

The World Bank and its reflexes in the Brazilian education post COVID-19

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Abstract. The World Bank is known to be an institution that promotes development and has as one of its priorities to improve the educational system, especially in developing countries. This paper focuses on the reflexes of the World Bank's actions and agenda in Brazil's education and its changes after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study provides a critical assessment of the bank's creation, the differences between its politics when it was founded and nowadays, exploring through official documents what were the actions taken by the institution and why were they made. It also shows its relation with Brazil, the agenda adopted to assist the educational system and focus on the changes that took place after the pandemic. The study was made based on a qualitative data analysis and literature review of the institution's documents and published articles. This analysis showed the inefficiency of the World Bank in assisting developing countries during crisis and most importantly the permanence of the same agenda for education in Brazil for several years, even after significant changes in the global scenery.

Keywords. World Bank, Brazil, Education, COVID-19.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it has been raised questions and assumptions about the outcomes it would bring, not only for the economy but also socially and culturally. Another doubt generated by the situation was about whether international organizations would interfere and how they should do it. One of the institutions that act the most in developing issues and education is the World Bank, and it was expected it would take actions and make changes in its priorities and the education agenda to address the consequences of the pandemic.

Even though there are several studies about the institution's plans for education around the world, it lacks analysis on the situation post-pandemic, especially in Brazil, which has been following the World Bank's agenda for years.

In this paper, the question asked is if the COVID-19 pandemic changed the World Bank's educational agenda and policies in Brazil. For that, the hypothesis raised was that even with the changes and crises that reached all sectors, especially the educational, the World Bank did not change its goals, actions and agenda directed to the educational sector in Brazil, nor did it provide bigger support to overcome the

situation.

Initially, it presents the context of Brazilian education, how it works and the laws and ministries in charge of it. Still in the same section it is discussed the functioning of the system, both before and after de pandemic.

The next section is about the World Bank, where is explained about the institution, approaching its foundation, the agencies and the goals established by the institution.

The article approaches the methods used by the organization to impose their policies and agenda over some nations. It also mentions the bank's idea of poverty and their plans to eradicate it.

Lastly in the paper, is discussed the relation between the World Bank and Brazil, focusing on the agenda created for Brazilian education and how the organization dealt with the post-pandemic problems in the sector.

That way, this paper has as the main purpose to analyze whether there were changes in the plans and agenda or it was kept the old one.

2. Methodology

This study analyzes the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic promoted in the World Bank's actions toward the Brazilian education system using a content analysis and a hypothetical-deductive method. For the arguments were examined different documents, articles and data, providing a context and identifying patterns in the studied case

The documents used were mostly taken from the World Bank's data bank, analyzed and put in the context of the paper and the other information collected. Was also collected articles and publications from well-known scholars of the area of study.

3. The education system in Brazil

Education appears in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a basic right that must be provided for all equally, and schools are the main way to achieve that. It can also be explained as a consequence of life in a community, where people learn their language, religion and habits, and that is why family and religion can also be considered ways of education (TEIXEIRA, 1999).

According to article 205 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution elaborated in 1988, education is a right of all and a duty for the state and family, with the society's collaboration, aiming the country's full development so that the individuals may exercise their citizenship and join the job market (BRAZIL, 1988).

The *Ministério da Educação e Cultura* (MEC), was founded in 1953, but only in 1962 was the first law established, *Lei de Diretrizes e Base da Educação* (LDB) was created and from that started the process of democratization, improvement in quality and access to education in Brazil (GRAÇA, 2023).

3.1 Before COVID

Even with the creation of laws and the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC), a document that regulates the essential learning students must develop in basic education (MEC, 2018), the Brazilian educational system faces a hard situation when it comes to economic factors, leading the country to crises. In 2019, around 6% of the country's Gross National Product (GNP) was destined for the education sector, which was not enough to represent satisfactory results (IBGE, 2019).

Even with these investments, it was not possible to create a good infrastructure in public schools around the country. Though this problem occurs in the entire area, it's more present in the northeast, which is the poorest part where, for example, most public institutions don't have a computer laboratory or when it does, there are not enough computers for all the students (AGUIAR, 2020).

Another problem that can be pointed out, especially in a time where technology has an important role in education, is the absence of access to internet for the teachers and students. That shows the discrepancy in

the structure and quality of teaching between public and private schools in Brazil (AGUIAR, 2020).

But the major problem, according to MEC, is that Brazil has a high rate of dropout. Around 5% of high school students from public schools discontinued their studies in 2021. The biggest reasons for that are the distance between their houses and the school, lack of conduction, the necessity to work or assist the parents at home, lack of interest or parental abandonment (INEP, 2021).

It is also important to mention that from the students that left school early, 27,3% are white and 71,7% are black (IBGE, 2019). These numbers show that poverty and racial inequality, that has been historically present in Brazil's history when black people didn't have access to education, are some of the reasons why the Brazilian education system hasn't evolved (GRAÇA, 2023).

To reassure that, the PISA 2018 research showed that nations with higher incomes have students with better grades and development. It's also stated that the level of education presented by their parents is also an indication. That can be studied through the analyses of politics and investments made by more developed countries (OCDE, 2018).

3.2 Education during COVID

In Brazil, the first COVID-19 case registered by the Ministry of Health was on February 26, 2020, and it spread quickly throughout the country. Until September 15, 2023, it was registered 705.485 deaths and 17.789.040 confirmed cases in Brazil (MINISTÉRIO DA SAÚDE, 2023).

It's correct to say that the pandemic highlighted some existing problems, and presented new ones, like the lack of knowledge in technology by teachers and students, which made it difficult to use the online platforms. Another big obstacle was mental health, which with the confinement due to the virus, was highly affected (DIAS; PINTO, 2020).

Another problem evidenced during the pandemic and made even more visible is the low index that measures the quality of national education, which is a reflex from the social inequality that has been present in the country, but hidden, and now become exposed (DIAS; PINTO, 2020).

Poverty has made the situation even more complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools were shut down and had to adopt online distance learning following the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations, evidencing the technological barrier, given that students needed access to computers and the internet, which the poorest part of the population didn't have (GRAÇA, 2023).

According to data provided by PNAD (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*), approximately 20.9% of the Brazilian households don't have access to the internet, which corresponds to about 15

million houses (IBGE, 2018).

4. World Bank

Originated from the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, along with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank has the goal to adjust general macroeconomic and social policies to guarantee the economic stability of developing countries. The organization also has social matters as their priority and the main goal is to end poverty around the world (ALTMANN, 2002).

It has four major activities been them loans and credits for projects and policies; counseling, technical assistance and advocacy in favor of a certain agenda of policies; specialized economic research in all development areas; public and private agents' mobilization and articulation to multilateral global initiatives (PEREIRA, 2021).

The World Bank grants loans and credits but makes requirements that can either be punctual or broad and those might reflect in the country's public policies and public administration. It is also important to state that the Bank lends not only for unions, but also for states and cities (PEREIRA, 2021).

Among the many areas to be conceived credits, one of the most highlighted is the educational area. The institution made its first loan to the sector in 1962 and stuck to financing scholar infrastructure and training for workers in the first couple of years. Sometime later, education became a fundamental part of the combat against poverty and its anti-poverty policies and other areas also began to be included in the concessions (PEREIRA, 2021).

4.1 Poverty and Policies

It's also one of the Bank's goals to measure poverty, both qualitatively and quantitatively through the World Development Reports. The institution states that one of the factors that keep Brazil from being a world-class education country is its high poverty and inequality index. (WORLD BANK, 1990).

It is presented as essential to improve the educational system and the labor force skills, equal educational opportunity and student learning. And for that, it is stated that the agenda created by the World Bank and support from international organizations are essential (WORLD BANK, 2012).

It's also mentioned that the biggest problem went from inequality of access to school to lack of equality in learning attainment. Some of the major reasons for that are social matters, family instability, learning issues and development deficits (WORLD BANK, 2012).

The World Bank has, as goals for education, ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. With that, it's expected more employment, earnings, health, innovations, and economic growth (WORLD BANK, 2018).

So that these goals can be achieved, there are three major problems that must be solved. The first and most important is that the learning process has low levels, high inequality and slow progress. The second obstacle is the inefficiency of schools and the education system that fails the students. And lastly is the system and actors that fail schools (WORLD BANK, 2018).

Even though controlling and decreasing poverty was already a hard task, it got even harder after de 2020. It was already expected that the pandemic would increase global poverty, but the numbers turned out higher than expected. It went from 8.8 to 9.3 percent, which is the largest increase since World War II (WORLD BANK 2022).

This change in the global economy in 2020 made the process of recovery harder and uneven in the following years. And from that originated a series of other problems, not just in economic sectors, but also in social areas (WORLD BANK, 2022)

4.2 Actions taken in Brazil

The World Bank has, for years, tried to interfere in Brazilian education with the goal of elevating the level of learning and consequentially lowering the level of poverty in the country. So that the objective can be achieved, the institution imposes educational policies and loans to programs and projects that are part of the structure of capitalism (SOUZA, 2014).

International organizations have been interfering in countries from Latin America trying to exercise control, either economic, cultural, political or educational. These countries became more bound to being imposed this situation mainly after World War II, when the United States grew as an economy and a political figure, and other nations were going through economic crises. At the same time, several organizations and institutions were created, and with that came a chance for poorer countries to recover from the war (SOUZA, 2014).

According to the World Bank, peripheral countries have three main goals when it comes to their educational system. The first is to increase the workforce to sustain economic growth, second, they should support the reduction of poverty and inequality, providing education for all, and lastly, the education system must be focused on transforming waste into education results (WORLD BANK, 2010).

With that, the organization proposes that Brazil should have their education entirely focused on the results, lined with technical training for the poorer, so that they can enter the job market and be more productive. That way the investments in education will fulfill its major goal, which is to reduce poverty (WORLD BANK, 1996).

In a report made in 2017, the Bank proposed that the public sector in Brazil spends a lot of money, and also spends it badly. It is suggested that the sector could save money if they made use of the private sector's practices, given that, according to the institution, the

cost per student is lower, there are more students per teacher, fewer dropouts and disapproved students, and higher grades (WORLD BANK, 2017).

After the pandemic, the president of the World Bank stated that the liberalization of resources to ease the impacts of the pandemic will depend on the implantation of politics, for example, the commerce liberalization and deregulation of the economy. These propositions did not begin now, they have been used and imposed by the World Bank and IMF for the past decades (PEREIRA, 2021).

Another fact that can be pointed out, is that the fast assistance announced by the World Bank agency, International Finance Cooperation (IFC), which has the purpose of financing the expansion of private companies, has been directed to private institutions rather than public ones (PEREIRA, 2021).

In the Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration, published in 2022, the Bank establishes as their tactics to recover education after COVID-19, keeping every child in school, assessing learning levels regularly, prioritizing basic education and increasing the efficiency of the teachers. Those measures were all already set before the pandemic, as mentioned previously in the paper (WORLD BANK, 2022).

5. Conclusion

The subject under study in this paper is of extreme relevancy, both for the analysis of the educational system in Brazil during and after the pandemic, as for a further study about the International Organizations and how they operate in an unexpected situation, more specifically the World Bank.

This article had the purpose of analyzing the reflexes of the Bank's actions and agenda in Brazilian education, focusing on whether there were any chances after the COVID-19 pandemic.

As shown in the paper, the institution did not provide any more in-depth assistance for Brazil or other developing countries, both during and after the pandemic. Its plans, policies and agendas are kept the same as they were before, having only superficial changes.

With that, it is concluded that the hypothesis raised, that even with the changes and crises that reached all sectors, especially the educational, the World Bank did not change its goals, actions and agenda directed to the educational sector in Brazil, nor did it provide bigger support to overcome the situation, is confirmed.

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