

Brazilian Higher Education under Examination: A Critical and Analytical Review

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Abstract

Higher education in Brazil has undergone intense transformations, driven by public policies, expansion of the private sector and challenges in regulating the quality of teaching. This article carries out a theoretical review on the evolution of higher education in the country, addressing the impacts of commercialization, the assessment of academic quality and inequalities in access to universities. The research discusses the role of the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) and analyzes student financing policies, such as FIES and PROUNI. Furthermore, it examines the challenges of university autonomy, the impacts of quota policies and the effects of student debt on academic retention. The results point to the need to improve educational policies, both in regulating higher education and in promoting equity and academic quality. The study highlights that, although programs such as PROUNI and FIES have significantly expanded access to higher education, their structure needs to be reviewed to avoid precarious teaching and excessive student debt. Furthermore, the growing influence of private conglomerates raises questions about the standardization of curricula and the loss of academic diversity. Given this scenario, this article concludes that the consolidation of quality higher education in Brazil depends on the implementation of public policies that balance sector growth with effective regulation and financing mechanisms. The search for more inclusive, sustainable education and aligned with the demands of the job market and academic research is essential for national development.

Keywords: higher education, quality assessment, educational policies, private education, student financing

1. Introduction

Higher education in Brazil has undergone significant transformations since its implementation in the 19th century to the present day. The growth of the sector, driven by political and economic reforms, resulted in a diversified system, made up of public and private institutions that coexist in a scenario of constant challenges. The search for the expansion of higher education has been one of the main objectives of public policies, aiming to democratize access and improve academic quality. However, this expansion also brought issues related to the commodification of education, the quality of training offered and the regulation of the sector (CUNHA, 2011; CARVALHO, 2013).

This article aims to theoretically review the main aspects of higher education in Brazil, analyzing the educational policies that guided its structuring and contemporary challenges. Based on a historical and critical approach, topics such as the expansion of private institutions, quality assessment mechanisms, social inclusion and financing difficulties faced by the public sector are discussed.

In this article, it is sought to reflect on the national examination system of Brazilian Education as a driver of reform in Brazilian teaching within the scope of current educational policies. With the enactment of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN/1996), large-scale assessment became the guiding principle of educational policies. Since then, this concept has become an instrument for inducing and controlling the implementation of educational reforms that sought to establish a market-oriented education model in line with the new stage of global capitalism.

In this process, the Brazilian government takes on the role of formulator, regulator, and evaluator, with control over external evaluation, the results obtained, the curriculum, teaching work, educational practice, and the school system. Education, from basic

education to higher education, becomes subject to different national and international evaluations (SILVA; MELO, 2018, p.1).

The evaluation of Brazilian education, through the ENEM and ENADE, emerges in this context. Its reformulation in recent years has endowed it with other purposes, content, and formats, which bring new consequences for both public and private education. One of the objectives of this study is to problematize the analysis of this evaluation and highlight the role it plays in shaping and consolidating the educational market in Brazil, with a focus on higher education.

The exams are administered using the technique of printed questionnaires applied to students in a test setting similar to a competitive examination in the classroom. Data from teachers, coordinators, and directors of the evaluated educational institutions are collected via a questionnaire completed in a virtual environment. Both processes are analyzed from the perspective of the power relations that the exam actualizes.

This research on the Brazilian educational evaluation system is based on official documents from the period 1996 to 2025 and on academic production in the field. The methodology consists of a bibliographic survey of publications on the themes of Brazilian national education evaluation, examinations, quality, and inventive cognition, as well as current legislation.

Within this context, this article discusses and problematizes the risks of the Brazilian educational evaluation by addressing ENEM and ENADE and their specificities. This is followed by a reflection on the exam, its characteristics, and limitations, subsequently introducing the concept of inventive cognition in education and its possibilities.

This study is grounded in authors such as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Varela, and Kastrup to analyze the effects of simplifying the use of exam results as a standard for evaluating the quality of Brazilian education.

To this end, a theoretical review will be presented, discussing some fundamental concepts that seek to deconstruct the logic of evaluating educational quality, proposing processes of de-subjection and reconstruction of thinking in search of a possibility for the singularization of quality in Brazilian education.

Historical Evolution of Higher Education in Brazil

The history of higher education in Brazil dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, with the creation of the first schools aimed at training professionals in the areas of law, medicine and engineering. During the imperial period, higher education had an elitist character, being accessible only to a small portion of the population. At the beginning of the 20th century, with the advancement of industrialization and the need for qualified labor, new institutions were created, including public and private universities (DURHAM, 2003; FÁVERO, 2006).

From the 1960s onwards, the expansion of higher education was driven by government reforms, such as the University Reform of 1968, which modernized the university structure, incorporating research and postgraduate studies. During the military regime (1964-1985), the public sector had difficulties in expanding the number of vacancies, which resulted in significant growth in the private sector, marked by the creation of isolated colleges and university centers (NEVES, 2022).

With the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) of 1996, new bases for the regulation and evaluation of

higher education were established. From then on, there was a significant increase in the supply of courses and vacancies, especially in private institutions, which began to dominate the sector in terms of enrollments (BRASIL, 1996; RANIERI, 2000).

Thus, the two modalities were established, with private institutions responsible for accessing the largest number of people to Brazilian higher education and public ones, which, in addition to research and innovations, have the prerogative of being free of charge, also providing accessibility to teaching and research (CUNHA, 2011). In this way, the focus on the exploration and expansion of Higher Education by the private sector represented a great influence of the globalized capitalist society on Brazilian higher education, the well-known phenomenon of Commercialization of Brazilian Higher Education.

Expansion and Commercialization of Higher Education

The expansion of higher education in Brazil, mainly in the private sector, generated a phenomenon known as the commodification of education. This process intensified from the 1990s onwards, with the expansion of for-profit institutions, which began to adopt business models to maximize their profits. According to Carvalho (2013) and Bottoni et al. (2013), this movement led to the proliferation of courses with low academic quality and the precariousness of teaching conditions.

Starting in the 2000s, the creation of programs such as the Higher Education Student Financing Fund (FIES) and the University for All Program (PROUNI) expanded access to private higher education, but also contributed to student debt and the strengthening of large educational conglomerates. Companies such as Kroton, Estácio de Sá and Anhanguera have consolidated themselves as large business groups in the sector, directly influencing the dynamics of higher education in Brazil (SGUISSARDI, 2015).

Quality and Assessment of Higher Education

To design the quality policy for Higher Education in Brazil, the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) and the Ministry of Education (MEC) designed the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) established by Law 10861, of April 14, 2004 (BRASIL, 2004). From then on, Brazil opted for the evaluation process and not accreditation.

As the quality assessment established by SINAES does not confer a “quality seal”, that is, it is not an accreditation process, the way to establish consequences for the assessment processes was to link them to the regulatory processes. Due to the way SINAES was designed, linkage with regulation became mandatory (FRANCO, 2021, p. 219).

Thus, even though the initial intention when creating SINAES was to create an autonomous evaluation process, its execution turned into a regulatory procedure based on regulation justified by a regulatory process (DE OLIVEIRA NUNES; FERNANDES; ALBRETCH, 2015).

THE SINAES is coordinated by the National Higher Education Assessment Commission (CONAES), execution is carried out by INEP, regulated by Law No. 10861/2004, which emphasizes that evaluation is the basic difference for the regulation and supervision processes of Higher Education in Brazil (BRASIL, 2004).

The quality of higher education is a central issue in academic and political debate. To guarantee minimum quality standards, the Brazilian government implemented the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) in 2004. The system is made up of three

main axes: institutional assessment, course assessment and the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE) (BRAZIL, 2004; INEP, 2017).

The Higher Education Quality Indicators are made up of the ENADE Concept, Indicator of Difference between Observed and Expected Performance – IDD, Preliminary Course Concept – CPC and General Index of Institution's Evaluated Courses – IGC.

Quality in this evaluation context can then be seen as conformity to standards previously established by experts and members of bodies that define the criteria and standards through which academic sectors are controlled.

As a general trend, it is observed that evaluation and the concept of quality are determined by external experts and government authorities who, in general, are limited to controlling, measuring, certifying and regulating, to the detriment of participatory and formative processes of reflection and debates within the academic and scientific community, thus damaging the exercise of university autonomy.

Affirmative Actions and Quota Policies for Higher Education

In Brazil, Law 12711 of 2012 instituted the public policy of reserving vacancies for access to federal institutions of higher education and federal institutes of technical secondary education linked to the Ministry of Education. The first reserve was allocated to 50% of the vacancies in the institutions, courses and shifts intended for students who attended all of high school in the public network. The second reservation under the conditions already mentioned is that 50% of these vacancies are intended for students in which the family has a gross monthly income per capita is equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages and a proportion of self-declared black, brown and indigenous (PPI) at least equal to the percentage of these groups in the population of the Federation Unit (UF) where the referred educational establishment is located, using the 2010 Population Census to calculate the percentages, according to Decree No. 7,824, of October 11, 2012.

It is understood that one of the central objectives of affirmative action in higher education is to increase, at this stage of education, the access of groups considered historically underrepresented and that are established as priorities. As Bezerra and Gurgel (2012) state, these public policies could repair, at least in part, the injustices of access to social opportunities would be an ethical imperative.

When analyzing the impacts of the change with the Quota Law and access to Higher Education after completing the course, some authors such as Wainer and Melguizo (2017, p.12) highlight that "students who benefited from a [quota] policy do not finish higher education as lower quality professionals" and this would allow them to better place themselves in the job market. The returns and benefits of these actions do not translate into gains only on a personal level, but for society as a whole.

According to Amaral (2019), the policy of racial quotas has contributed to reducing inequalities and breaking the institutionalized racial segregation of black and brown people. Added to this is the fact that the absence of opportunities for access and permanence has brought great historical damage that affirmative action policies have sought to correct the systematic injustices of exclusion of the Brazilian past.

Evaluation of Brazilian Education

The Brazilian educational assessment policy comprises various programs, such as the National Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB), the National High School Exam

(ENEM), and the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE). Together, these systems form a macro-system for evaluating the quality of Brazilian education.

In this article, the authors have made a methodological decision to focus their analysis on ENEM and ENADE. The Encceja and the Capes Graduate Assessment System are not used as focal points of analysis, as the criteria for these assessment systems differ. In the case of Encceja, they are associated with solving specific educational problems, while the CAPES assessment focuses on graduate studies and assigns program grades primarily based on academic productivity. For these reasons, we have chosen to concentrate our analysis on the other assessment systems.

National High School Exam (ENEM)

Since its first version, the ENEM was designed to be the foundation for curricular changes implemented in high school. This action is understood as a strategy of the State reform project, which sought to gradually impose measures to implement it, thereby reducing resistance.

In 2009, the ENEM was reformed and acquired the following objectives: to democratize opportunities for access to federal higher education vacancies; to enable academic mobility; to guide the restructuring of high school curricula; and to promote certification for individuals over 18 years of age (SILVA; MELO, 2018).

By establishing the ENEM (National High School Exam) with the purpose of being used as a selective process for university admissions, the meritocratic nature of the traditional vestibular exam was reaffirmed, disregarding the selectivity that this mechanism implies.

As a consequence, Oliveira et al. (2008, p. 83) elucidate that “[...] innovations in the selection process have failed to change the panorama of social selectivity, since they do not alter the paradigm of the elitist school system existing in the country.” It must also be recognized that standardized assessment processes intensify social reproduction and selectivity, as well as interfere in school organization and the educational framework of high school.

It is noteworthy that, even after the reformulation of the ENEM, which began in 2009, its central role was maintained:

To assess competencies and skills. However, it is evident that the successive reformulations of the exam, combined with the creation of the Innovative High School Program (Programa Ensino Médio Inovador), and the approval of the High School Reform (Law No. 13,415) and the BNCC (National Common Curricular Base), constitute a scenario of aligned policies for high school. This alignment aims to control the quality of education provided, based on the interests of business-oriented reformers who began investing in the educational market (SILVA; MELO, 2018, p.8-9).

These changes to the exam, which was previously used solely and exclusively to assess the skills and competencies of high school graduates, modified the university selection processes when it acquired the objective of selecting students for higher education. The former entrance exams, the vestibulares, which were formulated by local teams across the country with different formats specific to various Brazilian universities, were consequently transformed.

National Student Performance Exam (ENADE)

According to data researched on the INEP portal, ENADE is an instrument of SINAES that evaluates the performance of graduating undergraduate students through the application of an exam on programmatic contents provided for in the curricular guidelines of the courses, abilities to adjust to the demands arising from the evolution of knowledge, and competencies to understand themes external to the specific scope of their profession. In addition to the test, answered by the students, ENADE also has an evaluation of the participants' impressions about the exam: a socioeconomic questionnaire for the students and an assessment instrument for the course coordinators (BRASIL, 2012).

The ENADE Concept is calculated for each course, with the observation unit being a course at an institution, in a municipality, and within an evaluation area. The ENADE concept of the course is the weighted average of the standardized score of the graduates in the general education component and the specific component. The part related to general education contributes 25% to the final score, while the part related to the specific component contributes 75%. The concept is presented in five categories (1 to 5), with 1 being the lowest result and 5 being the best possible result (BRASIL, 2012).

The National Student Performance Exam – ENADE, initially, aimed to assess the academic performance of undergraduate students, both those in their first year and those concluding their studies, in relation to the programmatic content of their enrolled courses, as well as their skills and competencies. The first administration occurred in 2004, and the maximum frequency with which each field of knowledge is evaluated is triennial (BRASIL, 2013). In recent editions, it has focused solely on concluding students.

The National Student Performance Exam (ENADE) is based on the premise of assessing student performance in relation to the programmatic content outlined in the curricular guidelines of undergraduate courses, as well as the skills and competencies acquired during their education, according to the text of Article 33 of Normative Ordinance No. 40/2007 (BRASIL, 2007). This exam is conducted every three years and uses student sampling to measure course performance.

Within the scope of SINAES, indices were created based on ENADE results, such as the ENADE Concept, the Preliminary Course Concept (CPC) for courses, and the IGC (General Course Index), which allowed for the creation of rankings among institutions. These rankings, publicized by the media based on the results of exams taken by students, have almost always been interpreted by society, the government, and the institutions themselves as a kind of certification of the quality level of higher education courses and institutions. The government transformed ENADE into an instrument for measuring the quality of Brazilian higher education courses and institutions when it linked minimum performance requirements for establishing agreements with private institutions, such as the University for All Program (PROUNI) and the Student Financing Fund (FIES), to enable access to scientific databases, or to make resources from the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES) available.

The Exam

“The exam combines the techniques of hierarchical observation with those of normalizing judgment” (Foucault, 2014, p.181).

The ENEM and ENADE exams follow a logic of individualization and comparison within a context that seeks to measure and classify individuals, rewarding and sanctioning according to normalization. This occurs in the sense of an examination, an evaluative mechanism that links the formation of knowledge to a way of exercising power. “The examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing

its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification.” (FOUCAULT, 2014, p. 183).

The Exam allows, beyond what has been presented, the documentation and registration of individuals. These are also the codes of disciplinary individuality exposed by Foucault in his work *Discipline and Punish*, which formally constitute the individual within power relations through quantitative and qualitative means. Thus, the examination serves the purpose of constituting the individual as an object to be described, analyzed, and specified, as well as enabling their comparison with others, in groups and populations. In this way, the games of truth are constituted, and it becomes possible to discipline behaviors.

The main objective of Saeb is to evaluate the education systems and provide support for the improvement of educational policies. For this purpose, analyses of the factors associated with learning are fundamental, in order to identify what students are capable of doing and which factors hinder learning. Among the factors external to the school, the following stand out: parents' level of education; access to books and cultural assets; family socioeconomic status; teachers' career and initial training; etc. Among the factors internal to the school and education systems, the following are noteworthy:

School management and a climate conducive to learning; effects of grade repetition; continuous and in-service teacher training; time spent in school; use of classroom time; access to early childhood education; quality teaching materials; study habits; homework; parental involvement; among others. (CASTRO, 2009, p. 9).

When examining basic education, SAEB is structured based on external and internal factors. These are measured primarily by quantitative scales, and the results are analyzed in a macro context to inform decisions that generate policies and actions to be implemented without considering the particularities of each school and individual.

The ENEM (National High School Exam) is a test implemented by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in 1998. Its initial purpose was to evaluate the individual performance of students at the end of high school, aiming to assess the development of competencies and skills necessary for the full exercise of citizenship. The exam, which is interdisciplinary and contextualized, consists of an essay and an objective section.

The increase in the number of higher education institutions in the 1990s led the Brazilian State to establish a regulatory policy for the sector. This initiated a policy of “remote management, ensuring quality and social responsibility through evaluation processes instead of intervention and direct control.” (VERHINE; DANTAS; SOARES, 2006).

In the view of Dias Sobrinho (2010), the neoliberal perspective led general exams to gain importance as instruments of control and reform. These exams fit well with the logic of measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of education, according to the needs of neoliberal states. These needs are based on demonstrating the results of the educational services provided, whether from the perspective of privatization or transparency in choice within the market.

Authors such as Calderón, Poltronieri, and Borges (2011) observe that among the three instruments of SINAES, ENADE gains the most visibility in the media, through disclosures by the Ministry of Education (MEC), which results in rankings. It is then taken as the primary source of information for formulating higher education quality indices. This is questionable because ENADE is an operational test created with the objective of imposing on the

evaluated students a moment of reflection and assessment of the content learned during their undergraduate studies.

Ribeiro, Almeida, and Ituassu (2015, p. 11-2) state that:

In its role of monitoring the quality standards of education for the Ministry of Education (MEC), an evaluation takes place that can be compared to the panopticon described by Foucault. Therefore, if a Higher Education Institution (IES) deviates from what is considered quality, this Ministry uses its ultimate monitoring function, which is punishment through the suspension of undergraduate programs, until the institution adjusts its processes to the standard.

Thus, ENADE can be considered an instrument that monitors and punishes, through which the educational institution is evaluated every three years. It is seen without seeing the evaluator in loco, submitting itself to normalizing power and adapting its policies and teaching plans to the programmatic content of this exam.

However, it should be noted that this power is not polarized; there is no clear oppressor and oppressed. While the Higher Education Institution (IES) is pressured to achieve better results, it also pressures itself to at least meet the average performance of other institutions (its peers). This is the exact metaphor of the panopticon, where the viewing mechanism is like a chamber with windows through which individuals are watched, and the individuals know they are being watched but cannot see the watchers, as the windows are mirrored. It becomes a transparent system where the exercise of power is something controllable by the entire society (FOUCAULT, 2014).

Thus, power is greater than what is institutionalized. The educational system comes to be evaluated not only by the Ministry of Education but also by its peers, as well as other institutions, students, graduates, and future applicants.

This represents an exacerbation of evaluation—its intensity, its omnipresence, and its permeation into all spheres of our lives. It is the radically economic character that evaluation assumes in neoliberal societies, constituting itself as an economically-inspired technology that not only classifies, segregates, positions, and hierarchizes, but also teaches, promotes, and naturalizes social classification, segregation, positioning, and hierarchization (VEIGA NETO, 2012). The hierarchy proposed by evaluation generates competition and diverts focus from the oppressor, seeking to adapt to the norm—otherwise, sanctions follow. This normality is exclusionary, as it is constructed according to the local culture, which is the result of processes of subjectivation.

Another example of non-polarized power is the institution finding itself subjected to the power of the students, as it will be the students who take the exam and, consciously or unconsciously, bring value to the institution. As proposed in Foucault's conception, power is immanent in social relations—unequal and dynamic. In the organizational field, we can observe that schools and higher education institutions accept this legitimized power, recognizing the contribution of exam scores to their survival, indicating that it is a force that not only represses but also operates through more complex mechanisms.

It remains to consider that the examination instrument may not reflect reality, since the students selected by sampling are required to participate in the evaluation, yet there is no minimum score requirement for the student themselves, nor any penalty for students who obtain an unsatisfactory grade. The idea of the Ministry of Education (MEC) is that the School and the Higher Education Institution (IES) will work on the criterion of critical

consciousness with their students regarding the contribution of this exam to the institution where they study, thereby also controlling their bodies—which, in Foucault's view, appears as the concept of the docilization of bodies.

Thus, there is an objective evaluation based on a subjective criterion: the student's consciousness, which cannot be managed exclusively by the School and IES. This seeks to control the individual, which previously occurred through confinement (FOUCAULT, 2014) in classrooms and now operates through the apprehension and hijacking of their subjectivity, via the attempt at social control of their body (FARIA; MENEGHETI, 2001).

Furthermore, according to Foucault (2014, p. 205), reward is an element of a dual system: gratification-sanction. “This two-element mechanism enables a number of operations characteristic of disciplinary penalty.” Thus, it is noticeable that once again the main subjects of the exam—the students—are encouraged to perform well, as their results lead to rewards, such as the notoriety of the School's or IES's name where they completed their undergraduate course, which does not necessarily reflect the student's actual education. As for sanctions, these tend to be applied to schools and higher education institutions, such as the reduction of their concept and evaluated courses.

Several considerations arise, such as: the student's lack of conscientiousness when taking the test will not prevent them from obtaining their diploma, yet it will interfere as one of the criteria in the MEC's evaluation of the HEI. Therefore, the instrument may measure the institution's unreality rather than the quality of its education. This raises the question of whether a professional's quality can be measured by their ability to fill out answers on a test taken on a single day, more specifically on a Sunday afternoon, to measure knowledge from an entire course.

In this sense, selecting professionals for the job market based on their ENADE score without considering other possibilities and characteristics of the candidate is not a coherent option, despite being a reality in many business organizations.

This reflects the same pattern seen in IQ tests, for example, where the investigative technology of the experiment shifted into the judging technology of the test. The test represents a new type of examination that is neither clinical nor pedagogical, but rather designed to link a score to an individual. The test is a way of materializing the mind, part of a broader shift in individualization. Thus, a process of individualization occurs through the transformation of a subject into a number, an index.

INVENTIVE COGNITION IN EDUCATION

The postmodern vision of processes of singularization, which are understood as, according to Guattari and Rolnik (1996, p. 17):

“[...] a way of refusing all these pre-established modes of encoding, all these modes of manipulation and remote control; to refuse them in order to construct, in a certain way, modes of sensibility, modes of relation with the other, modes of production, modes of creativity that produce a singular subjectivity.”

The individual produces singularity when they appropriate the components of subjectivity in a relationship of expression and creation (GUATTARI; ROLNIK, 1996).

For possibilities of singularization to be created, it is necessary to consider that these must necessarily occur in the present, in the sense of Bergson (1897), who sees the present as a privileged situation, a passage of time, a transformation. In the words of Kastrup (2005, p.

94), “[...] the present does not succeed the past nor precede the future, but makes these times coexist. From the past, it possesses virtuality; from the future, unpredictability.” This understanding is fundamental for thinking about the singularization of the current situation, breaking with stable domains and instituted forms. In this sense, Foucault presents his notion of actuality, which inverts Nietzsche's without changing its meaning, proposing that it is in the present, in becoming, that difference is made in history. Thus, in actuality, regularity and instability coexist; actuality configures itself as a sketch and not as a defined picture, as it does not allow for anticipations of the future (KASTRUP, 2005).

To see the world through this lens is to refuse the model of representation, since cognition ceases to be given and becomes invented, in the sense of inventing oneself and inventing the world according to the present moment, which is in motion, placing the present under experimentation. This relationship is not one of rupture or discontinuity, but rather of coexistence, since one cannot deny the already constituted forms, but at the same time, one cannot disregard the possibilities of becoming. In other words, cognition becomes polytemporal. The focus shifts to visualizing how the present can break with the already established history and give rise to novelty based on structural couplings (MATURANA; VARELA, 1990; KASTRUP, 2005).

To understand what discontinuity is, it is important to highlight the concept of “perturbation” or “breakdown,” which accounts for the moment of the invention of problems—a crack, a shock, a bifurcation in the habitual cognitive flow. The concept of “breakdown” is essential in understanding and arguing that there is no pre-existing world, nor a pre-existing subject. The self and the world are co-engendered through action, in a reciprocal and inseparable manner. Thus, both find themselves, in turn, immersed in a process of permanent transformation. For even if they are configured as forms, these remain subject to new perturbations, which force their reinvention.

This way of understanding cognition finds resonance in the studies of the production of subjectivity by Deleuze and Guattari (1997). In this context, subjectivity and objectivity are not pre-existing entities but effects of collective assemblages.

The concept of assemblage by Deleuze and Guattari, in turn, refers to the coupling of a set of material relations to a corresponding regime of signs. The assemblage is formed by expression (collective assemblage of enunciation) and content (machinic assemblage) (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 1997).

In addition to collective assemblages of enunciation, it is important at this point to highlight the definition of rhizomes by Deleuze and Guattari (1997).

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, an intermezzo. The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the rhizome's fabric is the conjunction “and... and... and...” This conjunction carries sufficient force to shake and uproot the verb “to be.” [...] “Between” things does not designate a localizable relationship that goes from one to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that carries them both away, a stream without beginning or end that gnaws at its banks and picks up speed in the middle (p. 37, authors' emphasis).

Processes of subjectivation and objectivation occur on a plane beneath forms, a plane of moving forces that, through their assemblage, come to configure always precarious and transformable forms—rhizomes—that exist in-between. Forms are distinguished but not

separated from the plane of forces from which they emerge, remaining immersed in it through a zone of adjacency.

The concept of “becoming” seeks to account for an involutive movement (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997) that dismantles forms, relaunching them into the plane of formless forces. In this sense, becoming corresponds to a moment of de-subjectivation, which is a condition for the process of subjectivity production to continue.

Varela defines Enaction or enactment as an attempt to reconcile cognition with the concrete, which is embodied and distinct from the view of cognition as a mental process. It occurs in action guided by sensory processes that simultaneously indicate the body's participation in the world, thus enabling the invention of the world. This eliminates the notion of representation, as the human being is acting in the world through a becoming that is in constant transformation, permeated by the assemblage of actions.

Evaluating the quality of education through a test is an individualized attempt to capture a subject's learning as a number, an index that quantifies and represents them. Deleuze's perspective moves in the opposite direction, as it understands that optimal performance is not guaranteed by mastering a technique, since learning always involves parallel becomings. It therefore demands skill in dealing with becoming. Learning is, above all, the ability to problematize, to be sensitive to the material variations in our cognition, which exists in the present, coexisting with forms and sensitive to the forces of becoming.

The need to break free from processes of subjectivation and reconstruct one's way of thinking in pursuit of singularity becomes clear. To achieve this, it is necessary to detach from moral determination and challenge dominant discourses, for a grade does not define an individual, a school, a course, and certainly not a university.

Given the concepts presented, the need to think of educational quality as a process that occurs in becoming is evident—a process open to breakdowns and inventive attention. One cannot consider what was previously stated as invalid, but it is also impossible to believe it is irrefutable. Every theory must be experimented with and put to the test so that it can be invented or reinvented. Such a fluid concept cannot be treated as something rigid that can be verified through a test, much less serve as a basis for surveillance and punishment.

This reflection proposes that Brazilian education cannot be qualified by rankings based on indicators. It is essential to open space for the possibility of inventing a quality education based on action and the singularization of individuals in the learning process. Only under such conditions will it be possible to invent a singular Brazilian education that allows for structural coupling and becoming within an open system, created in the circumstances of the present.

In a report prepared by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), commissioned by the Ministry of Education (MEC), the findings question the continuation of the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE). The report evaluates that the exam has “unrealistic” objectives and fails in its task of attesting to the quality of undergraduate programs. The exam has “significant weaknesses” in its design, development, objectives, and the results obtained. Therefore, the OECD recommends that MEC assess whether it is worthwhile to maintain it. “It is questionable whether the quality and usefulness of the results obtained from the exam justify the expenditure of public money.” In 2017, the administration of ENADE cost 118 million reais (PALHARES, 2018).

2. Methodology

Source Selection Criteria

To ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date theoretical review, academic and official sources were selected, including articles published in indexed journals, government documents and technical reports. The selection prioritized publications that address the historical evolution of higher education, evaluation and regulation policies, as well as the commodification of teaching. Texts that presented relevant empirical data and critical analysis of the impacts of educational policies were used as inclusion criteria.

Databases Used

The databases consulted included SciELO, CAPES, MEC, INEP and technical reports from the Brazilian government. SciELO was used to locate peer-reviewed articles, while official documents from MEC and INEP provided essential statistical and normative information to understand educational policies. Furthermore, legislation such as the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) and the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) were analyzed to support the discussions.

3. Discussion

Higher education in Brazil faces complex challenges, which range from the democratization of access to the quality of training offered. The significant growth of the private sector, driven by incentive policies and the commercialization of education, brought opportunities and structural problems. On the one hand, the possibility of entering higher education was expanded for thousands of students, but, on the other, concerns arose regarding academic quality and the sustainability of the current model (CARVALHO, 2013; SGUISSARDI, 2015).

The regulation and evaluation of higher education have been fundamental to guarantee the quality of teaching. The National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) seeks to standardize and monitor institutions, but faces challenges, especially with regard to the effectiveness of its assessment instruments. Indicators such as ENADE and CPC have been criticized for not being able to fully capture the complexity of teaching and learning, often resulting in a merely quantitative assessment (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2008).

Another relevant factor in the discussion is the financing of higher education. While public universities suffer from budget restrictions, many private institutions depend heavily on programs such as FIES and PROUNI to maintain their activities. This generates a cycle of student debt and precarious teaching, with institutions prioritizing the recruitment of students to the detriment of the quality of the training offered (INEP, 2017).

Furthermore, the concentration of educational institutions in large business conglomerates has transformed the higher education scenario in the country. The standardization of curricula, the reduction of academic autonomy and the precariousness of teaching working conditions are some of the impacts of this model. Public universities, in turn, face challenges such as funding cuts and the need to adapt to new demands in the job market, which often results in pressure for curricular flexibility and administrative restructuring (FRANCO, 2021).

Inequality in access to higher education is also a central point of the discussion. Social inclusion programs have been successfully implemented, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that students from different socioeconomic profiles have the same opportunities to enter and remain in educational institutions. Issues such as school dropout, lack of academic

support and financial difficulties continue to be significant barriers for many Brazilian students (BRAZIL, 2004).

Therefore, the discussion about higher education in Brazil must take into account both the advances achieved and the persistent challenges. To guarantee a fairer and more efficient educational system, it is essential to strengthen public regulatory and financing policies, in addition to promoting initiatives that ensure the quality of academic training and equity in access to higher education.

When considering the Brazilian educational assessment systems, the first point to highlight is the complexity of their processes. These systems have altered the relational nature of the student/teacher dynamic, which was traditionally focused on guiding learning. Instead, as Kellaghan (2001) points out, the emphasis has shifted primarily to institutional and systemic performance. This mirrors other assessments with broader objectives, exemplified in our specific context by the evaluations promoted by the Federal Government: the National High School Exam (ENEM) and the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE).

Given the above, the need for studies on the assessments operationalized at various levels of our educational system becomes clear, especially those that are large-scale in nature. These assessments encompass the diversity of our multicultural geography, are sample-based, and are purportedly considered statistically representative.

The effects and consequences of using the current Brazilian educational assessment system adhere to the policy of measuring and presenting results through the technique of applying objective tests and direct questions. There are no practical tests, oral examinations, or observational assessments, as proposed by Kellaghan (2001), which would be desirable for a comprehensive and conclusive evaluation. However, we are forced to recognize that such methods are impossible to implement in contexts involving large populations.

This means that we do not truly have a complete evaluative framework, one that is descriptive of the different dimensions of the student body, as would be desirable, but rather a simple metric of what it presumes to measure. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that many competencies and skills important in today's world are not effectively assessed, implicitly compromising the definition of the educational framework to be configured (VIANNA, 2003, p. 45).

The specific vision of Brazilian education is limited to exam results. There is no attempt to understand each School and Higher Education program as something unique, considering their singularity and that of each participant. Educational actions and policies are developed and grounded in a cognitivist worldview, which considers reality to be objective and measurable.

Indeed, if the market-oriented conception that permeates the expansion of higher education is not accompanied by quality evaluation processes dissociated from the traditional punitive and restrictive practices that have motivated institutional resistance, there will be little progress in the logic of the right to education, respect for institutional identity, and the construction of citizenship. It is only through reflection, trust, and participation that there will be engaged subjects involved in the process of reforming higher education and in decision-making regarding evaluation policies (GRIBOSKI, 2012, p. 185).

In light of the above, methods and processes related to perspectivism are proposed, presenting themselves in opposition to universalism, counter to metanarratives and single truths, always relying on multiple perspectives to view Brazilian education as a heterogeneous multiplicity and the knowledge of it as a perspectival creation.

For this to be possible, broad participation of students, teachers, and researchers in defining social priorities and in the production and sharing of rigorous and relevant knowledge is necessary. In other words, it is essential to establish an ethic of social responsibility that links academic actors and organized civil society agents to public agendas and to addressing the demands of the populations, and not merely to the validation and legitimization of mercantilist projects of neoliberal globalization (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2009).

4. Conclusion

Higher education in Brazil presents significant advances, but also faces persistent challenges. The increase in the number of vacancies and expanded access through public policies were important steps towards the democratization of education. However, the quality of academic training remains a central concern, especially in the private sector, where the commodification of education has generated negative impacts.

Regulation and evaluation of higher education need to be improved to ensure that all institutions meet minimum quality standards. The National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) represents progress, but there is a need for adjustments to the criteria used to measure the quality of teaching and the support offered to institutions facing structural difficulties.

Unequal access to public universities is still an obstacle, and more effective strategies must be implemented to ensure greater equity. Furthermore, student financing must be reviewed to avoid excessive student debt and allow higher education to fulfill its role of qualified training without compromising students financially.

Therefore, improving higher education in Brazil depends on an integrated approach, which combines expansion policies with more robust quality control mechanisms, sustainable financing and ensuring equity. Strengthening academic research and the autonomy of institutions are also essential elements to consolidate an educational system that meets the country's needs and contributes to its economic and social development.

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