



Distance Education in Brazil: Quality and democratization of access go hand in hand

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ABSTRACT :

The objective of this article is present the scenario of higher education offered at as distance learning mode in Brazil better known and to demonstrate that the students' academic performance has no significant differences comparing to face-to-face qualifications, which demonstrates the effective incorporation of new technologies and methodologies. It was analysed the only large-scale parameter whose data are public and can be compared vis-a-vis, by the years 2015 and 2016. It also aim to draw attention to distance education as a way that can be expanded to establish multilateral research networks, exchanges and partnerships that work on the complementarities and different challenges of The BRICS Network University, established in 2015.

Keywords: The BRICS Network University, distance education, Brazil

1. INTRODUCTION :

Since its first Summit in 2009, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) has significantly expanded its activities in the areas of policy coordination, economic-financial cooperation and multisectoral cooperation.

Economic relations between countries are best served by better understanding of cultures and more confidence is established, something that can only be achieved by expanding contact possibilities, disseminating knowledge and presenting tangible results that benefit the populations involved - not just the merchant or government elites.

2.SOME BRICS COMPLEMENTARITIES

The areas of science, technology & innovation (CTI) and energy are considered priority by Brazil for the consolidation of multisectoral cooperation. Coordination in these areas can produce tangible results: to improve the quality of life of the BRICS population and for the innovation of the national industrial and technological park.

The importance of cooperation in CTI is due to the need to reduce the scientific and technological gap between BRICS and developed countries and has relevant initiatives both in terms of the potential of knowledge exchange and the resources made available for research projects.

The BRICS Network University, established in 2015, is an educational project aimed at developing, preferentially, bilateral/multilateral short-term joint training, master's and PhD programmes along with joint research projects in various knowledge fields according to common standards and quality criteria, given recognition of the learning outcomes by participants as per national criteria. It intends to offer in conformity with own laws Masters and PhD programmes; short-term training and modular courses; development and implementation of joint research projects, innovative activity within the frames of educational programmes; organization of the academic mobility of students, the university faculty and staff of the BRICS NU participants.

Distance education has been an important factor for inclusion and expansion of access to higher education in Brazil. And it can be expanded to establish multilateral research networks, exchanges and partnerships that work on the complementarities and different challenges of the BRICS countries.

3. THE BRAZILIAN HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

The Brazilian educational system and its impacts on society still suffer from an inheritance of mercantile colonialism, from cruel and massive slavery, which has long been taken as the basis for the socio-cultural and economic matrix of the country.

The unjust inequality of income and opportunities that Brazil has always marked and continues to grow, caused by the inability of the elites - for their interests, their subordination to the culture and the objectives of the rich countries, for their incompetence - and the inability of our people to understand and fight for your rights.

The long history of slavery in Brazil, coupled with the characteristics that marked Portuguese colonization around the world, made the opening of schools and universities a late phenomenon, even compared to other colonized nations in Latin America.

In Higher Education, for example, The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro claims to have been founded in 1792, when the first course of Higher Education was created in Brazil, but it only effectively received the title of "university" in 1920.

Brazil was a colony of Portugal, from the year 1.500 to 1.822. From the outset the economy was heavily reliant on slavery. The many indigenous peoples who already inhabited the land were the first to suffer through the process of acculturation and enslavement, to the point that millions of women, men and children of various ethnic groups were decimated.

Shortly after the arrival of the Portuguese, the importation of blacks began to increase the slave labor, mainly from Angola, also a country dominated at the time by the Portuguese.

In the year of its independence, out of every three Brazilians, two were slaves, blacks, freedmen, indigenous or mulatos. Out of every ten people, only one could read and write. At that historical moment, no care was taken to improve the distribution of income and opportunities in an absolutely unequal society.

Brazil managed to separate itself from Portugal without breaking the prevailing social order. The small Brazilian elite struggled to prevent the expansion of participation in the self-determination of the people resulting in ruptures that threatened the status quo.

Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish slavery in 1888, perhaps because it was the nation that most imported Africans, about 46% of all those who were coercively brought into the Americas. This astounding volume of slaves was regarded as private property.

This creates a dynamic in which slave ownership was very important. Many people had slaves. In the cities there were lower-middle-class people who had one or two slaves. Studies show that slave ownership in Brazil was much more widespread than in

Jamaica or the South of the United States. Almost everything depended on slave labor and the arrival of Africans.

To get an idea of the extent to which slavery marked cities, in 1849, the City of Rio de Janeiro had 260,000 inhabitants, of whom 110,000 were slaves. That is, 42% of the population (Alencastro, 2000).

Since it was not enough to free the slaves only, it was necessary to incorporate them into society as full citizens. The regime of slavery corrupted everything and prevented the country from evolving. But nothing was done after abolishment in terms of social integration.

The impacts of this disinterest of elites on the offer of Higher Education in Brazil can be felt even today. The following data were published by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2018).

The population of Brazil reached 207 million in 2017. Among people between 18 and 24 years of age, the schooling rate was 31.7% in the same year. The adjusted net attendance rate in higher education was 23.2%, reaching 26.8% for women.

About 25.1 million people aged 15-29 who did not achieve full tertiary education were not studying or qualifying in 2017. Of this group, 52.5% were men and 64.2% were black or brown color.

The adjusted rate of school attendance net of higher education was 23.2% in the population aged 18 to 24 years. For women, the rate was 26.8. For white people the rate was 32.9%, and 16.7% for black or brown people. The adjusted rate for black or brown people remained almost half the rate for white people.

In the analysis by sex and color or race, 22.9% of white people and 17.5% of women, both 25 years of age or older, had completed higher education in 2017. Among men, 42.6% were uneducated or did not complete primary school and 13.7% had completed higher education.

By 2017, 25.1 million people aged 15-29 had not attended school, pre-college courses, mid-level or vocational training, and had not completed an undergraduate program. In this group it was characterized by 52.5% of men and 64.2% of people of black or brown color.

Regarding the level of education, 55.1% had incomplete high school or higher incomplete, 23% incomplete or incomplete Secondary School and 21.9% were uneducated or with complete Elementary School.

The private higher education institutions accounts for 75.3% of the students of higher education, against 24.7% of the state entities. This means that in 2016 there were 6,058,623 students enrolled in private colleges and universities and another 1,990,078 in institutions run by the public authority. When analyzing data from 2006 to 2016, the enrollment increase was 66.8% in the private sector and 59% in the municipal, state and federal higher education networks.

There are 2,407 institutions of higher education in Brazil. Of these, 2,100 are from the private sector, while 298 are public. For each student enrolled in the state network, there are 2.5 studying in private institutions, when it comes to face-to-face courses.

In Brazil, in face-to-face courses, there are 2.5 students enrolled in the private higher education institutions for each student enrolled in the public network. The majority of students entering higher education (61.5%) take baccalaureate courses. The degree then comes with 20% of the students, and the Higher National Diplomas (HND) are responsible for 17.8% of the students. Women are the majority among those enrolled in both networks. The average age of the face-to-face degree is 21 years, while distance learning has been 28 years.

4. UNDERGRADUATE'S DISTANCE LEARNING

According to the Census of Higher Education (MEC, 2017), in 2016, 33% of new students enrolled in higher education in distance learning and 67% in face-to-face courses.

The most frequent age of the student who entered a undergraduate distance learning

program in 2016 was 28 years, while in the classroom was 21 years.

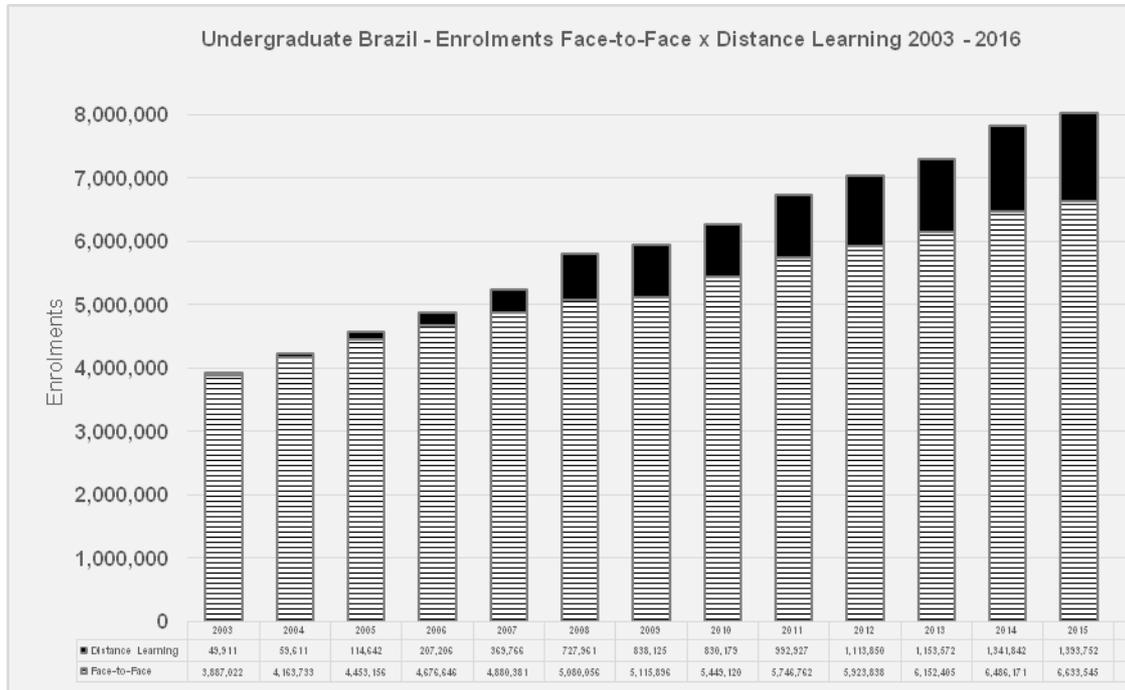


Figure 1: Undergraduate Brazil – Enrolments face-to-face and distance learning 2003 – 2016. Source: MEC, 2017.

A recent survey (ABMES, 2018) shows that among people who choose to study in a undergraduate distance learning program, a higher age group predominates, being 38% from 31 to 40 years of age and 29% from 40 years of age.

The majority of these students are of class C (58%) and come from public school (75%). It is also predominant the number of people who work (83%) and who are married (62%).

Table 1: Brazilian Family Income Monthly 2016

Class	Family Income Monthly 2016
A	US\$ 5.122,89 or more
B	US\$ 2.561,44 to US\$ 5.122,88
C	US\$ 1.027,58 to US\$ 2.561,43
D	US\$ 512,29 to US\$ 1.027,57

Note: Quotation US\$ in 05/25/2018

5. THE NATIONAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE EXAM – ENADE

There are recurrent discussions about possible differences in the quality of higher education when offered in person or at a distance learning mode. Often driven by prejudice and ignorance,

it is common to find statements that have no scientific or statistical basis against Distance Education. Starting with an ideological position that regards technology first and only as an instrument of domination and social control.

On the other hand, there is always the risk of technophilia, passive adoption and reification (Lukács, 1989) enhanced by technology, a transformation experienced by productive activity, by social relations and by human subjectivity itself, subjected and increasingly identified with the character inanimate, quantitative and automatic of objects, by commodity fetishism and alienation.

In Brazil, the Federal Government regulates and conducts the objective processes of quality evaluation of Higher Education.

Established by law in 2004, the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (SINAES), has the mission of evaluating undergraduate courses in order to improve the quality of Higher Education and the academic training of Brazilian students (INEP, 2015).

The evaluations carried out under this system assess the quality of Higher Education Institutions, undergraduate courses and student performance.

The evaluation of students' performance in undergraduate courses, carried out through the National Student Performance Examination - Enade -, has the purpose of evaluating students' performance in relation to the programmatic contents, their skills and competences. It also provides elements for the construction of quality indicators of the courses that serve as reference for the subsequent processes of evaluation in loco.

In this way, graduation evaluation plays a significant role in strengthening higher education, allowing society, the management bodies of this type of education and the institutions themselves to use it as an important diagnostic tool to reference and define public policies relevant to development institutional and social.

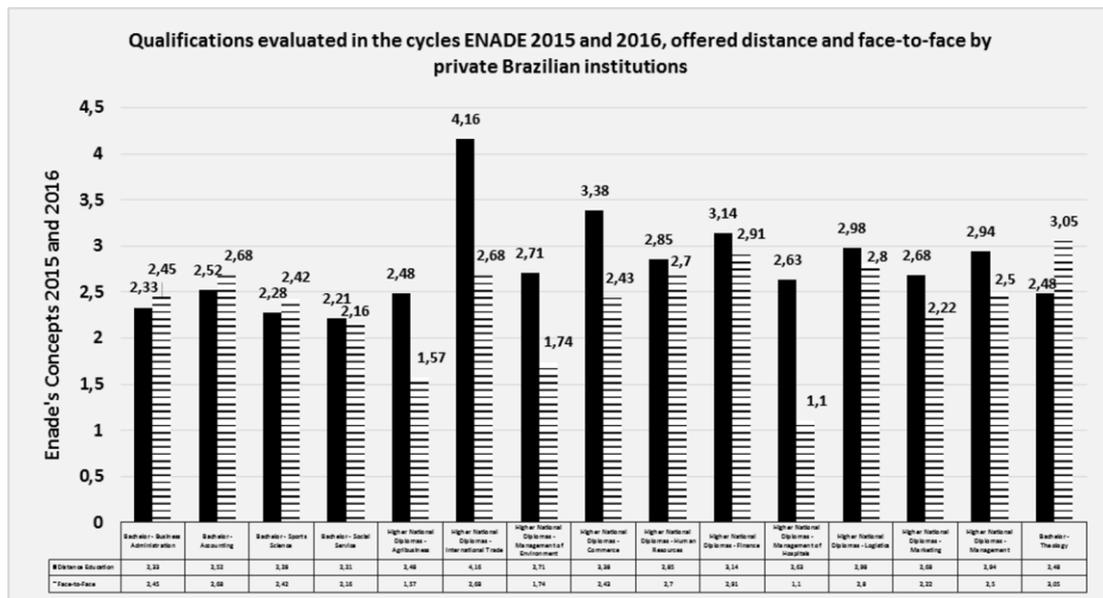


Figure 2: Qualifications evaluated in the cycles ENADE 2015 and 2016, offered distance and face-to-face by private Brazilian institutions

Although institutional profile and regional differences can produce specific situations and require more or less extensive readings on the situation

of higher education in Brazil, the quality of undergraduate courses, regardless of where they are offered, should be pursued by all, without distinction.

After all, the National Curricular Guidelines that guide the training of students in different undergraduate courses define the same quality expectations for the professional profile, skills and abilities expected of graduates of higher education.

Undergraduate's face-to-face and distance learning students participate in the same test of Enade, on the same day, at the same time and in the same conditions, according to the evaluation cycle of each course. This allows us to establish some performance comparisons, as we will show below.

6. DATA ANALYSIS ENADE 2015

The performances obtained in the ENADE's 2015 and 2016 were analyzed by 14 courses belonging to 69 private higher education institutions in Brazil, which had at least one course offered both in face and distance. These 14 courses were recorded 211 times.

Table 2: Qualifications evaluated in the cycles ENADE 2015 and 2016, comparison distance and face-to-face offered by private Brazilian institutions

Tertiary Education Qualifications	Distance Education	Face-to-Face
Bachelor - Business Administration	2,33	2,45
Bachelor - Accounting	2,52	2,68
Bachelor - Sports Science	2,28	2,42
Bachelor - Social Service	2,21	2,16
Higher National Diplomas - Agribusiness	2,48	1,57
Higher National Diplomas - International Trade	4,16	2,68
Higher National Diplomas - Management of Environment	2,71	1,74
Higher National Diplomas - Commerce	3,38	2,43
Higher National Diplomas - Human Resources	2,85	2,7
Higher National Diplomas - Finance	3,14	2,91
Higher National Diplomas - Management of Hospitals	2,63	1,1
Higher National Diplomas - Logistics	2,98	2,8
Higher National Diplomas - Marketing	2,68	2,22
Higher National Diplomas - Management	2,94	2,5
Bachelor - Theology	2,48	3,05

As shown in graphic 2 and table 2, we can observe small differences in results, more positive for face-to-face qualifications, in bachelor's degrees like business administration, accounting, and sports science, the last one focused mainly in teacher's formation.

The face-to-face's baccalaureate in theology demonstrates a greater and positive difference, perhaps because the profile of the students is different from the other courses: even older, who find in the studies a more significant personal satisfaction because they usually apply the knowledge acquired immediately in their daily lives in the religious organizations that act.

On the other hand, for work-related higher education qualifications – looking more like Higher National Diplomas in UK - with a shorter duration focused on the practical application of management or techniques for the professional arena, distance education students have had more positive results, sometimes with great differences.

7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW RESEARCHES

The Economically Active Population (EAP) of the BRICS represents an enormous productive potential, which today corresponds to more than 1.5 billion active workers, with a relatively low average age.

The design and implementation of public policies for education, employment and income that actually improve the labor market situation, especially for young people, women and blacks, would represent an important economic boost for each of the BRICS countries. The importance of greater and more intense coordination between the Ministries of Education of the five countries, which makes possible progress in the field of distance education and new possibilities for cooperation, is therefore important.

To realize its full potential at the required speed and intensity, The BRICS Network University needs to prioritize distance education and the possibilities brought by new technologies to bring people, institutions, cultures together and generate knowledge through mutual learning.

Observed the performance comparison presented in this article, it is clear that a standardized test applied to students should not be considered as the main way of measuring the quality of Higher Education in a country.

However, as the only large-scale parameter whose data are public and can be compared vis-a-vis, it can be seen that there are no significant differences in performance between students of undergraduate's face-to-face and distance learning courses.

Brazilian society has experienced a decline in the number and proportion of students with high performance in ENADE, in addition to the low performance in international assessments in K-12. The number of adult and adolescent functional illiterates is large. According to the World Bank (2018), in its World Development Report 2018, there is a crisis of learning, in addition perceived in many countries.

Distance Education addresses efforts to reduce inequalities and have a potential to sustain leap-frogs with the incorporation of new technologies and methodologies (Sharma, 1999). The distance education or face-to-face classroom should contemplate practices that are sufficiently innovative, that go beyond to a emancipatory and critical direction.

According to Franco (2016), the pedagogical practices include from the planning and systematization of the dynamics of the learning processes to the walk in the middle of processes that occur in addition to the learning, in order to guarantee the teaching of contents and activities that are considered fundamental for that stage of formation of the student, and, through this process, create in the students mechanisms of mobilization of their previous knowledge built in other educational spaces.

In digital convergence times people learn differently. The possibilities opened by technology lead us to rethink methodologies of teaching, research and even the way in which educational institutions organize themselves.

It will disseminate new concepts and practices that impact or can influence educational institutions and their professionals through the mediation of technology, especially teachers and educational managers. It is a paradigmatic change that calls for discussion, reflection, investigation and analysis well grounded, not dazzled or apocalyptic.

Consider that the proposal of any educational mode, distance Education or face-to-face, the challenge will always be the same in Brazil: the democratization of knowledge as key and fundamental for the strengthening of democracy, the reduction of inequalities and the defense of human dignity.

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