

Country Profile: Brazil

Equity in Education

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Brazil is a middle-income country with high levels of socioeconomic inequality across the population. Education is administered at federal, state and municipal level. The education system has undergone radical transformation in the past two decades, with a strong focus on improving equity in access and reducing inequality in learning outcomes for the most disadvantaged students. There has also been a marked increase in funding for the education sector: public expenditure for education accounts for 6.1% of GDP compared to 3.5% in 2000. Funding per student falls below the OECD average.¹

Key policies for education reform include equalising education funding, providing cash transfers to increase attendance rates amongst the poorest students, establishing a monitoring system to evaluate learning outcomes, and investing in teacher training programmes. These reforms have improved access for many marginalised sub-groups, and led to significant increases in student performance and completion rates. While learning outcomes remain below average compared to other middle-income countries, there is a continuing upward trend in measures of student performance.² Brazil thus offers an important case study in how policy can drive improvement in access, attendance and learning outcomes within a relatively short time span.

As of 2011, national completion rates for primary education stood at 85% - dropping to 64% for lower secondary and 19% for upper secondary.³ The drop out rate in some secondary schools reaches 60%. This may be explained, in part, by the

number of students repeating one or more school years - 20% of primary school children repeat at least one school year⁴ - leading to a significant over-age population at secondary level.

In terms of equity for sub-groups of the school-aged population, Brazil has achieved gender parity in enrolment rates, although girls are more likely to complete primary education than boys (90% compared to 82%). Male students from the lowest two quintiles living in rural areas are most at risk of multiple disadvantage. In contrast to expectations, boys from lowest quintile are more likely to complete primary education than those from the second lowest quintile (81% compared to 70%). It is likely that recent policies targeting students from the poorest backgrounds have contributed to higher completion rates for the 'poorest' compared to 'poor' male students.⁵ Two other factors that have significant impact on rates of access and attainment are ethnicity and disability, both of which are explored in further detail below.

Poverty

Since 1993, Brazil has implemented a broad spectrum of policies that aim to improve equity of access and quality of provision for school-aged children living in poverty. Evidence suggests that these policies have had a considerable impact in closing the gap between the richest and poorest students; while primary completion rates have remained static at 89% for the richest students over the past two decades, rates for the poorest students have increased substantially from 43% in

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/brazil/EAG2014-Country-Note-Brazil.pdf>

² <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2383/656590REPLACEMENT0hieving0World0Class0.pdf?sequence=1>

³ <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/brazil>

⁴ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2383/656590REPLACEMENT0hieving0World0Class0.pdf?sequence=1>

⁵ <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/brazil>

1993 to 84% in 2011. Completion rates for the poorest students have also improved at lower secondary level (9% to 55%) and upper secondary level (1% to 17%) during the same time period.⁶

A system of conditional cash transfers was established in 2001 to improve access and attendance for families in the poorest quintile. Revised and renamed as the *Bolsa Familia* in 2006, the programme provides a monthly stipend to support more than one third of families with school-aged children. There has been a corresponding decrease in drop-out rates since the programme was implemented.⁷ Further policy initiatives designed to reduce the cost of schooling for the poorest children include provision of school meals, textbooks, and transportation to and from school.⁸

Policy makers have also recognised that improving the quality of education provision must go hand-in-hand with increased enrolment and attendance. The equalisation of education funding represents a key policy focused on improving the quality standards for all students by setting a national minimum spending level per students, as well as increasing teachers salaries.⁹ The government has also allocated additional funding to improve resources and infrastructure in schools in deprived areas, while the *Pronacampo* programme aims to improve school infrastructure, teacher training and school resources for targeted schools in rural areas since (as noted above) living in a rural area typically compounds barriers to equitable access to quality education for the poorest students.¹⁰

Learning outcomes have also improved for students from the poorest quintile, although levels of attainment still lag behind that of higher income groups. Since education reforms have reduced barriers to educational access and put in place policies to improve quality of provision, the underlying causes of persistent lower learning

outcomes for a minority of the poorest children have shifted. According to a recent World Bank study, the main factors that continue to have an impact on attainment for the poorest quintile are social issues, family instability and absence of early years learning and development support. The Brazilian government has responded by establishing new programmes targeting early years development for preschool children and providing remedial support for school-aged children.¹¹

Ethnicity

Given the significant overlap between ethnicity and poverty, many of the education reforms outlined above have had a direct impact on reducing educational inequalities related to ethnicity. While enrolment and competition rates have improved for all ethnic groups, these improvements have not been matched by corresponding increases in attainment for ethnic groups most likely to experience educational disadvantage or discrimination: namely, black, mixed race and indigenous students.¹²

In Brazil, where black and mixed race students comprise just over half the school aged population, recent policy changes have led to near parity in enrolment rates for black and mixed race students (98%) compared to white students (99%). Enrolment rates for indigenous students - who make up less than 1% of the population - lag slightly behind other ethnic groups at 95%.¹³

A gap between different ethnic groups begins to emerge with completion rates. 91% of white school-aged children complete primary education compared to 83% of mixed race children, 80% of black children, and 63% of indigenous children. At both lower and upper secondary level, while competition rates decrease for all ethnic groups, black and mixed race school-aged children remain

⁶ <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/brazil>

⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Brazil-country-profile.pdf>

⁸ http://www.acaoeducativa.org.br/desenvolvimento/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Informe_Brasil.pdf

⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Brazil-country-profile.pdf>

¹⁰ http://www.acaoeducativa.org.br/desenvolvimento/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Informe_Brasil.pdf

¹¹ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2383/656590REPLACEMENT0hieving0Worl0Class0.pdf?sequence=1>

¹² <https://www.pep-net.org/pep-supported-study-examines-ethnic-inequality-traps-education-latin-america>

¹³ <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/brazil>

less likely to complete successive stages of education than their white counterparts, while indigenous children represent the ethnic group least likely to complete education and most likely to be out-of-school or never to have attended school.¹⁴

In addition to lower completion rates, students from ethnic groups most at risk of educational disadvantage also achieve lower learning outcomes. Recent research suggests that black and mixed race children in Brazil experience an ethnic inequality trap within the education system.¹⁵ Persistent educational disparity for black and mixed race students is attributed not only to structural inequality (resources, funding, etc) but also to entrenched racial prejudices creating both explicit¹⁶ and implicit discrimination.¹⁷ Disadvantaged ethnic groups are also more likely to receive poorer quality education, for example, less than 40% of teachers at indigenous schools hold the minimum required teaching qualifications.¹⁸

Extra training courses for teachers in Ethnic-Racial Relations Education, Indigenous Education and Quilombola Education¹⁹ constitute one policy measure developed to combat the prevalence of ethnic discrimination in schools. The 2013 National Programme of Ethno-educational Territories (PNTEE) also aims to improve both access to and quality of education for indigenous school-aged children through targeted financial and technical assistance.²⁰ Nonetheless, there remains scope for further policy initiatives that target structural and social inequalities for black, mixed race and indigenous school-aged children in order to achieve greater parity in learning outcomes, consistent with the improved enrolment rates for

all ethnic groups.

Disability

As in many countries across the world, Brazilian children living with disabilities are much more likely to experience exclusion and discrimination within the education system. UNICEF estimate that, as of 2010, almost half of disabled school-aged children (47%) were out-of-school and that many schools refused to enrol children with disabilities.²¹ Recent policy initiatives to promote inclusive education have had a positive impact on enrolment, but more needs to be done to improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities or special educational needs.

In 2008, Brazil affirmed its commitment to enrol more children with disabilities in mainstream schools,²² followed by the 2011 National Plan for Inclusive Education. To date, these initiatives have led to the development of 13,360 new multifunction classrooms for students with special educational needs and disabilities, the creation of 20 new sign language courses, additional funding to improve infrastructure and accessibility resources for over 40,000 schools, and the purchase of more than 2,000 accessible vehicles for school transport. Children with disabilities are also entitled to receive a regular stipend under the Continuous Cash Benefit Programme.²³

Following these initiatives, enrolment rates for children with disabilities and special education needs have increased from 29% in 2003 to 79% in 2014. Many of these children entered mainstream education; 84% of schools current have students with disabilities enrolled compared to 50% in

¹⁴ <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/brazil>

¹⁵ <https://www.pep-net.org/pep-supported-study-examines-ethnic-inequality-traps-education-latin-america>

¹⁶ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002252/225214e.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.pep-net.org/pep-supported-study-examines-ethnic-inequality-traps-education-latin-america>

¹⁸ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002252/225214e.pdf>

¹⁹ http://www.acaoeducativa.org.br/desenvolvimento/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Informe_Brasil.pdf

²⁰ http://www.acaoeducativa.org.br/desenvolvimento/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Informe_Brasil.pdf

²¹ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/OOSCI%20Reports/brasil-oosci-summary-2012-en.pdf>

²² <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Brazil-country-profile.pdf>

²³ http://zeroproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/316_Brazil_Brazil's-billion-dollar-National-Plan-for-Inclusive-Education.pdf

2003.²⁴ Recent research indicates, however, that children with disabilities and/or special education needs enrolled in mainstream school have higher than average repetition rates and lower than average learning outcomes suggesting that the newly funded resources have not yet translated into on-the-ground improvements in the quality of education for disabled children.²⁵

Learning Outcomes

Policy makers have recognised that improving the quality of education provision requires more than simply increasing enrolment and attendance rates. As such, Brazil has integrated two monitoring programmes into its education systems that track learning outcomes and support schools in developing greater data literacy as an essential mechanism to raise education standards. Wide reporting of Ideb scores has created a clear incentive for schools to improve quality measures and to support students in achieving basic learning outcomes.²⁶

The role of monitoring learning outcomes is particularly important within the Brazilian context given the lower than average levels of literacy and numeracy for school-aged students when compared to other middle income countries, with students from poorer background, female students, and black or mixed race students typically achieving lower learning outcomes than their peers. Inequalities in learning outcomes were closely tied to the availability of key resources, including school resources and teaching staff.²⁷

The Basic Education Evaluation System (Saeb) samples and measures school efficiency, numeracy and literacy for 3rd grade students, and learning outcomes for 4th and 8th grade students (known as the Brazil Exam). This data is used to evaluate the quality of primary and secondary education

through the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb). In the period 2005-2011, overall performance has improved at a faster rate for primary education than projected targets; scores for 3rd grade primary students increased from 3.8 to 5.0 compared to a projected target of 4.8 by 2011. Student performance remains below that of comparable countries within the PISA rankings, however. Results for secondary education in the same period met but did not exceed projected targets (from 3.4 to 3.7).²⁸

The Ideb monitoring system has also created broader positive impact within the education system. The Ideb discourages schools from engaging in the widespread practice of holding children back that do not achieve basic learning outcomes. Brazil has previously experienced some of the highest repetition rates in the world (up to 20% at primary level) despite the fact that holding children back until they achieve basic learning outcomes increases the likelihood of over-aged students dropping out before completing both primary and secondary schooling. Since the establishment of the Ideb, repetition rates have decreased, thereby ensuring that students get to the right grade on time.²⁹

²⁴ http://zeroproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/316_Brazil_Brazil's-billion-dollar-National-Plan-for-Inclusive-Education.pdf

²⁵ <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1666>

²⁶ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2383/656590REPLACEMENT0hieving0World0Class0.pdf?sequence=1>

²⁷ <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=36744258>

²⁸ http://www.acaoeducativa.org.br/desenvolvimento/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Informe_Brasil.pdf

²⁹ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2383/656590REPLACEMENT0hieving0World0Class0.pdf?sequence=1>