Uno de ellos es el de la semántica, centrado en el acto lingüístico de transmitir una idea a través de las unidades de la lengua. En este trabajo, la aproximación al concepto de *innovación* se lleva a cabo desde esta perspectiva, estudiando los términos que se utilizan con más frecuencia para hacer búsquedas en torno a la innovación en los principales motores científicos relacionados con la educación.

Para ello, se han escogido cuatro de los buscadores principales en educación en español y se han realizado búsquedas de palabras siguiendo criterios de adherencia semántica, según su uso como análogo al de *innovación*. Se han seleccionado los artículos publicados sin sesgo temporal, teniendo en cuenta la aparición de los términos adheridos en el título de los mismos. El cómputo resultante es un conjunto de artículos que muestra el uso de cuatro términos mayoritarios: *cambio*, *mejora*, *novedad* y *transformación*. Finalmente, se han analizado estos términos para entender cuál es el impacto de su presencia y cómo aportan significado a un concepto que no está definido desde una perspectiva universal.

Con este fin, se ha investigado cómo estos términos están presentes en diversos programas, instituciones y agentes educativos, que exponen su visión de la innovación y, a su vez, procesan otras visiones. Se pone de relevancia, además, cómo esta construcción permeable permite vislumbrar el futuro de lo innovador, y también cuáles son los principales obstáculos para construir perspectivas críticas al respecto. Con este trabajo se pretende ahondar en la necesidad de conceptualizar la innovación, y en cómo la concreción de lo lingüístico en el ámbito de lo educativo se traduce en prácticas, políticas y relaciones entre los agentes que intervienen en él.

**Palabras clave:** innovación, educación, cambio educativo, mejora educativa, semántica.

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## 1. Introduction

Defining broad terms is a challenge in any field, especially in education, where a multitude of meanings are in conflict. This conflict becomes problematic when it impacts not only the construction of pedagogical knowledge, but also the design of public policies and the practices implemented in classrooms. Hence the need to agree on what we mean when we use certain words.

Narrowing down definitions involves providing meanings to make sense of the reality we live in, but also to create and transform it as a communicative sphere (Ponce and Riveros, 2021). Thanks to language, we can communicate with each other, but we can also look into our own inner selves (Ibáñez et al., 2022) and confront ourselves through the way we construct terms. Defining broad terms is, therefore, both a responsibility and a necessity in equal measure.

One of the best examples of this exercise can be found in the work of the educator José Manuel Esteve Zaragoza (2010). In his book *Educación: un compromiso con la memoria*<sup>1</sup>, he proposes, among other objectives, to define the concept of *education* by confronting it with other terms that are commonly used as analogues. Esteve points out that, in an exercise of linguistic economy, we use different terms to refer to the same reality, but we maintain the specificity of each one because it provides nuances that we wish to preserve. Thus, he presents the term *education* as similar to others such as *instruction*, *training* or *learning*, and points out the similarities and differences between them and with the original. Using different criteria, he builds what he calls a *nomological network*, a web of words through whose meanings a large universal term, specific to a given context, can be constructed. This is the case with *education*, which, from the different origins attributed to it, refers, on the one hand, to a process of guidance and leadership and, on the other, to an extractive task (Doval, 1979).

However, not all the terms we use in the field of education have such clear and contextualised origins, and defining them is more complex. Narrowing them down requires understanding which terms they relate to or are associated with because they share some feature of their meaning. In this paper, we refer to this phenomenon as “semantic adherence”. An adherence is a union, a bond. Two terms that adhere, that stick together, do so because they share part of their meanings, although not necessarily all of them. That is why they do not merge, because there are nuances that mean that, even though they refer to the same reality, they do not represent exactly the same thing.

In the field of education, one of the major concepts currently under dispute is *innovation*. There are many definitions, but none has been accepted as universal in the educational context, which deepens the disagreement surrounding the term. From conservative critical perspectives, innovation refers to new ways of learning that leave aside what is learned (Luri, 2020). From the perspectives of those who defend innovative practice, it is the opposite: learners should receive a solid education that enables them to critically address the rapid changes in today’s information and knowledge society (Carbonell, 2001). In between, there are multiple views, indicating that there is no clear agreement on the meaning of the term. Therefore, we often believe we share an idea about what *innovation* means, but we position ourselves in different places because there are nuances that cause some views to differ from others.

If we explore the term in a linguistic engine, the search engine of the Dictionary of the Spanish Language published by the Royal Spanish Academy<sup>2</sup>, *innovation* implies the action of innovating, which in turn means “changing or altering something by introducing new features”. In addition, the dictionary suggests synonyms for the term such as *change*, *improvement*, *novelty*, *originality*, *invention*, and *refinement*. From these, we can deduce that innovation is an exercise in change that seeks something new, which can be invented, that is, created for that purpose, and which leads to refinement, that is, the search for the best version of something.

This definition, as the dictionary itself indicates in its second meaning, could refer to creating or modifying any type of product, introducing it into any type of market, to achieve a great revolution. Entities such as the European Central Bank corroborate this by defining *innovation* as “an essential driver of economic progress that benefits consumers, businesses and the economy as a whole”. *Innovation*, therefore, is not exclusive to the educational context, but has permeated it significantly in recent decades.

In Spain, it first appeared institutionally in the 1945<sup>3</sup> General Law on Primary Education. The Franco government specified that “the experience of modern life imposes technical and methodological innovations which, adapted to the Spanish temperament, must be embraced”. Since then, the term has permeated all aspects of education, allowing us to discuss different aspects of education from our own perspectives, generating as many definitions as there are perspectives.

This plurality has generated richness, but also a certain amount of confusion. The complexity in defining this term stems from its permeability, as it becomes a sum of interpretations that include education, but also contributions from other sectors, such as technology (Peris, 2020). This is because the proposal to innovate has traditionally arisen from the need to provide multidisciplinary responses to the presence of various imbalances (Pastor & Balbinot, 2021), such as technological obsolescence or the outdated nature of certain methods. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of a single concept of *innovation*, but rather of as many as there are forms it takes depending on the context in which it is defined.

1 The author had already approached this work in previous publications: Esteve Zaragoza, J. M. (1979). Educational language and pedagogical theories. Anaya, and Esteve Zaragoza, J. M. (1983). Theory of education I (the problem of education). Ediciones Límites.

2 The digital version of the dictionary has been used as it is the most up-to-date: <https://dle.rae.es/>

3 <https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE/1945/199/A00385-00416.pdf>

We thus understand that there is no single meaning and that, furthermore, seeking one shared by all contexts and all agents would imply denying the multiple theoretical and practical nuances that permeate its construction. It is necessary to understand that each definition is executed by emphasising the aspect that one wishes to highlight (Olmos, 2021), and it is precisely this exercise that opens up new perspectives for study.

The problem is that when a term occupies as much space as *innovation* does in the field of education, it conditions priorities in this area. For example, the Spanish Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sport (MEFP) has a National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE) with the dual objective of researching and innovating in the field of education. To this end, it analyses and collects the results of its actions, disseminates them periodically, and designs and implements educational assessment plans, developing national indicators to guide decisions and manage information networks. In other words, innovation determines and conditions the plans and projects that articulate public policies on education in Spain, and is key to the entire structure of the education system. All this without there being a universal definition of what innovation entails.

On the other hand, the fact that there is no universal definition means not only that there is a lack of clarity in the structural design indicators, but also that the allocation of resources is conditioned. We find that, in 2023, the MEFP allocated 30 million euros to the development of innovation and research projects applied to knowledge transfer in vocational training, including “technological, environmental, production process or service provision innovation<sup>4</sup>”. A vague concept of *innovation* makes it difficult to understand not only the objective of this or any financial allocation, but also the impact of these projects, as well as limiting participation in them by not clarifying exactly what they involve.

This confusion also leads to misunderstandings and coordination problems among actors in the field of education, who are often frustrated by their inability to reach agreements even when they believe they share similar perspectives. The consequences are that, under the guise of good intentions to improve, any organisation may undertake any action simply because it is labelled as innovative, without assessing the real potential benefits and without consensus with other stakeholders, despite reports such as that of COTEC (2024) showing that this consensus is perceived by society as the basis for success in educational innovation<sup>5</sup>.

We therefore detect a real need to specify what the term *innovation* implies. A first step in achieving this is to analyse the terms that are chosen as priorities for writing about innovation in an educational context. By highlighting them, we can understand which meanings are most commonly used, as these influence theoretical construction and have an impact on the design of practices related to innovation.

As an example, we will look at some of the existing definitions. Some refer to the desires and actions of educational communities that lead to transformative improvements in their practices, with the aim of achieving changes that contribute to the emancipation of students and teachers (Martínez and Rogero, 2021). Others, such as the COTEC Foundation (2024), define it as any change, not only technological, based on knowledge, not only scientific, that adds value, not only economic. Those most focused on educational practice refer to the introduction of methodological changes capable of promoting more active forms of learning and participation on the part of learners (Sarmiento et al., 2021).

For UNESCO (2014), *innovation* involves a deliberate and planned act of problem solving with the aim of improving the quality of learning by overcoming academicism through the collective and active construction of knowledge. For its part, the OECD (2012) defines it as an essential element in combating global challenges, especially those related to structural changes that include the entire value chain and modifications to existing processes or practices. Almost all definitions, as noted in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language, refer to *changes* and *transformations*, terms that are already understood to be inherent to the concept of *innovation* itself.

On the other hand, Spain has a long tradition of change and transformation at different moments in its history, one of the most notable being the Educational Renewal Movements (MRP). These movements, made up of various groups of educational agents, had a remarkable pedagogical trajectory in Spain during the last stage of the Franco regime and in the first decades of the transition, as they carried out a radical critique of the traditional school model. The work of these movements continues to be studied because, despite successive legal reforms, the traditional school model is still considered hegemonic in Spain (Feu et al., 2021).

The fact that this criticism remains relevant has led to the identification of the drive for renewal with the current trend towards innovation. However, many authors have pointed out the conflict involved in identifying *renewal* with *innovation*, as it encourages debate but also confusion, especially regarding the objectives and aims of both exercises (Díez-Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

Something similar occurs with another emerging, albeit increasingly present, term: *disruption*. Although the Dictionary of the Spanish Language does not identify this term as related to *innovation*, both share the concept of change as intrinsic. Specifically, disruption is understood as a form of decisive and abrupt change, which is carried out to replace something old and inefficient with something simpler and more effective (García, 2021).

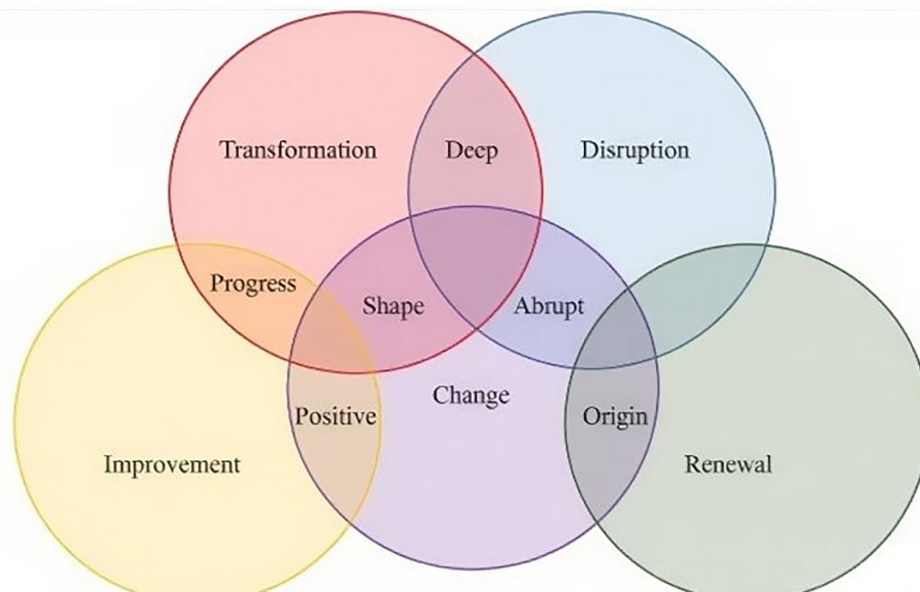
However, *disruption* is more specifically related to the technological context, which is also central to proposals related to innovation (García et al., 2022), so its meaning of change is often linked to the emergence of technology in educational spaces where it was not previously present. In fact, one of the main focuses of

4 It can be accessed at <https://www.educacionpydeportes.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano/catalogo/general/19/1931646/ficha/1931646-2023.html>

5 <https://cotec.es/informes/encuesta-de-percepcion-social-de-la-innovacion-educativa/>

debate revolves around the relevance of the use of digital tools in the classroom and whether they are suitable for achieving the academic objectives pursued (Bernate & Fonseca, 2023).

Figure I. Relationships between terms at the semantic level.



Source: own elaboration.

Of all the terms associated with *innovation*, the central one at the semantic level is *change*, implying the action and effect of changing, as shown in Figure I. *Transformation*, *improvement*, *renewal* and *disruption* are all changes, with improvement bringing a positive qualitative nuance of progress or advancement and renewal presenting formal nuances, as it implies a return to the original form or an improved state of it. *Transformation* and *disruption* bring structural nuances to the terms they involve profound and significant changes, without the need for continuity, the latter being a form of the former that involves a drastic, disruptive evolution.

We study terms that have semantic connections with *innovation*, assuming three responsibilities:

1. First, to delve deeper into a concept that is currently the barometer of conflicts, interests, divergences, and tensions between different approaches to thinking about the meaning and social function of education (Martínez & Rogero, 2021). Innovation has become imperative in education because it is impossible to ignore either its meaning or its impact in all areas. Addressing the term, dissecting it and tackling its limitations and contradictions, is a strategy for analysing it critically, avoiding glorifying or demonising it, and appropriating its possibilities.
2. Secondly, we must reject the impulse to fall into what has come to be known as the 'ideology of innovation', a value system whose core is innovation. In this structure, innovation is not only a value, but the supreme value, the yardstick by which all other values are measured (Aibar, 2021). The problem with this position is that when a term becomes the origin of a value system, it becomes difficult to subject it to review. This runs the risk of assuming a conservative position, whose main objective is to keep the concept safe and, to this end, avoid criticism and invalidate any debate about it.
3. Finally, theorising about innovation, discovering, manipulating and constructing categories to reveal relationships between meanings and express values and attributes (Piñero & Perozo, 2020). Pointing out semantic adhesions allows us to address different terminological nuances and rely on them to understand the complexity of constructing the concept. Clarifying which terms underpin others is an exercise in theorising that allows practices to be understandable, accessible and assessable.

This paper seeks to demonstrate the extent to which these semantic relationships have an impact on the conceptualisation of educational innovation. To this end, we have chosen several terms that we understand to be identified with *innovation*: from those proposed by the Dictionary of the Spanish Language, we chose *change*, *improvement* and *novelty* as they were the most prevalent in the definitions consulted. Due to its presence in the educational debate, we included *transformation*, and in order to recognise and analyse the tradition of innovation in the Spanish educational context and understand how it has evolved, we added *renewal*. Finally, to include in the study the powerful emergence of technology in the field of education and the debate that has arisen from it, we added *disruption* to this list.

## 2. Methodology

This work presents the data analysed after reviewing the results obtained from searching for the selected terms in different scientific search engines. Given the large number of search engines that exist, we established the following inclusion criteria: they had to be academic search engines (1), they had to have a Spanish version or be specialised in texts in Spanish (2)<sup>6</sup> and they had to have a free, open-access database

<sup>6</sup> Texts in Spanish have been chosen to serve as frameworks for analysing Spanish historical and pedagogical tradition and its linguistic context. However, a confirmatory search has been carried out in English, as indicated below.



(3). The results were Dialnet<sup>7</sup>, Redalyc<sup>8</sup>, Scielo<sup>9</sup> and JStor<sup>10</sup>. As for the screening of the texts, no time filter was applied, since the aim of the work is not to analyse the evolution of the term or its presence, but to ascertain whether or not there are semantic adhesions.

The following criteria were used to conduct the search. The word *innovation* was entered into the search engine followed by the operator AND and one of the proposals for the set of semantic adhesions (1), using the operator “quotation marks” (2) to ensure that both appeared in the specified order. For example: “*innovation*” AND “*transformation*”. In this way, we located the presence of this adherence anywhere in the texts. Then, a second search was carried out by adding the term *education* to determine the presence or absence of semantic adherence in an educational context (3), for example: “*innovation*” AND “*transformation*” AND “*education*”.

### 3. Results

The findings are presented numerically in order to provide a clearer and more comprehensible overview<sup>11</sup>. However, this approach should not be interpreted as a statistical or probabilistic analysis. Instead, the main purpose is to systematically classify or map the terms used to discuss educational innovation. The information provided aims to identify and characterise terms that have semantic connections with the term *innovation*, and more specifically when this innovation is related to education, without attempting to establish cause-and-effect relationships between the variables studied.

Table I. Results of the search for the term innovation alongside another term. All types of texts.

	Dialnet	Redalyc	SciELO	JStor
change	14.770	98.589	636	23.778
improvement	19.727	98.681	446	10.591
novelty	1.559	26.342	31	4.434
transformation	4.519	75.171	312	12.775
renovation	1.150	28.979	57	4.756
disruption	161	1.100	12	350

Source: own elaboration.

In this first search, we observed notable differences between search engines due to the number of indexed texts in each one. Redalyc has the largest number, while SciELO has the smallest. However, it is interesting to analyse the trend in the presence of texts containing the terms mentioned.

Although the texts are not explicitly related to the educational context, we observe that some of the documents returned by the search are related to the field of education in all search engines, although social, technological and industrial aspects are also present, which is linked to the origin of some of the terms chosen.

The results shown in Table I indicate four terms with the greatest presence<sup>12</sup>: *change*, *improvement*, *renewal*, *transformation*. The other terms also appear, but to a lesser extent. The least present of all is *disruption*, the term with the least pedagogical tradition of those proposed, as it is part of a new culture of teaching and learning (Pulido et al, 2023).

Table II. Results of the search for the term innovation together with another term. Texts where the word “education” appears.

	Dialnet	Redalyc	SciELO	JStor
change	5.645	70.527	139	14.180
improvement	7.527	70.928	134	7.653
novelty	441	18.872	4	2.425
transformation	1.719	55.111	90	8.416
renovation	394	21.204	16	2.989
disruption	36	773	4	221

Source: own elaboration.

<sup>7</sup> <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.redalyc.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://scielo.org/es/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/>

<sup>11</sup> The data corresponds to the number of texts indexed in October 2024.

<sup>12</sup> There is one exception: in Dialnet, we observe a slightly higher result for novelty compared to renewal. However, the majority presence of the others remains, so we do not consider it exclusive. Even so, we will take it into account in the analysis of the results. In the case of Dialnet, we observe a slightly higher result for novelty compared to renewal. However, the majority presence of the others remains, so we do not consider it exclusive. Even so, we will take it into account in the analysis of the results.

In a second search, we see that the results shown in Table II are reduced compared to those shown in Table I. The reduction varies with regard to terms and search engines, although when the variable *education* is introduced, some terms such as *disruption* are diluted to the point of almost disappearing.

Concerning the number of results, we continue to observe a greater presence of *change*, *improvement*, *renewal*, *transformation*<sup>13</sup>, and *innovation*; i.e., those that have greater semantic adherence. This implies that when the term *innovation* is introduced, also in the field of education, its meaning, or at least part of it, is identified with change, improvement, renewal, and transformation.

Taking as a reference the total number of articles found in each search engine, we analysed the results according to each of the engines.

In Dialnet, the terms most related to innovation in both searches are *improvement*, *change*, and *transformation*. When we introduce the educational variable, the results decrease, with significant differences between the two searches for each of the terms, and the term *disruption* is practically diluted.

In Redalyc, the rule established in Dialnet is followed: *improvement*, *change*, and *transformation* are the results that appear most related to *innovation* in both searches. It is striking that the difference between the first two is minimal, which means that there are no major differences in terms of their adherence. The term *disruption* also appears less when it is related to *education*.

SciELO yields a much lower number of results than the previous search engines. The most frequent terms are *change*, *improvement* and *transformation*, in that order. In an initial search, *change* and *improvement* show significant differences, while in the second search, when the educational variable is introduced, the difference decreases considerably. *Disruption* appears residually in the second search, corroborating the pattern of the two previous search engines.

As for JStor, with a significant number of texts, the most frequent terms in this order are *change*, *transformation* and *improvement*, a pattern different from all the previous ones. In this case, *change* appears far from the others, with a greater distance than in any other search engine. The least frequent term, following the trend of most search engines, is *disruption*, with a much lower result than the other terms.

If we analyse the relationship with *education*, we find that all terms appear less frequently. The order of the terms remains the same, and *change* also appears much more frequently than the rest. Once again, *disruption* is the least frequent term, although here the difference between the two searches indicates a minority but not a residual presence.

To summarise all the search engines, we can see that the words most frequently associated with *innovation* are *change*, *improvement* and *transformation*, with the first two appearing in no particular order. Furthermore, they continue to appear when we enter the variable *education* into the search, although they appear less frequently.

The term that appears least frequently in relation to *innovation* is *disruption*, and it is even less present when related to the field of education.

Additionally, although this study seeks semantic associations in Spanish, a confirmatory search was carried out in English using the SJR search engine<sup>14</sup>. The terms used were those referring to the British context of the language: *innovation*, *change*, *improvement*, *novel* (avoiding the word *new* because it can be translated as *novedad*, but also as *nuevo*, which could cause confusion between the use of the term as an adjective and as a noun), *transformation*, *renovation*, *disruption*.

Table III. SJR results for the search term innovation together with another term. Comparison of texts with and without the term education included in the search.

	Without education	With education
change	105.118	14.910
improvement	45.227	6.331
novelty	37.673	2.509
transformation	30.832	4.057
renovation	843	101
disruption	4.223	532

Source: Own elaboration.

In the first search, the results in Spanish and English coincide, although the term *transformation* changes position. When the term *education* is included in the search, the trend we observed in Spanish is confirmed, as shown in Table III.

<sup>13</sup> We found the same result in Dialnet as in the first search.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.scopus.com/home.uri>

#### 4. Conclusions and discussion

In this article, we have analysed how the term *innovation* is constructed through the use of other terms with which it shares part of its meaning without merging with them. This phenomenon, which we have called semantic adherence, not only allows us to understand the concept, but also serves to construct it and add nuances.

Studying terms that do not have a universal definition is essential to understanding their impact in the educational context and to avoid their glorification or stigmatisation. Furthermore, theorising about innovation and exploring its semantic relationships prevents us from falling into dogmatic positions that hinder its criticism and revision.

Based on the results obtained, we draw several conclusions. First, *there is a clear semantic association between innovation and the terms change, improvement, and transformation*, which appear most frequently both in general and in the educational context. These concepts reflect a conception of innovation as a progressive and essentially positive process.

Secondly, *when the term education is introduced into the search, the results decrease, but the main associations remain the same*, confirming the strength of these semantic links in educational discourse. *Renewal* also has a prominent presence, albeit somewhat less so, revealing the existence of a connection, perhaps in the process of weakening, between innovation and pedagogical tradition.

Finally, *disruption is the least prevalent term*, especially when related to education. This suggests that, although it is an emerging concept linked to technology, it has not yet been fully integrated into the academic language of the educational field.

Overall, the data indicate that *educational innovation is conceived as an evolution that promises a certain continuity, rather than a rupture*. Based on these conclusions, we propose three avenues for discussion.

##### 1.- *Innovation*: a multifaceted concept based on *change*.

We have observed that the term has different facets and different possibilities when analysed, which are also practically indistinguishable as they are not only related but also intertwined. Therefore, when we talk about *innovation*, we must start from the premise that we do not have to do so from the same perspective. We can describe the term as elastic (Merino, 2021), and even, in certain contexts, as vague and controversial (Navarrete et al., 2022), since in academic educational literature it appears to be associated with almost any field. We find definitions that assert that innovation is a matter eminently related to curriculum design (Salas et al., 2023; Castro et al., 2022; Moreno, 2021), to those that assert that it should focus on methodologies (Mendoza et al., 2020; González et al., 2021; Roa et al., 2021), while many focus on technology (Aibar, 2023; Rubio & Jiménez, 2021; Zúñiga et al., 2021). While it is necessary to embrace all perspectives, it is also necessary to clarify which one we are focusing on in order to propose and implement effective change processes.

In terms of pedagogy, some proposals call for radical changes that replace everything we know (Aretio, 2017), while others suggest reflective and critical processes within existing models (Loja & Suco, 2021). This shows us that it is easy to fall into confusion or false feelings of agreement or disagreement, even when it comes to strategies. Given that what all dimensions have in common is that *innovation* is a process of *change*, it would be appropriate not to deny the need for change, but rather to open up avenues for discussion based on the relevance, meaning and direction of that change.

##### 2.- *Innovation* as an educational axiom.

The term *innovation* is associated with change, improvement and transformation. This means that it is attributed with dynamic, polymorphic and essentially positive qualities, which would mean that all innovation, by virtue of being innovation, is a desirable means or end in any context. Hence, *innovation* is found in almost every educational action or process. The main association, *change*, appears to be fundamentally related to the introduction of new and better practices (Del Río, 2023; Donoso et al., 2023; Teijeiro et al., 2023) and *improvement*, with development, progress and advancement towards the future (Rincón et al., 2022; Pereira, 2021; Macanchí et al., 2020).

*Transformation* frequently appears in major proposals related to innovation, such as in the report by the Observatory of State Public Policies entitled "Educational innovation. The transformation of teaching models"<sup>15</sup>, or the discussion forums on the new curriculum models of the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Universities (MEFP)<sup>16</sup>. The Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan launched by the Spanish Government in 2021 has articulated more than 700 innovative actions, including the provision of resources to complete digital classrooms in the centres participating in educational innovation projects<sup>17</sup>. Something similar is happening with *innovation*: the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, in the *Innovate* section of its website, when considering possibilities for innovation in different contexts, refers to new responses to existing needs, new fields of development, new approaches and new models of governance<sup>18</sup>.

Hence, we consider innovation to be axiomatic, as it embraces all kinds of objectives and means under the premise of building a better world through the most appropriate strategies. However, in this context, it is more complex to carry out critiques that help to reveal the areas in which innovation, precisely because it is considered essentially good and avoids criticism, can contribute to stagnation or fail to contribute to

15 We refer to the report published on 25 November 2020, which can be consulted at <https://www.ospi.es/es/informes/detalle/Innovacion-Educativa.-La-Transformacion-de-los-Modelos-de-Ensenanza/>

16 The forums can be visited at <https://educagob.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/curriculo/debate-curriculo/actuaciones/nuevo-curriculo/descrpcion.html>. They were created as part of the public debate on the curriculum that arose from the 2020 legislative reform.

17 <https://planderecuperacion.gob.es/como-acceder-a-los-fondos/convocatorias?combine=innovaci%C3%B3n&page=1>

18 <https://www.ciencia.gob.es/Innovar.htm>

improvement. Thus, there is a risk of sacralising the term by not subjecting it to necessary ongoing review.

### 3.- The disruptive future of innovation.

The terms that are least associated with *innovation* are those that contribute to a space-time dimension: *renewal* and *disruption*. In the case of *renewal*, we anticipated a relationship with historical tradition, and given that *disruption* refers to immediate and radical changes, it would bring a new nuance to *innovation* that would imply haste and abruptness, and which could be less compatible with the idea of *change*, which is more neutral and progressive.

However, it is noteworthy that in areas where innovation has traditionally been discussed before this concept spread to the field of education, companies, the disruptive perspective is very much present as a solution to the crises we face in our time (Jiménez-Montecinos, 2020). Hence, corporations such as Iberdrola are proposing disruptive education<sup>19</sup>, and educational consultancies such as Pearson are associating it not with the present but with the future of education-related institutions<sup>20</sup>. It is therefore necessary to discuss the relevance of a possible trend towards radical rupture, which would oppose the hegemonic idea of *change* by renouncing progressiveness and continuity and opting for absolute and unquestionable constructions.

By way of conclusion, two reflections are offered that highlight the need to maintain a critical and open view of the term *innovation*: first, as there is no universal discourse, the organisations that can offer the most support to those who want to implement innovative actions are those that have the most resources to construct that innovative discourse in the direction they deem appropriate. A good example of this are the educational innovation departments that many Spanish banks have<sup>21</sup>, whose main activity is not education, but to which they devote considerable effort to nurture teachers, families and schools with programmes such as BBVA's *Aprendemos juntos*, focused on educational innovation<sup>22</sup>, or actions such as the EDUCA ABANCA Awards for the best innovative teacher<sup>23</sup>. Narrowing down the concept would allow more agents to participate and develop innovative proposals without depending on large entities, as they would have a common theoretical framework to guide practices in a coherent and effective manner.

Secondly, the indiscriminate use of a term contributes to diluting its value. If everything can be innovative, nothing is truly innovative. By refusing to define, narrow down and rationalise this concept, we would be giving up a possibility for progress that, with more and better specificity, would offer us opportunities to identify genuine capacities for advancement.

In short, languages provide us with different means to talk about the world, to explain our interactions with other people and with the environment, and to talk about how we represent all this mentally (Espinal et al., 2020). Hence, words have different meanings and express different aspects of the external world, which are also conditioned by the internal visions of those who define them. Interestingly, the more connections are created, the more possibilities a term has to generate new meanings (Perucho, 2004), as the context in which it can be defined with more nuances is broadened, but more difficulties will also be generated in delving into critical perspectives.

In line with these difficulties, we find limitations in this work: on the one hand, the bias of the authorship in choosing the terms to be studied according to their own context of analysis, selecting the preferred sources. This is also a possibility for future study, as other semantic associations can be analysed, or those specific to areas that are intertwined with education. On the other hand, the limitation of the time frame of the study is evident, as the speed at which texts are indexed in the document collections is so fast that the results will surely change subtly or significantly as time goes by. This is another possibility for future study: the revalidation or otherwise of the terms presented here as semantic adhesions of *innovation* and the search by time periods, which would allow the evolution of the term's presence to be studied.

Finally, the very construction of search engines is limiting, as it prevents the comparison of which documents are part of the results in various categories, which, due to the high number of results, is very difficult to contrast with non-digital screening methods. Algorithms also limit inquiries, as they suggest results related to previous searches. This weakness will translate into a possibility for study when new search filters are introduced or accessible tools exist that allow for more specific screening.

For all the reasons outlined above, although we should not limit the semantic associations or contexts specific to each field in the construction of the term *innovation*, as they all contribute nuances that open up new fields of study, we must not lose sight of the need to analyse and reflect on them in order to understand what remains visible and what remains invisible, and to agree on universal concepts. Reflection, although a human quality (Núñez-Lira et al., 2021), is learned and developed when one comes into contact with processes, methods, strategies, and materials that avoid a single theoretical orientation.

19 <https://www.iberdrola.com/talento/educacion-disruptiva>

20 <https://blog.pearsonlatam.com/educacion-del-futuro/educacion-disruptiva-el-futuro-de-las-instituciones-educativas>

21 BBVA has a specific department, <https://www.bbva.com/es/educacion-e-innovacion-construir-entorno-basadovalores/>, as does Banco Santander, <https://www.santanderopenacademy.com/es/blog/innovacion-y-educacion.html>. The Credit Institution Deposit Guarantee Fund has created a strategic line of innovative education: <https://www.fgd.es/info/dia-educacion-financiera-2024-innovacion-educacion-futuro-mas-seguro>

22 <https://aprendemosjuntos.bbva.com/categoria/innovacion-educativa/>

23 <https://plataformaeduca.org/premios-educa/bases-del-certamen/>



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