


## EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE EQUITY IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes educational inequalities in Brazil, identifying challenges and strategies to promote equity in the education system. Through a systematic review of the literature and analysis of recent data, the research reveals significant disparities in access, permanence, and school performance, influenced by socioeconomic, regional, and ethnic-racial factors. The results indicate that 6.6% of the Brazilian population aged 15 and over is illiterate, with rates reaching 13.9% in the Northeast. Students in the richest quintile perform 32% better on standardized tests compared to those in the poorest quintile. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these inequalities, with 26.8% of public school students without access to remote activities. The study highlights effective public policies, such as the Bolsa Família Program, which reduced school dropout by 36% among beneficiaries. Promising strategies include implementing culturally sensitive curricula, strengthening comprehensive education, and mentoring programs, demonstrating potential to reduce disparities. The research emphasizes the need for a multidimensional approach, involving public policies, innovative pedagogical practices, and community engagement. It is concluded that, despite the advances, significant challenges persist, such as school segregation and the intersectionality of inequalities. The study proposes directions for future research and

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underscores the importance of continued and coordinated investments to build a truly equitable education system in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Educational Inequalities. Equity. Public Policies. School Performance. Inclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right and an essential pillar for the socioeconomic development of any nation. However, educational inequalities persist as a significant challenge in Brazil and in many countries around the world. These disparities not only compromise the principle of equity but also negatively impact the social and economic progress of society as a whole (NARCISO et al., 2024a).

In the Brazilian context, educational inequalities manifest themselves in different ways, from unequal access to quality education to disparities in learning outcomes between different socioeconomic groups. According to data from the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2023), there are still significant differences in schooling rates and academic performance between regions, social classes, and ethnic groups in the country.

The complexity of this scenario requires a multifaceted approach that considers not only the pedagogical aspects, but also the social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the educational process. In this sense, Narciso et al. (2024b, p. 45) argue that "the promotion of educational equity requires a deep understanding of the mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities and the development of innovative strategies to overcome them".

One of the crucial aspects to face this challenge is teacher training. Narciso et al. (2024c) highlight the importance of preparing teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom and to implement active methodologies that can engage all students, regardless of their backgrounds or socioeconomic conditions. This perspective is corroborated by recent studies that point to the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical approaches in reducing educational disparities (NARCISO et al., 2024d).

In addition, the use of educational technologies emerges as a potential tool to promote equity. Narciso et al. (2024e, p. 6) state that "assistive technology has proven to be a valuable resource to enhance the learning of students with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable education". However, it is essential to ensure that access to these technologies is democratized, preventing them from becoming another factor of inequality.

Public policies also play a crucial role in the pursuit of educational equity. The National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024 establishes ambitious goals for reducing inequalities and improving the quality of education at all levels (BRASIL, 2014). However,

the effective implementation of these policies faces significant challenges, especially in a country with continental dimensions and socioeconomic realities as diverse as Brazil.

In this context, this article proposes to analyze the main challenges related to educational inequalities in Brazil and discuss potential strategies to promote greater equity in the education system. The overall objective is to contribute to the academic and policy debate on how to build a more just and inclusive education system, capable of providing equitable learning and development opportunities for all students.

To achieve this objective, the study adopts a qualitative methodological approach, based on a systematic review of recent literature on the subject, including scientific articles, government reports, and case studies. In addition, relevant statistical data will be analyzed to draw an updated panorama of educational inequalities in the country.

The structure of the article is organized as follows: after this introduction, the following section presents a theoretical review of the concepts of educational inequality and equity. Then, the main challenges faced by the Brazilian educational system in promoting equity are discussed. The fourth section analyzes promising strategies and successful initiatives implemented in Brazil and other countries. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings and offers recommendations for public policies and educational practices aimed at reducing inequalities.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND EQUITY**

Understanding the concepts of educational inequality and equity is fundamental for the analysis of the challenges faced by the Brazilian educational system. According to Ribeiro and Schlegel (2015), educational inequality refers to disparities in access, permanence and school performance between different social, economic or ethnic groups. Equity, as defined by Crahay (2013), goes beyond formal equality of opportunities, seeking to ensure that all students, regardless of their origins, have effective conditions to develop their educational potential.

Narciso et al. (2024a, p. 37) argumentam que:

"The search for educational equity implies not only offering the same opportunities to all, but recognizing and meeting the specific needs of each group, compensating for social and economic disadvantages that may impact the learning process."

This perspective is aligned with the concept of social justice in education, which, according to Dubet (2004), demands affirmative actions and compensatory policies to mitigate the structural inequalities that affect school performance.

## DETERMINANTS OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

Educational inequalities are the result of a complex interaction of socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors. Alves and Soares (2013) identify three main dimensions that influence school performance: the socioeconomic level of families, school structure and pedagogical practices.

Family background plays a crucial role in students' educational trajectory. As pointed out by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), the cultural capital inherited from families significantly influences the chances of school success. In the Brazilian context, studies such as that of Ribeiro (2011) demonstrate that social origin continues to be a strong predictor of academic performance and educational opportunities.

The quality of school infrastructure and pedagogical resources is also a determining factor. Narciso et al. (2024e) highlight the importance of assistive technology in promoting inclusion and supporting the learning of students with disabilities. However, the unequal distribution of these resources between public and private schools, as well as between regions of the country, contributes to the perpetuation of inequalities.

## THE ROLE OF TEACHER TRAINING IN PROMOTING EQUITY

Teacher training and practice are crucial elements in the search for educational equity. Narciso et al. (2024c, p. 372) state that:

"The implementation of active methodologies in teacher training is essential to prepare teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom and to develop pedagogical strategies that promote inclusion and engagement of all students."

This perspective is corroborated by Gatti (2016), who emphasizes the need for teacher training that prepares teachers to work in contexts of inequality, developing skills to adapt their practices to the specific needs of each student.

## PUBLIC POLICIES AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Public policies play a key role in reducing educational inequalities. The National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024 establishes specific goals for the promotion of equity,

including the universalization of access to basic education and the improvement of the quality of education (BRASIL, 2014).

Programs such as Bolsa Família have demonstrated positive impacts in reducing school dropout and improving the academic performance of students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability (SIMÕES; SABATES, 2014). However, Krawczyk and Vieira (2012) argue that there are still significant challenges in the effective implementation of these policies, especially in a country with the size and diversity of Brazil.

### CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES: TECHNOLOGY AND PANDEMIC

Technological advancement and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have brought new challenges and opportunities for educational equity. Narciso et al. (2024d) highlight the potential of educational technologies in promoting more personalized and inclusive learning. However, the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities, especially with regard to access to the internet and electronic devices for remote teaching (INSTITUTO UNIBANCO, 2020).

### PERSPECTIVES FOR THE PROMOTION OF EQUITY

The promotion of educational equity requires a multidimensional approach that involves public policies, innovative pedagogical practices, and the engagement of society as a whole. Narciso et al. (2024b) emphasize the importance of strategies that consider local specificities and the individual needs of students.

Initiatives such as the implementation of culturally sensitive curricula, the strengthening of comprehensive education, and the appreciation of diversity in the school environment are pointed out by researchers as promising paths for building a more equitable educational system (ARROYO, 2010; MOLL, 2012).

This theoretical framework provides a conceptual basis for the analysis of the challenges and strategies related to the promotion of equity in the Brazilian educational system. Subsequent sections of the article will deepen the discussion on these topics by presenting relevant empirical data and case studies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **APPROACH AND TYPE OF RESEARCH**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, with characteristics of exploratory and descriptive research. According to Gil (2019), exploratory research aims to provide greater familiarity with the problem, making it more explicit, while descriptive research seeks to describe the characteristics of a given phenomenon or population. This approach is justified by the complexity of the issue of educational inequalities and the need for an in-depth understanding of the challenges and strategies to promote equity in the Brazilian educational system.

### **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

Data collection was carried out through a systematic review of the literature, following the principles proposed by Galvão and Pereira (2014). The process of searching for and selecting sources followed the following steps:

1. Definition of the databases: The following databases were used: SciELO, CAPES Journal Portal, Google Scholar and Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD).
2. Establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria: Scientific articles, theses, dissertations, and books published between 2010 and 2024, in Portuguese, that addressed topics related to educational inequalities in Brazil were included. Non-peer-reviewed studies and those that did not specifically focus on the Brazilian context were excluded.
3. Definition of descriptors: The following search terms were used: "educational inequalities", "equity in education", "educational policies", "school inclusion" and "teacher training".
4. Selection of studies: Initially, 287 studies were identified. After reading the titles and abstracts, 112 were selected for full reading. Of these, 58 were included in the final review.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data analysis followed the principles of content analysis proposed by Bardin (2011), comprising the following phases:

1. Pre-analysis: Floating reading of the selected material and initial organization of the data.
2. Exploration of the material: Coding and categorization of the data into topics relevant to the study.
3. Treatment of results: Interpretation and synthesis of the information obtained.

The categories of analysis were defined a priori, based on the objectives of the study and the theoretical framework, and refined during the analysis process. The main categories include: determinants of educational inequalities, public policies to promote equity, inclusive pedagogical practices, and teacher training.

### 3.4 ETHICAL ASPECTS

Although this study does not directly involve human beings as research subjects, the ethical principles of scientific research were observed, as recommended by Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council (BRASIL, 2016). This includes respect for the authorship of the works consulted, with appropriate citations and references, and integrity in the analysis and presentation of data.

### STUDY LIMITATIONS

It is important to recognize the limitations inherent to the methodology adopted. The literature review, while comprehensive, may not capture all the nuances and specificities of educational inequalities in a country as diverse as Brazil. In addition, the rapid evolution of the educational landscape, especially in the post-pandemic context, may imply some temporal gaps in the available literature.

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE METHODOLOGY

The methodological choice allows a broad and in-depth view of the theme, integrating different perspectives and theoretical approaches. As Narciso et al. (2024b, p. 48) argue:

"Critical analysis of the literature on educational inequalities is critical to identifying patterns, trends, and gaps in current knowledge, providing solid foundations for the development of effective strategies to promote equity."

This methodological approach enables not only the description of the current state of educational inequalities in Brazil, but also the identification of promising strategies and the proposition of paths for future research and interventions.



## STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The results of the analysis will be presented in the subsequent sections of the article, organized according to the thematic categories identified. Tables and tables will be used to synthesize relevant information, facilitating the understanding of the main findings. Direct and indirect quotations will be used to illustrate key points and support the discussions, always in accordance with ABNT standards.

This methodology aims to provide a solid and transparent basis for the analysis of educational inequalities in Brazil and the discussion of strategies to promote equity in the education system.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN BRAZIL

The analysis of the literature reveals a worrying scenario of educational inequalities in Brazil. According to IBGE data (2022), 6.6% of the population aged 15 and over is illiterate, with significant disparities between regions: while the South has a rate of 3.3%, the Northeast reaches 13.9%. These regional disparities reflect historical and structural inequalities that persist in the country.

Access to basic education, although it has improved in recent decades, still presents challenges. According to the 2023 School Census (INEP, 2024), 98.2% of children and adolescents between 6 and 14 years old are enrolled in elementary school. However, this percentage drops to 91.7% when it comes to high school (15 to 17 years old), indicating a significant bottleneck in the transition between education levels.

### SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The results of the survey corroborate the strong correlation between socioeconomic level and school performance. Alves et al. (2023) demonstrate that students in the richest quintile have, on average, 32% higher performance on standardized tests compared to those in the poorest quintile. This disparity is even more pronounced when we consider the educational background of the parents: children of parents with complete higher education are 2.7 times more likely to enter university than those whose parents have only elementary education.

## IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities. Narciso et al. (2024d) point out that 26.8% of students in the public school system did not have access to remote activities during the period of school closures, in contrast to only 4.3% of students in the private network. In addition, 42% of low-income students reported significant difficulties in following online classes, either due to lack of adequate equipment or stable internet connection.

## PUBLIC POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTS

The public policies implemented in recent decades have shown mixed results. The Bolsa Família program, for example, contributed to a 36% reduction in school dropout among beneficiaries (SIMÕES; SABATES, 2014). On the other hand, the implementation of the National Education Plan (PNE) 2014-2024 faces challenges: only 5 of the 20 goals established were partially met by 2023, according to a report by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2023).

## TEACHER TRAINING AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Teacher training emerges as a crucial factor for the promotion of equity. Gatti (2022) points out that only 51.8% of basic education teachers have specific training in the area in which they teach. Narciso et al. (2024c) argue that the implementation of active methodologies in teacher education can increase the effectiveness of inclusive pedagogical practices by up to 28%.

## TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

The use of educational technologies has the potential to reduce inequalities, but it can also create new barriers. Narciso et al. (2024e) show that schools that implemented digital inclusion programs saw a 23% increase in average student performance on standardized assessments. However, only 38.7% of Brazilian public schools have computer labs in adequate conditions of use (CENSO ESCOLAR, 2023).

## PROMISING STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING EQUITY

The literature analysis points to some promising strategies:

1. Implementing culturally sensitive curricula: Schools that adopted this approach recorded a 17% reduction in dropout among students from minority groups (ARROYO, 2022).
2. Strengthening full-time education: Students in full-time schools showed a 15% increase in performance in mathematics and 12% in Portuguese (MOLL, 2021).
3. Mentoring and tutoring programs: Mentoring initiatives reduced the performance gap between students of different socioeconomic levels by 22% (SILVA; SANTOS, 2023).

## PERSISTENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PATHS

Despite the advances, significant challenges persist. School segregation continues to be a problem: 72% of public school students study in institutions where more than 75% of their classmates are low-income (RIBEIRO; SCHLEGEL, 2015). In addition, the intersectionality between race, gender, and social class amplifies inequalities: black students are 2.4 times less likely to enter higher education compared to white students of the same socioeconomic level (IBGE, 2022).

The results of this research indicate that the promotion of educational equity requires a multifaceted approach, which combines robust public policies, quality teacher training, strategic use of technologies and community engagement. As Narciso et al. (2024b, p. 215) argue:

"The construction of a truly equitable educational system requires not only financial investments, but a profound transformation in pedagogical practices, institutional structures and social mentalities."

Future studies should focus on the longitudinal evaluation of specific interventions, the analysis of the impact of educational policies in different regional contexts, and the investigation of innovative approaches to overcome structural barriers to educational equity.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to analyze educational inequalities in Brazil, identifying challenges and strategies to promote equity in the educational system. From the systematic review of the literature and the analysis of the data presented, it is possible to make the following considerations:

## SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

Educational inequalities in Brazil remain significant, with regional, socioeconomic, and ethnic-racial disparities impacting student access, retention, and performance. The survey revealed that, despite advances in recent decades, 6.6% of the population aged 15 and over is still illiterate, with rates reaching 13.9% in the Northeast (IBGE, 2022). In addition, the study showed that students in the richest quintile perform 32% better on standardized tests compared to those in the poorest quintile (ALVES et al., 2023).

## RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of analyzing educational inequalities and identifying strategies to promote equity was achieved. Determinant factors of inequalities were identified, such as socioeconomic level, family background, and access to technological resources. Promising strategies include implementing culturally sensitive curricula, strengthening comprehensive education, and mentoring programs, which have demonstrated potential to reduce achievement disparities and school dropouts.

## STUDY CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes to the field of education by offering a comprehensive and up-to-date view of educational inequalities in Brazil, integrating recent data and critical analyses of the literature. The study highlights the importance of a multidimensional approach to addressing inequalities, involving public policies, pedagogical practices, and community engagement.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study. The literature review-based methodology, while comprehensive, may not capture all the regional and local nuances of educational inequalities. In addition, the rapid evolution of the educational landscape, especially in the post-pandemic context, may imply some temporal gaps in the available literature.

## PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The practical implications of this study include the need to reformulate educational policies, focusing on strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing

inequalities. Theoretically, the study reinforces the importance of intersectional approaches in understanding educational inequalities, considering the interaction between factors such as race, social class, and gender.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should focus on:

1. Longitudinal evaluations of specific interventions to reduce inequalities;
2. Comparative analyses of the impact of educational policies in different regional contexts;
3. Investigation of innovative approaches to overcome structural barriers to educational equity;
4. Studies on the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational inequalities.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The promotion of educational equity in Brazil requires a continuous and coordinated effort by various social actors. As Narciso et al. (2024b, p. 215) argue, "the construction of a truly equitable educational system requires not only financial investments, but a profound transformation in pedagogical practices, institutional structures, and social mentalities."

It is concluded that, despite the persistent challenges, there are promising ways to reduce educational inequalities. The effective implementation of evidence-based policies, investment in quality teacher training, and the strategic use of educational technologies are crucial elements in this process. Only through a collective commitment to equity will it be possible to build an education system that offers fair and equal opportunities for all Brazilian students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, race, or geographic location.

## SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

### OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES

1. Illiteracy rate: 6.6% of the Brazilian population aged 15 and over is illiterate, with significant regional disparities (IBGE, 2022).
  - South: 3.3%
  - Northeast: 13.9%
2. Access to basic education (INEP, 2024):

- Elementary School (6-14 years old): 98.2% enrollment
- High School (15-17 years old): 91.7% enrollment

### SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

3. Performance in standardized tests (ALVES et al., 2023):
  - Students in the richest quintile: 32% higher than those in the poorest quintile
4. Impact of family educational background:
  - Children of parents with higher education: 2.7 times more likely to enter university

### IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

5. Access to remote activities during school closures (NARCISO et al., 2024d):
  - Public network: 26.8% without access
  - Private network: 4.3% without access
6. Difficulties in online classes:
  - 42% of low-income students reported significant difficulties

### PUBLIC POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTS

7. Bolsa Família Program (SIMÕES; SABATES, 2014):
  - 36% reduction in school dropout among beneficiaries
8. National Education Plan 2014-2024 (INEP, 2023):
  - Only 5 of the 20 targets partially met by 2023

### TEACHER TRAINING

9. Teacher qualification (GATTI, 2022):
  - 51.8% of basic education teachers with specific training in the area of activity
10. Impact of active methodologies (NARCISO et al., 2024c):
  - Up to 28% increase in the effectiveness of inclusive pedagogical practices

### TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

Digital inclusion programs (NARCISO et al., 2024e):

- 23% increase in average student performance on standardized assessments

Technological infrastructure (SCHOOL CENSUS, 2023):

- 38.7% of public schools with computer labs in adequate conditions

## PROMISING STRATEGIES

Culturally Sensitive Curricula (ARROYO, 2022):

- 17% reduction in school dropout of students from minority groups

Integral education (MOLL, 2021):

- 15% increase in performance in mathematics and 12% in Portuguese language

Mentoring Programs (SILVA; SANTOS, 2023):

- 22% reduction in achievement disparity between students of different socioeconomic levels

## PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

School segregation (RIBEIRO; SCHLEGEL, 2015):

- 72% of public school students study in institutions where more than 75% of their peers are low-income

Intersectionality (IBGE, 2022):

- Black students are 2.4 times less likely to enter higher education compared to white students of the same socioeconomic status

This synthesis presents the main findings of the research, highlighting persistent educational inequalities in Brazil, the impact of socioeconomic factors, the effects of the pandemic, the influence of public policies, and promising strategies to promote educational equity. The quantitative data provided offer a clear and objective view of the current situation and the challenges to be faced in the Brazilian educational system.

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