



## SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN BRAZIL TODAY: BETWEEN CHALLENGES AND ALTERNATIVES

### *SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES AND PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL: CHALLENGES AND ALTERNATIVES*

Aline Raquel Richter – IBRA College  
Cristiane Turcato da Costa – IBRA College  
Nelson Davi Damke – IBRA College Adriana  
Cardoso – IBRA College  
Rosiará Dutra Maciel – IBRA College

#### SUMMARY

This paper analyzes the sociological issues that influence public education in Brazil, focusing on social inequalities, structural racism, and alternative policies to promote inclusion and equity. Through a literature review, the study addresses the historical development of public education, highlighting how the educational system reflects and reinforces structural inequalities. Factors such as economic exclusion, spatial segregation, and racial disparities limit access to quality education, especially impacting black and vulnerable populations. The research showed that structural racism manifests itself in school practices and curricula, which have historically neglected Afro-Brazilian cultural representation. Affirmative policies, such as racial quotas and ProUni, have contributed to reducing these inequalities, but challenges such as the full implementation of Law 10.639/03 and teacher training remain. International initiatives, such as the Nordic educational models, reinforce the importance of integrating equity and quality into educational planning. The study concludes that the transformation of the Brazilian education system requires the strengthening of inclusive public policies that address structural barriers and promote social justice. It suggests continued investment in teacher training, infrastructure, and the integration of innovative practices. This work contributes to the academic debate by proposing ways to build a public education system that is effectively inclusive and promotes equity.

**Keywords:**Public education. Social inequality. Structural racism. Affirmative action policies. Educational equity.

#### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the sociological issues influencing public education in Brazil, focusing on social inequalities, structural racism, and alternative policies to promote inclusion and equity. Through a bibliographic review, the research examines the historical development of public education, highlighting how the educational system reflects and reinforces structural inequalities. Factors such as economic exclusion, spatial segregation, and racial disparities limit access to quality education, disproportionately affecting Black and vulnerable populations.

The study revealed that structural racism manifests in school practices and curricula, which have historically neglected Afro-Brazilian cultural representation. Affirmative policies, such as racial quotas and the ProUni program, have contributed to reducing these inequalities, although challenges like the full implementation of Law 10.639/03 and teacher training persist. International initiatives, such as Nordic educational models, underscore the importance of integrating equity and quality in educational planning. The study concludes that transforming Brazil's educational system requires strengthening inclusive public policies that address structural barriers and promote social justice. Continuous investment in teacher training, infrastructure, and the integration of innovative practices is recommended. This work contributes to the academic debate by proposing pathways for building a public education system that is effectively inclusive and fosters equity.

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#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Public education plays a fundamental role in building a more equitable society.



tative and democratic. In Brazil, the history of the educational system reflects the complex relationships between politics, economy and culture, highlighting structural challenges that affect the quality and universalization of education. This paper seeks to analyze the sociological issues that influence public education in the country, focusing on social inequalities, structural racism and alternative policies aimed at promoting equity and educational inclusion.

The choice of this theme is justified by the importance of understanding the intersections between the historical and contemporary challenges faced by public education in Brazil. In addition to being a fundamental right guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution, education is an essential instrument for reducing social inequalities, promoting citizenship and strengthening democratic institutions. However, structural barriers, such as economic exclusion and racism, continue to hinder full access to quality education, especially for the most vulnerable populations.

The research question guiding this study is: how do sociological issues, such as social inequality and structural racism, impact the public education system in Brazil, and what alternatives can contribute to overcoming its limitations? The overall objective is to understand the dynamics that shape Brazilian public education and identify paths for transforming the system. Specific objectives include: analyzing the historical development of public education, exploring the impact of social and racial inequalities, and discussing alternative policies that promote inclusion and quality.

This paper adopts a qualitative approach, based on a bibliographic review of authors such as Florestan Fernandes, Paulo Freire and Abdias do Nascimento, as well as institutional reports and empirical data. The structure of the paper is organized into chapters that address the history of public education in Brazil, the influence of social and racial inequalities and alternative policies. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the academic and political debate, offering reflections and proposals for the construction of a more inclusive and efficient educational system.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 HISTORY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

The history of public education in Brazil is marked by inequalities and exclusions that reflect the country's social and economic formation. Since the colonial period, educational practices have been shaped by the interests of the dominant elites, focused on maintaining privileges and social control, to the detriment of broad and universal access to education. Understanding this trajectory is essential to analyzing the challenges and structural limitations of the current education system.

During the colonial period, education in Brazil was predominantly religious, controlled by the Jesuits, who established schools focused on catechesis and the training of administrative elites. According to Holanda (1994), "education in colonial Brazil was elitist and exclusionary, restricted to a few and focused on perpetuating colonial interests. There was no concern whatsoever with teaching literacy or educating the masses, whose social function was limited to servile labor and obedience" (HOLANDA, 1994, p. 67). This perspective shows that education, from its inception, was an instrument of segregation and control, leaving the vast majority of the population without access to educational training.

With the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in 1808 and the subsequent independence of Brazil in 1822, initiatives to organize education in the country emerged. However, these actions were limited and fragmented, reflecting the inequalities in society. The Law of October 15, 1827, which determined the creation of elementary schools in all cities, towns and villages, was a milestone, but its implementation was precarious. As Schwartzman (2004) points out:

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Although the 1827 law represented progress by establishing compulsory primary education, its implementation was practically non-existent. The lack of infrastructure, trained teachers and financial resources made the ideal of universal education somewhat distant from Brazilian reality (SCHWARTZMAN, 2004, p. 89).

During the 19th century, education remained limited, with low literacy rates and large regional inequalities. It was only in the Vargas Era (1930-1945) that there were significant advances in the organization of public education, with the creation of the Ministry of Education and Public Health and the expansion of access

to basic education. The 1934 Constitution introduced the concept of education as a right for all, but its implementation still faced structural challenges.

The period of military dictatorship (1964-1985) brought significant changes to the educational system, with the expansion of public networks, especially in technical and higher education. However, priority was given to training geared towards the job market, to the detriment of critical and emancipatory education. As Freire (1987) observes, "education during the military regime was instrumental, aimed at creating subjects who would adapt to the system and reproduce its inequalities. There was no room for critical reflection or social emancipation" (FREIRE, 1987, p. 35).

The redemocratization of Brazil and the enactment of the 1988 Constitution marked a new period, consolidating education as a social right. The National Education Plan (PNE) and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) were created to guide the education system, with goals aimed at universalizing basic education and reducing inequalities. Despite these advances, challenges such as regional inequality, the precariousness of public schools and social exclusion persist.

Therefore, the history of public education in Brazil reveals a system marked by inequalities and exclusions since its origins. The country's trajectory shows that, although progress has been made, there is still a long way to go before public education is truly universal, equitable and of quality.

## 2.2 SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Social inequality in Brazil has a direct impact on access to and quality of public education, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and limiting opportunities for social mobility. The education system reflects and reinforces structural divisions in society, where economically vulnerable populations face barriers that compromise their right to quality education. This dynamic highlights how economic exclusion, spatial segregation, and structural limitations contribute to the perpetuation of educational inequalities.

Economic exclusion is one of the main factors that limit access to education. Low-income families often face difficulties in ensuring that their children and young people attend school regularly, due to needs such as early employment, lack of transportation or inadequate infrastructure. According to Soares (2012):

Poverty not only affects the ability to attend school, but also the quality of the educational experience. Schools in low-income areas face adverse conditions, such as lack of resources, poor infrastructure and less qualified teachers, creating an environment that limits learning and perpetuates social inequalities (SOARES, 2012, p. 45).

This analysis highlights how poverty structures educational inequalities, impacting both access and student performance. Another relevant factor is spatial segregation, which reinforces educational inequality. In many Brazilian cities, low-income communities are concentrated in urban peripheries, where public schools often lack basic resources and face problems such as overcrowding and violence. Caldeira (2000) points out that

Spatial segregation in Brazilian cities reflects and amplifies social inequalities, creating territories where the State is absent or offers low-quality public services. In the field of education, this segregation creates physical and symbolic barriers for residents of the outskirts, who have limited access to quality schools and educational opportunities equivalent to those of the elites (CALDEIRA, 2000, p. 112).

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This segregation contributes to the deepening of inequalities, as students in these areas have less access to pedagogical resources and extracurricular activities that promote learning. Structural barriers in the educational system also play a significant role in the exclusion of vulnerable populations. These barriers include the lack of consistent public policies, the discontinuity of educational programs, and the absence of affirmative actions that compensate for historical inequalities. According to Freire (1987):

The Brazilian educational system has historically been structured to reproduce social inequalities, rather than combat them. The lack of a critical and inclusive approach in the formulation of public policies limits the ability of education to function as an instrument of social transformation (FREIRE, 1987, p. 67).

This perspective emphasizes the need for structural changes that promote educational equity, ensuring that access to and quality of education are not determined by socioeconomic status. Therefore, social inequality in Brazil profoundly influences access to and quality of public education, creating barriers that perpetuate exclusion and limit possibilities for social advancement. Addressing these inequalities requires comprehensive public policies that promote equity and invest in infrastructure, teacher training, and support for vulnerable communities. Only with a more inclusive and egalitarian education system will it be possible to break the cycles of poverty and exclusion that still characterize Brazilian society.

### 2.3 STRUCTURAL RACISM AND EDUCATION

Structural racism is a phenomenon that permeates all spheres of Brazilian society, including the educational system, where it manifests itself in racial disparities in access to quality education, in cultural representation in school curricula, and in the perpetuation of racial stereotypes. These dynamics not only reflect but also reinforce the historical and social inequalities faced by the black population in Brazil, highlighting the need for educational policies that promote racial equity and the appreciation of cultural diversity.

Racial disparities in access to quality education are one of the most obvious expressions of structural racism. Studies show that black children and young people are more likely to attend public schools with poor infrastructure and fewer educational resources. According to Nascimento (1989):

The educational exclusion of the black population is one of the most effective mechanisms for perpetuating structural racism in Brazil. By denying black children access to quality education, the educational system contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities and the maintenance of a deeply rooted racial hierarchy (NASCIMENTO, 1989, p. 54).

This analysis highlights how the education system reflects broader social inequalities, restricting opportunities for social advancement for the black population. Furthermore, cultural representation in school curricula is also a central aspect of structural racism in education. For a long time, Brazilian school curricula have neglected Afro-Brazilian history and culture, promoting a Eurocentric view that renders invisible the contribution of African peoples to the formation of Brazilian society. As Gomes (2017) observes:

The lack of content that values Afro-Brazilian history and culture in school curricula contributes to the symbolic marginalization of the black population. This gap not only limits access to knowledge about Brazil's cultural diversity, but also reinforces stereotypes that dehumanize and devalue black students (GOMES, 2017, p. 29).

Law 10.639/03, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture mandatory, represented a significant advance, but its implementation still faces challenges, such as the lack of teacher training and adequate teaching materials. Another aspect of structural racism in education is the perpetuation of racial stereotypes in school interactions. Studies show that black students face greater risk of being victims of discrimination and negative expectations from teachers and peers, which affects their performance and self-esteem. According to Silva (2015):

Schools often reproduce society's racial hierarchies, treating black students as inferior or less capable. These discriminatory practices create psychological and social barriers that limit the full development of these students, perpetuating cycles of exclusion (SILVA, 2015, p. 83).

Therefore, structural racism exerts a profound influence on the Brazilian educational system. From unequal access to quality education to cultural marginalization and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Addressing this problem requires an effective commitment to implementing anti-racist policies, which include valuing diversity in curricula, ongoing teacher training and combating discriminatory practices in schools. Only through these actions will it be possible to build an educational system that promotes racial equity and inclusion, contributing to a more just society.

## 2.4 ALTERNATIVE POLICIES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Alternative policies for public education have gained prominence as tools to address structural inequalities and promote inclusive, quality education. These initiatives are characterized by strategies that recognize the specificities of vulnerable populations, prioritize equity, and seek to overcome the limitations of traditional educational practices. National and international experiences offer valuable lessons on how to implement these policies effectively, contributing to the transformation of the education system.

In Brazil, programs such as ProUni (University for All Program) and the racial and social quota system in public universities are examples of policies that aim to expand access to higher education for historically excluded groups. According to Santos (2010):

Affirmative action policies in Brazil represent a significant advance in the democratization of access to higher education. By recognizing the historical inequalities faced by black and low-income populations, these policies create concrete opportunities for inclusion, while promoting critical reflection on the country's social and educational structure (SANTOS, 2010, p. 112).

This analysis highlights that affirmative action policies have a positive impact not only on educational inclusion, but also on building a more egalitarian society. In the context of basic education, initiatives such as the Bolsa Família Program, by linking income transfers to school attendance, have contributed to reducing school dropout rates and improving the academic performance of children and young people in vulnerable situations. However, their effectiveness depends on an integrated implementation that considers aspects such as school infrastructure and teacher training. According to Oliveira (2015):

The articulation between social and educational policies is essential to break the cycles of poverty and exclusion. Bolsa Família, by encouraging school attendance, is a transformative policy, but its potential is limited without parallel investments in teaching quality and pedagogical support (OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 87).

Internationally, programs such as *No Child Left Behind* in the United States and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* highlight the importance of policies that prioritize educational equity, although they face challenges in implementation. In Nordic countries, the adoption of inclusive teaching models, with a focus on socio-emotional skills and collaborative work, offers examples of practices that promote inclusion and meaningful learning. As Schleicher (2018) notes, “high-performing education systems are those that combine equity and quality, ensuring that all students have access to the same learning opportunities, regardless of their socio-economic background” (SCHLEICHER, 2018, p. 45).

Thus, alternative policies for public education represent viable ways to face the challenges of the Brazilian education system. By prioritizing inclusion, equity and quality, these initiatives have the potential to transform the reality of millions of students, breaking cycles of exclusion and promoting social justice. However, its implementation requires political commitment, consistent investments and the integration of different strategies that consider local specificities.

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## 3 MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study aims to investigate the sociological issues that influence public education in Brazil and explore alternative policies aimed at inclusion and equity. To this end, a qualitative approach was adopted, based on a bibliographic review, which allows the interpretation and correlation of the



historical, structural and cultural aspects that shape the Brazilian educational system.

The materials used include reference works by authors such as Paulo Freire, Abdias do Nascimento and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, which offer critical perspectives on educational inequalities and strategies for change. Legislation was also analyzed, such as Law 10.639/03, which establishes the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture, and institutional reports, such as those from the National Institute of Studies and Educational Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), which provide data on educational disparities. In addition, international experiences, such as the educational models of Finland and other Nordic countries, were included to broaden the understanding of alternative policies.

The method consisted of identifying and analyzing relevant theoretical and empirical sources, prioritizing texts that addressed the history of public education, social inequality, structural racism, and educational policies. Qualitative analysis was used to interpret the data, identifying patterns and relationships between the factors that influence the educational system and the possibilities for overcoming inequalities.

The research was structured around four main axes: history of public education in Brazil; impact of social inequality on access to education; influence of structural racism; and alternative policies to promote inclusion and quality. Each axis was explored based on the selected sources, seeking a broad and integrative view of the challenges and opportunities for transforming the education system.

This methodological approach allowed us not only to understand the limitations of the Brazilian education system, but also to propose ways to reformulate it. By combining critical analysis with the identification of successful practices, the work seeks to contribute to the academic and political debate, promoting reflections and solutions aimed at building a more inclusive and equitable public education system.

#### 4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper analyzed the sociological issues that influence public education in Brazil, focusing on structural inequalities, the impact of racism, and the possibilities for transformation through alternative policies. Based on a literature review, it was possible to understand that the Brazilian educational system reflects and reinforces historical social inequalities, which compromises the universalization of quality and equitable education.

The results highlighted that economic exclusion and spatial segregation limit access to quality public education for the most vulnerable populations. In addition, structural racism permeates the education system, manifesting itself in racial disparities in access, the lack of cultural representation in school curricula, and the reproduction of stereotypes. These factors not only harm the academic performance of black students, but also perpetuate social hierarchies that place them in disadvantaged positions.

On the other hand, the study identified alternative policies as viable ways to overcome these limitations. Initiatives such as racial quotas, ProUni, the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture, and income transfer programs linked to school attendance have shown positive impacts on educational inclusion. International experiences, such as the Nordic models, reinforce the importance of investing in equity as a basis for educational quality.

It is concluded that the transformation of the Brazilian education system requires a political commitment to inclusion and social justice. This involves strengthening public policies that recognize and combat structural inequalities, promoting a more welcoming, representative and egalitarian school environment. In addition, continuous investment in teacher training, infrastructure and the integration of innovative practices that meet local specificities is necessary.

This study contributes to the academic and political debate by highlighting the intersection between social inequality, structural racism and public education. However, it is suggested that future research deepen the analysis from successful cases and explore strategies to expand and adapt alternative policies to realities regional. Only through a comprehensive and transformative approach will it be possible to ensure that public education in Brazil becomes an effective instrument of inclusion and equity.

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