

Disparities in Access to Basic Education in Brazil During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to identify the implications of inequities in access to basic education (SDG 4) during the Coronavirus pandemic in Brazil, and their reflections on structural inequalities. The H-D method is used, focusing on early childhood education, since its deficits reflect on human development and the social exclusion of historically marginalised groups. Many structural inequalities are the consequence of inefficient allocations that limit the universalisation of basic schooling. Primary education, mainly childhood education, was made unfeasible in the educational portfolios of Brazilian governments throughout its conservative, authoritarian and participative history. The results of this study demonstrate that the sanitary crisis has exacerbated the inequalities linked to institutional racism and poverty (sub-citizenship) in the basic educational cycle, as the government during the crisis management did not provide mechanisms for an equal remote teaching and incentives for students. About 2/3 of OECD countries took investments in elementary education by reason of the impacts generated by the COVID-19, while the Brazilian government did not announce changes to investment in education. Children aged 6-10 years were the most affected by educational exclusion and the majority were from unequal geographical areas. Therefore, considering the setback of the pandemic on the educational development of social minorities, and Brazilian status-quo, investment policies are recommended that correct the psychosocial and economic deficits generated by the crisis—filling in gaps related to learning poverty that will arise in the recovery period (post-pandemic phases).

Keywords: Brazil, COVID-19, Early Childhood Education, Educational Development, Public Policies

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Introduction

Economic history, together with the economics of education, demonstrates that the impact of unequal access to education transcends multiple dimensions related to the eradication of structural inequalities in Brazil. It is observed in the literature that basic education, especially during early childhood, plays an important role in the formation of human capital (Heckman et al., 2011; Heckman, 2008), which is extremely significant for economic growth (Mankiw et al., 2011; Heckman, 2008). Furthermore, the importance of primary education goes beyond the economic sphere, as cracks in cognitive and non-cognitive skills can be attributed to early childhood experiences (Heckman, 2008). Consequently, the collaborations to the gaps in the economics of education reflect on the emancipatory potential and the exercise of citizenship (Sen, 1999), challenging the inequalities of latent opportunities in the Brazilian State since its beginnings.

In this context, when analysing socioeconomic disparities, it becomes essential to understand how the interests of political elites and their bargaining power in institutions shaped many educational policies, making them restricted throughout Brazilian history, contributing to the phenomenon of social exclusion—sub-citizenship (Kang, 2017; Kang, 2010; Souza, 2003). The lack of investment in education and disparities in access to basic education, especially Early Childhood Education (ECE), have led to an increase in inequality in numerous aspects, as the lack of education leads to lower wages and racial minorities are especially affected by the political game of the described situation. This is also seen as a form of violence within a structuralist and security perspective, as seen by (Galtung, 1969), because it impacts on structures that guarantee the social and economic development of human beings in the face of the social contract.

At the international level, since 2015 global agencies have been committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are considered an evolution of the Millennium Development Goals (2000)—they prioritise the universalization of primary education. Nevertheless, in 2020, with the advances of the COVID-19 epidemic, the United Nations Economic and Social Council announced that the pandemic had consequences in terms of the goals of progress on the SDGs, with a focus on the issue of universal education—especially in developing countries. Due to mandatory social distancing measures, aimed at preventing the spread of contagion, as well as inequities in access to technologies, thousands of children had limited access to school and to learning, bringing serious problems—stipulates that there may be an educational setback of up to two decades—regarding educational development in the context of basic schooling in Brazil (UNICEF, 2021).

In view of this exhibition, this interdisciplinary inquiry seeks to identify the implications of disparities in access to basic education, in Brazilian reality, among the most vulnerable socio-economic classes and their effects on structural inequalities during the COVID-19. This work is shown as a contribution to the development of forecasts of educational investment policies in the face of the recovery from the crisis generated by the coronavirus. Our focus is directed mainly on early childhood education, since its interference is significant for human development, as already exemplified.

Wherefore, the results and discussions section are divided into four topics. In a first moment, the structural inequities in the Brazilian State apparatus are debated, under the prism of sub-citizenship, focusing, above all, regarding institutional racism. Sequentially, the right to

education is examined throughout the Brazilian constitutional charters, expanding to the international commitments. In the third axis, the deficits, and gaps in basic education in Brazil are released from a historical economic perspective. Finally, the State's actions during COVID-19 are verified, as well as the consequences of the inequalities in the pandemic on the right of social minorities' education.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-quantitative approach in the form of bibliographic, digital, documentary, and experimental investigation. The comparative method adjunct to the historical method is applied to achieve the research objectives. Comparative-historical analysis is defined specifically by epistemology, as part of interdisciplinary tradition. In this way, academic productions that opt for comparative-historical methods seek a social scientific vision, using methodological pluralism within a balance between the particular and the general analysis (Lange, 2013).

Considering the validity of the sources, this academic production focuses on the use of peer-reviewed articles, as well as publications in high-impact journals and books—in conducting the bibliographic research. The documentary analysis, as well as the selection of legal documents, social indicators in the measurement and operationalization stage employing the compared method, went through sources present in the legal systems, which are available in a digital analogous way in the databases of national, supranational and international institutions—such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank (WBG), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics* (IBGE) etc.

Results and Discussion

1. Structural Inequalities and Institutional Racism

Social Stratification in Brazil, as a fragment of what constitutes sub-citizenship¹ within the historical processes of social inclusion and exclusion, is intertwined with the colonial heritage, which combines abandonment with the inaptitude of the marginalised ethnic-racial population. In the perception of Souza (2003), headed by Bourdieusian and Taylorian sociology, the “*precarious habitus*”—with incorporated cultural capital being habitus—materialises in the Global South through the tools that constitute structural oppression, which disqualify social agents and precarious groups as sub-citizens. Within this segment, the author calls “*secondary habitus*” the appropriation of goods in scarcity, which establishes static forms of inequality in developing countries.

In the historical-materialist conception traced by Florestan Fernandes (2006), the recent socioeconomic divisions, present in the context of late capitalism in Brazil, hide the hierarchies of a federation founded by a reactionary and slave-owning political elite. This elite sustains the social order—the status quo and societal inequalities of race linked to income percentiles. Although the State is considered “liberal”, in terms of sovereignty and institutions, there has not in fact been a break with its conservative essence—involving patrimonialism and feudalism—in terms of social-political relations (Silva, 2013). The right to education of newly freed indigenous and enslaved peoples co-participates in this historical

¹ Jessé de Souza's (2003) interpretation of social exclusion in peripheral States.

perspective, because of essentialism associated certain humans above others, building a stigmatised legal inequality in the autocratic State apparatus, reiterated in (Carneiro, 2015; Soares et al., 2021). Scientific racism, coined equally from social Darwinism, co-opted “science” to map humanity through raciality. This being, in post-modernity, the great legacy of biased colonialism in the Brazilian political scenario (Claeys, 2000; Souza, 2003).

The semantic understanding of institutional racism appears for the first time in the literature through activists Charles Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael, who describe it as a mechanism of societal exclusion of ethnic and black minorities in the political sphere, which results in the perpetuation of racial discrimination (Bhavnani et al., 2005: 28). Later, when establishing his structural analysis permeating human security at a systemic level, Johan Galtung (1969) considers structural violence as one of the manifestations of social injustice propagated by state dimensions, which mainly impedes the social and economic development of individuals, affecting the exercise of citizenship and the promotion of peace. In this horizon, Amartya Sen (1999: 15–27) proposes human development—including the educational axis—as an advance of instrumental freedoms associated with the rule of law. In this way, social opportunities are a gear for compensating historical social exclusion (material imparities) by political elites.

Sueli Carneiro (2015) shows in her work *‘Racismo, Sexismo e Desigualdade no Brasil’*, through advances in economics and sociological sciences, that Brazil remains a racially separate country—*apartheid*. She uses social indicators, present in the Human Development Index (HDI), income, life expectancy, and education as an example of the higher standards of living of the self-declared white population in Brazil. While the white population has standards of living compared to developed countries; the racialized sample shows lower rates than those of nation-states that have overcome racial segregation in a revolutionary way. The insertion of race as a unit of analysis, given the security prospect in the dimension of redistributive justice, appears as an essential tool for the implementation of public policies aimed at solving the problems conditioned by structural inequalities.

“With regard to colour or race, 55.8% of white people had at least completed the basic education cycle, whereas among black or mixed-race people this percentage was 40.3%, a difference of 15.5 pp. From 2017 to 2018, this difference reduced – it was 18.9 pp in 2017 – but remained at a high level, indicating that educational opportunities were different between these groups” (IBGE, 2019: 11), translation by authors.²

² IBGE. (2019). *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua 2016-2018* (p. 11). https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/livros/liv101657_informativo.pdf

2. The Right to Education in the Constitutional Charters

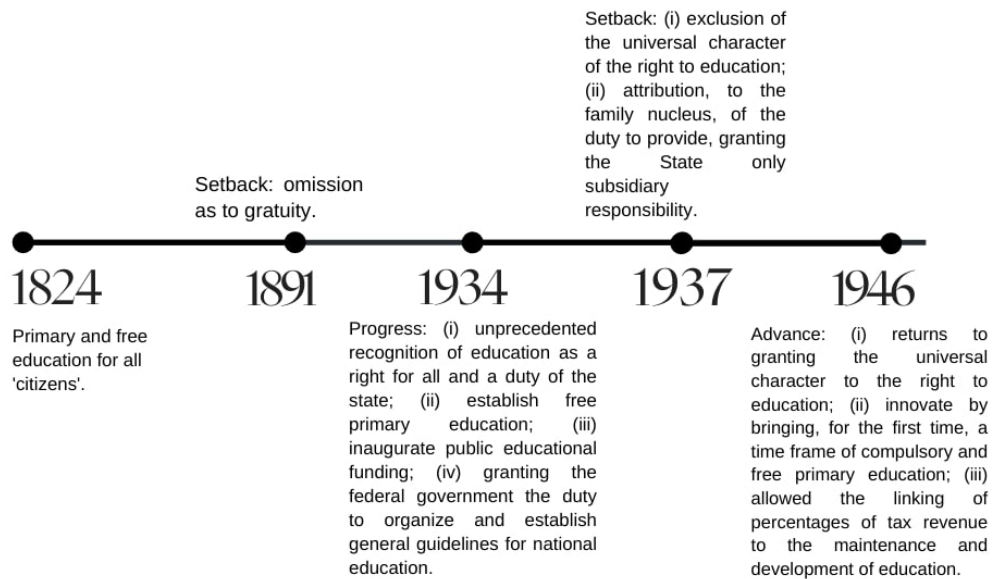


Figure 1: Education in the schedule of constitutions 1824-1946.
Authors' elaboration based on literature review

Education has the character of a fundamental right in the Brazilian legal system, and this status was attributed by the Brazilian society, through its Constituent Original Power, and positively stated in Article 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of 1988. However, although education enjoys this status in the current wording provided in this Magna Carta, it is undeniable how long was the process of universalization and formal effectiveness of this right to Brazilian society, especially about the constitutional history of Brazil, since education is provided for in the homeland constitutional order since the first Constitution, namely the Imperial Letter of 1824 (Sarlet et al., 2018)

In Brazilian constitutional history, seven constitutional charters have been in force, namely those of 1824, 1881, 1934, 1937, 1946, 1967 and 1988. To demonstrate the process of universalization and formal realisation of the right to education, a brief historical incursion will be made, demonstrating the normative evolution of the matter concerning this right provided for in the constitutional texts.

Regarding the Imperial Constitution, it is emphasised that there was only the provision of free primary education for all citizens. However, the constitutional letter did not bring the definition of citizenship and/or who had it, as well as did not establish the age range by which individuals would have the right to enter school for the beginning of primary education. In this way, in practice, there was only a generic declaration of a formal recognition of a subjective right of citizens, instead of an effective obligation of the State. The wording of the Republic Charter of 1981, on the other hand, is characterised by not bringing advances, but retrocede in relation to the previous constitution, since it is omitted even on the points addressed in the previous constitutional wording, being these free and compulsory education (Savelli, 2010).

At the turn of the 20th century, two very different constitutions came into force during the period known as the "Vargas Era", namely the Letters of 1934 and 1937. The Magna Law of 1934 innovated by (i) bringing in its wording the unprecedented recognition of education as a

right of all and duty of the state; (ii) fixing free primary education; (iii) inaugurating public educational financing; (iv) granting to the federal government the duty of organising and fixing general guidelines for national education. The constitutional text of 1937 presented a huge setback to the process of universalization and realisation of the right to education, since it excluded the universal character of this, as well as attributed to the family nucleus the duty to provide, granting to the State only the subsidiary responsibility for the realisation of the enjoyment of this right (Savelli, 2010).

In relation to the Constitution of 1946, a progressive text was observed, after all, this returned to grant the universal character to the right to education, besides innovating by bringing, for the first time, a time frame of compulsory and free primary education, as well as allowing the binding of percentages of tax revenue for the maintenance and development of education (10% of the Union and 20% of the States, Federal District and Municipalities). Regarding the 1967 Constitution, no setbacks were observed, only the important legislative innovation regarding the unprecedented determination of an age range for compulsory education, this range corresponding to students aged between 7 (seven) and 14 (fourteen) years (Savelli, 2010).

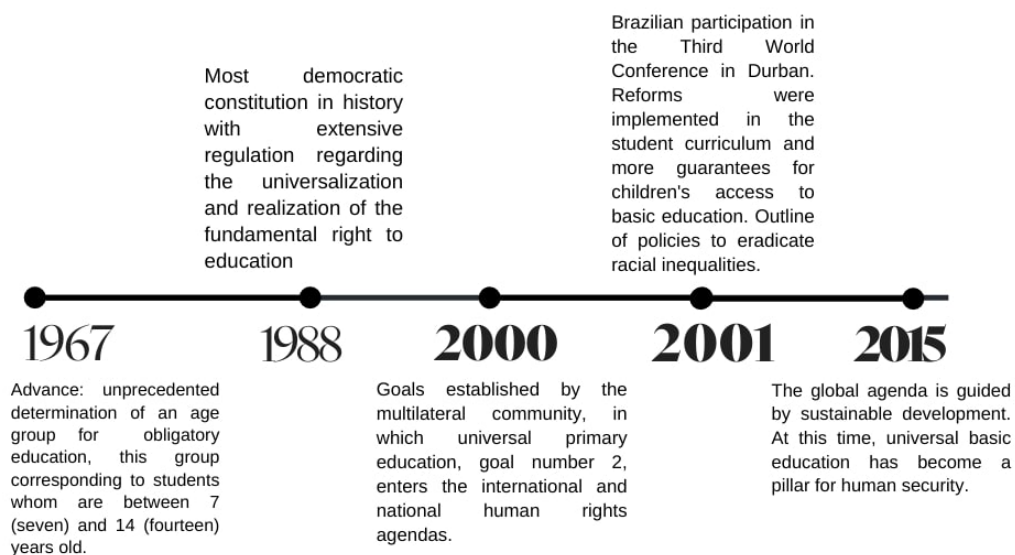


Figure 2: Constitution of 1967 and 1988 (current) and participation of Brazil in global agendas.

Authors' elaboration based on literature review

The 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil is considered to have the most democratic constitutional text in the history of the country's legal system, thus demonstrating a commitment by Brazilian society to a true socioeconomic and political transformation. In this sense, it is possible to observe that the adoption of the Democratic State of Law, as the state paradigm adopted by the Constitution of 1988, has brought about significant changes with respect to the functioning of social institutions, since, for the first time ever, a constitutional charter has brought a wording with a strong plural and compromising character. Thus, it is important to emphasise that these substantial changes have occurred because the adoption of this state paradigm has led to the observance of the exercise of social institutions with the basic principles and values of a democratic state.

Likewise, the impacts of the adoption of this paradigm in the current educational model can be clearly seen. The Constitution of the Republic of 1988, among all the constitutional

charters that have been in force in the Brazilian State, is the one with the most extensive regulation on the right to education, providing exhaustively, between articles 205 and 214, on the organisation, functioning, and planning of the education system in the country.

In the current Brazilian legal system, the right to education is also recognized as a right for all, as well as the State's duty to ensure its enjoyment by all citizens. To guarantee the effective enjoyment of this right, mechanisms are then created in the constitutional text, which are listed in the following provision: (i) FUNDEB; (ii) LDB; (iii) PNE.

The Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorisation of Education Professionals (FUNDEB), established by Constitutional Amendment No. 108/2020 and regulated by Law No. 14.113/2020, has the pooling of resources from transfers from the States, Federal District, and Municipalities, by way of tax collection, which have the main purpose of providing financial support for the educational system in the country. Law 9.394/96 (LDB) was instituted to establish the bases and guidelines for national education, while the National Education Plan (PNE), a ten-year plan, is a governmental instrument for educational development, through which the State creates goals, objectives, and strategies.

Regarding Early Childhood Education, the object of this article, the Constitution assigns, in §2, Art. 211, the priority competence to the municipalities regarding the promotion of early childhood education, as well as defined, in item IV, Art. 208, the age group that makes up this educational system, being composed of children up to 5 (five) years of age.

Basic Education in Multilateral Agencies

Multilateral organisations, the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), are the promoters of agendas aimed at implementing universal education. The framework of redistributive policies associated with forms of remediation of inequities is the participation, at first, through the process of Brazil in the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, also known as Durban Conference, held in South Africa in 2001.³

The importance of the Durban Conference resides in the formulation of an action plan, which aims to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, with the participation of historical colonialism victims. The forms of action would be through the implementation of public policies—compensatory investment policies in Brazil. In terms of the right to education, in addition to curricular reforms and education based on human rights, the program covers the issues surrounding the disparity in access to education. Therefore, the States would guarantee principally:

- Equal access to education for all, in law and in practice, and to refrain from any other legal or other measure leading to the imposition of racial segregation in any form in access to the education system.

³ Declaration and Program of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, held in Durban from 31 August to 8 September 2001, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf [accessed 10 November 2021]

- And take all appropriate measures to remove obstacles limiting children’s access to education and ensure that all children have access to good quality education without discrimination.

Since 2015, international agencies are committed to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are considered an evolution of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) implemented in the 2000s—these have already prioritised the universalization of basic education.⁴ The SDGs (2015) are present in paragraph 54 of Resolution A/RES/70/1, with the participation of 193 countries and civil society, debating a global agenda that involves social justice and climate action.⁵ The objectives are made up of goals that must be achieved by 2030, among which ‘Education for All’, Goal 4 of 17, focuses on ensuring universal education for children and adolescents. In addition to the above, early childhood education gains special attention, covering vulnerable children and minority social groups in the Global South. At this stage of development policies, universal basic education appears as a priority until then unresolved by previous agendas, although it is seen as the central pillar for the full achievement of human development (King, 2016).

3. Basic Education in Brazilian Economic History

Not much was done regarding educational policies before 1822 in Brazil. With the rise of imperial Brazil and the 1824 constitution, there were legal instruments to conduct public educational policy, however, very little was done in this period in terms of primary education, and what was done focused in the urban core. Regarding higher levels of education, pre-existing initiatives were expanded, both by the private sector and by state support. Even with the influx of immigrants, the illiteracy rate was still around 70% of the population (Heimer, 1975).

After the fall of the monarchy and the rise of the republic, there was a small increase in the number of elementary schools during this period, however, there were no advances in higher levels of education. The unequal character of the educational expansion, prioritising urban centres, continued. And, even with this small increase in elementary school, the illiteracy rate went from 67.2% in 1899 to 60.1% in 1830 of the total population (Heimer, 1975).

The rise of Getúlio Vargas and his developmentalist ideology led to some changes in educational policy. The prioritisation of secondary and higher levels of education happened again, however, with a new focus: industrial education and nationalism. It is worth mentioning that during the ‘*Estado Novo*’ there was even a drop in the proportion of children in elementary school (Kang, 2017; Kang, 2010; Heimer, 1975).

After the fall of Vargas, Brazil had a democracy for a few years, called the “Populist Republic”. The presidents of this era were substantially different from each other, therefore, they conducted different educational policies and projects, however, in the aggregate, there

⁴ UN General Assembly, United Nations Millennium Declaration, Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly, 18 September 2000, A/RES/55/2, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f4ea3.html> [accessed 10 November 2021]

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html> [accessed 10 November 2021]

were several relevant advances, such as a substantial increase in the primary education enrolment rate, however, the focus remained on the secondary and higher education levels. The João Goulart government represented an exception in this period, since his policies focused on basic education (Kang, 2010; Kang, 2017; Heimer, 1975).

With the 1964 coup, the military in power wanted to develop industry in Brazil, thus, the focus on industrial development meant that primary education was going to be neglected again, that is, the Brazilian state carried out policies to encourage industrialization and higher education leading to the stagnation of the proportion of children enrolled in elementary school (Kang, 2019).

Evidently, a structural inequality of access to education and of investment in different levels of schooling emerged throughout Brazilian history. Before we can proceed to the analysis of the current state of Brazilian basic education, it is important to understand why education is an important public policy. As said earlier, education plays a major role in economic growth, formation of human capital and, beyond the economic sphere, gaps in cognitive and non-cognitive abilities may be traced back to experiences in first childhood. Therefore, the investment in primary education has many positive effects, not only economic ones, but also social and cognitive.

Recently, Brazil experienced a substantial improvement regarding infant education, however, many schools still don't have proper resources to provide a quality education for children. For instance, only 53.5% of primary schools have access to computers for pedagogical purposes. One of the biggest gaps in Brazil's performance in educational development is its socioeconomic, social, and cultural status, which has the greatest influence on learning outcomes. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA index) demonstrates that children from lower social classes reach literacy results 55% lower than children with higher economic status, 29% lower compared to the OECD educational development averages made available in 2018 (OECD, 2021). Equitable learning, within the dimension of class, is conditioned by the investment variable in basic education and early childhood care, which are neglected within the totality of basic education in Brazil when compared to investments per student (OECD, 2021).

4. Repercussions of the COVID-19 on Educational Inequalities in the Basic Cycle

In 2020, with the advances of the COVID-19 epidemic, the United Nations Economic and Social Council announced that the pandemic had consequences in terms of the goals for progress in the SDGs, focusing on the issue of universal education, especially in developing countries. Due to mandatory measures of social distancing, aimed at preventing the spread of contagion, which limited the access of millions of children to schooling.^{6 7}

⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Council (2020) Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals Report of the Secretary-General Archived 30 December 2020 at the Wayback Machine, High-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (E/2020/57), 28 April 2020. available at: <https://undocs.org/E/2020/57> [accessed 10 November 2021]

⁷ Gustafsson, M. (2021). *Pandemic-related disruptions to schooling and impacts on learning proficiency indicators: A focus on the early grades*. UNESCO Institute for Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377781?1=null&queryId=e395e0d7-39fa-47e5-bd24-ec9feb2642ee>

In Brazil, the Pandemic was poorly managed, specially by the federal government, without tests, data, or access to the most economically vulnerable communities in different regions of the country are neglected. The official record made invisible how these peripheral communities faced the pandemic and the inefficiency of policies aimed at managing the health crisis, which, in turn, use these same official records as the basis for their preparation. Consecutively, the public policies adopted thus far did not consider the specificities of rural and urban peripheries in Brazil and their marginalised populations.⁸ Currently, the expressively high numbers of victims of COVID-19 among lower-income populations, particularly those who identify themselves as black and brown, demonstrate the degree of vulnerability of these groups, which constitute most of the population in peripheral regions (UNICEF, 2021).

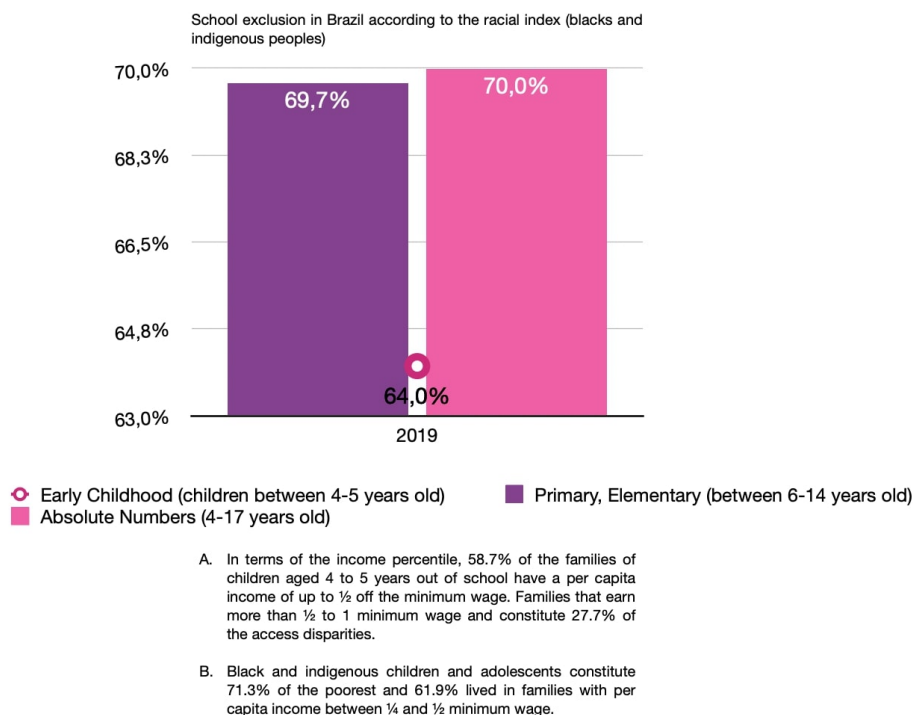


Figure 3: Using the racial index from IBGE and PNAD, shows the pre-pandemic percentage of school exclusion and socio-economic situation of children's families. Furthermore, school trajectories of blacks and indigenous peoples are marked by higher exclusion, failures, age and grade distortions than those of the declared white population. Thus, this portion of the population is, due to structural and economic factors, more vulnerable to educational exclusion and low development than the white population.

Data by Report Study “*Cenário de Exclusão Escolar no Brasil*” (UNICEF, 2021).

Authors’ elaboration

Regarding education, the failed governance of the pandemic affected especially those in vulnerable situations. Due to the structural racial inequality, minorities had poorer access to important resources for remote learning, such as computers and a good connection to the internet, they experienced more difficulties and effectively experienced a bigger educational

⁸ Braga, C., Tomesani, A. M., Ricarte, J., Maschietto, R. H., & Rupani, N. (2020). *As margens do estado na pandemia: experiências periféricas de (in) segurança humana no Brasil*. Sertanias: Revista De Ciências Humanas E Sociais, 1(1), 03-28. <https://doi.org/10.22481/sertanias.v1i1.8272>

deficit. Moreover, the budget allocated to education did not increase during the pandemic, therefore, many educational institutions, especially primary and secondary, suffered from a lack of resources to provide a good remote learning experience and to provide a safe return to school in 2021. This lack of investment goes against what was recommended by most experts, for instance, the Education at Glance report (2021) prepared by the OECD exposed that Brazil needed additional measures to address the disparities in access to education during the Pandemic.

Percentage by age of children and adolescents who were denied access to education in November 2020 (out of 5.1 million total)

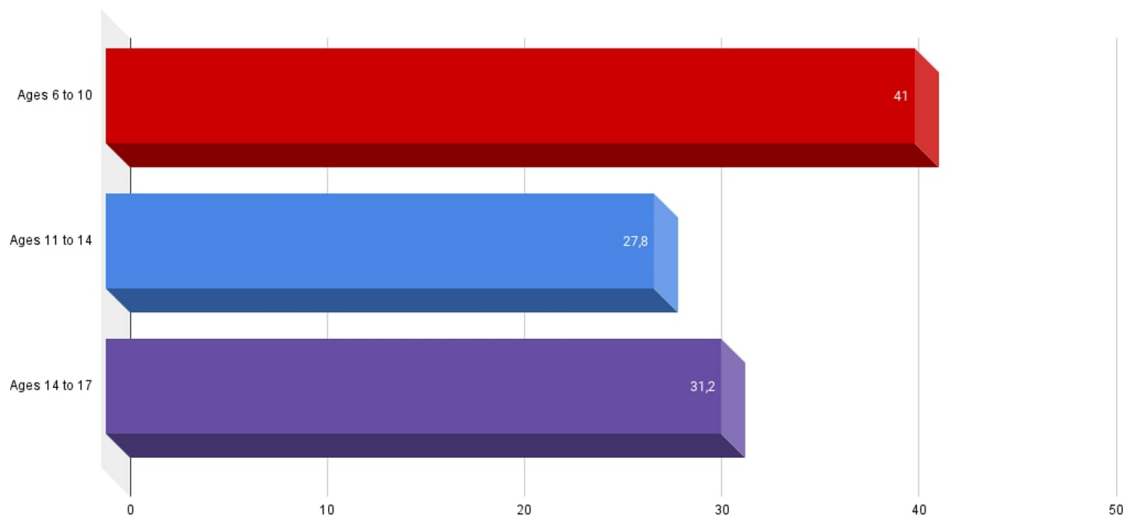


Figure 4: The data above shows how the COVID-19 led to greater exclusion from access to education. Almost 1.5 million children and teenagers did not attend school. Approximately 3.7 million were enrolled, but did not have access to activities, as they were unable to maintain remote learning. A total of 5.1 million (children and adolescents) were denied access in November 2020.

Data by UNICEF (2021) Authors' elaboration

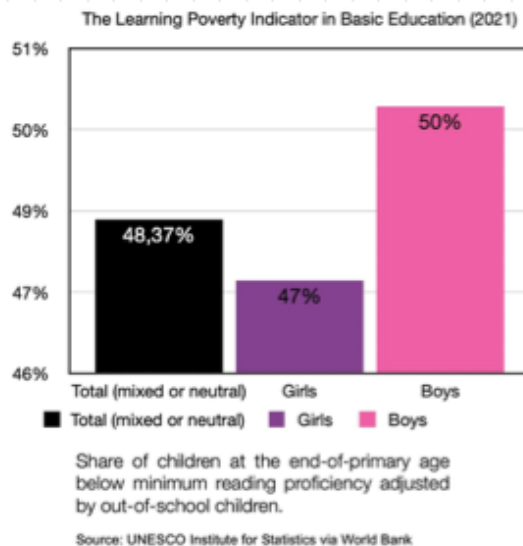


Figure 5: The data demonstrate impasses in educational development, during COVID-19, that lead to the *learning poverty indicator*.⁹
 Data by Johns Hopkins University, World Bank & UNICEF (2021)
 Authors' elaboration

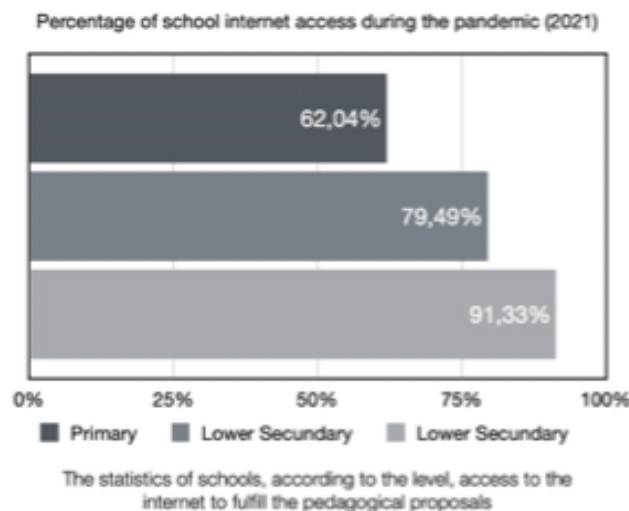


Figure 6: Sequentially, it is observed that primary schools during COVID-19 have reduced structures of internet access compared to secondary schools.
 Data by Johns Hopkins University, World Bank & UNICEF (2021)
 Authors' elaboration

Regarding investments, spending on basic education added to secondary and technical education in Brazil reached 4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018, above the average when compared to the OECD average of 3.2%. However, while 2/3 of the OECD countries and other partners have increased public investment in primary education institutions because of the pandemic crisis, the Bolsonaro government has reported no educational budget change in fiscal year 2020 and 2021 (OECD, 2021).

⁹ According to the World Bank, school precariousness during early childhood education raises the indexes related to the reading deficit. This indicator is related to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Therefore, the remote learning propagated inequality throughout the whole educational system, not only during the lockdown, but also when vaccination began and reopening started to be discussed, since schools reopened at very different rates, due to many forms of inequality, especially regional. Concerning ECE, the consequences are deeper, since there are cognitive and emotional reflexes (Silva et al., 2021).

Recommendations

We understand that a possible path for the construction of public policies that seek to deal with the context of early childhood education after COVID-19, should consider not only the universalization of access, but also the correction of the deficits generated (psychosocial, economic, and educational) by the crisis, thus, correcting the gaps that emerged in this period.

In view of the above, the lack of attention to this sector and investment in teachers and pedagogues reverberates in all stages of the basic education cycle linked to the learning poverty. It was observed that investments in early childhood bring generational returns and serve as a basis for improving structural inequalities, as it acts directly in areas of reproduction of life (socio-political system).

Conclusion

This research investigated the effects of disparities in access to education in the basic education cycle, among lower socioeconomic classes, within the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the correlation of this social phenomenon with the rise of structural inequalities, social exclusion, within the Brazilian administrative and institutional apparatus. It was found that the Brazilian State faces difficulties in complying with egalitarian basic education, objective number 4 (SDG), due to the allocation inefficiency. Basic education, with a focus on early childhood education, was made unfeasible in the educational portfolios of Brazilian governments throughout authoritarian and participative history. The findings showed that the great challenge for educational development, regarding the structural dimension, that is, socioeconomic and cultural, is the lack of prioritisation of investment in early childhood education. The neglect of this educational sector reflects on other levels of learning, equity, and training in basic education. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the weaknesses of unequal globalisation linked to the centuries-old lack of income redistribution and wealth concentration. Consequently, the racialized population mostly represents the high percentages of school dropouts, learning difficulties and were the most neglected throughout the health crisis due to the lack of access to electronic resources. Regardless of all the educational fractures exposed in the wake of the pandemic, the sectors of social reproduction, specifically basic education, did not receive a budget increase and specific attention from the Brazilian government.

Sociological literature showed that sub-citizenship, as a historical process of marginalisation and abandonment of ethnic-racial minority groups in Brazil, manifests itself as a colonial and an oligarchic heritage, which is perpetuated through the inequality in the distribution of resources and rights. As a result, in circumstances of the status quo, the racialized, Afro-descendant, and indigenous population continues to face difficulties linked to human security, as these social groups have precarious standards of quality of life when compared to those of individuals declared white. The Brazilian State underwent significant institutional changes but did not break with the reactionary and patrimonial social order, given that the right to

quality basic education is discriminatory, socio-political—having racial and economic aspects. In this way, the manifestation of institutional racism affects, above all, the implementation of public policies and the enforcement of human and constitutional rights.

The legal analysis showed that, although the right to education finds provision in all Brazilian constitutions, it was only recognized in the Constitutional Charter of 1988 as a right of all and a duty of the State. About basic education, the current Constitution—and the current infra-constitutional legislation applicable to the matter—innovated by determining that the State's duty to ensure education for its citizens extends to the early childhood age group.

Succinctly, the crisis caused by COVID-19 amplified inequalities in several instances, since it was found that the remote teaching and return-to-class process did not observe the specificity and needs of each socioeconomic group. The pandemic esterized fractures in the dimensions of social justice encompassing access to universal basic education, highlighting the structural disparities linked to racism and poverty throughout Brazilian administration history.

Bibliographic, documentary, and digital findings were extremely relevant for the construction of the qualitative and legal analysis on the right to education and Brazilian social classes. Besides, the historical and comparative method proved to be adequate in this scope. One hypothesis was not fully resolved in the investment investigation stage, because data on indicator (B2), which represents the quality of early childhood education in OECD countries, was not available to Brazil. It is indicated for future academic work analyses involving the quality of basic education in Brazil, compared to other developed and developing countries that invest in early childhood education, and educational progress based on investments in this sector.

Acknowledgements

This investigation is the result of months of poring over data around the pandemic and the increase in social disparities. Our first results about the object were presented at the IX Oxbridge Conference on Brazilian Studies in October 2021. Since then, we have seen paradigmatic changes.

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