

An overview of educational vulnerabilities in Brazil

Prof. Walace Rodrigues (PhD)¹

¹(Department of Letters/ Universidade Federal do Tocantins - UFT, Brazil)

ABSTRACT: *This paper seeks to show an overview of Brazilian educational vulnerabilities that we can find at public schools all over the country, but mainly in poor areas. Our approach is a bibliographical one and our analysis is a qualitative and quantitative one. The results of this paper confirm, with the use of many authors' works, that educational vulnerabilities in Brazil are thought of as a mechanism of power to keep the poor population illiterate for the political benefit of some candidates in the elections and the business elite of the country. There is no interest of the very influential and rich people in Brazil to have a more equal country to all, as the poor people still serve as manoeuvrer mass to their interests.*

KEYWORDS -Brazil; Education; Public schools; Vulnerabilities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The This paper aims to show an overview of the many vulnerabilities that affect Brazilian public education and their students. It is important to say that public education in Brazil is attended mainly by poor people, the ones who cannot afford to pay for private schools.

Such problems of educational vulnerability are mostly seen in developing countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Many personal or family factors can cause educational vulnerability, but here we focus on the schools' problems or the absence of schools, problems that can also cause educational vulnerability to children within school age.

Our approach to this subject is qualitative and quantitative and it is based on bibliographical research and it has a direct relation to our studies at the Post-graduation Programs at Universidade Federal do Tocantins – UFT, campus Araguaína.

We start this paper explaining our understanding of what the educational vulnerabilities are and searching to give some examples of vulnerabilities that affect public schools in Brazil, using bibliographical information to prove our point of view.

II. EDUCATIONAL VULNERABILITIES IN BRAZIL'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

For some time, we are trying to understand how various sorts of vulnerabilities affect Brazilian public education schools, students and families. We chose to call these various problems in Brazilian education educational vulnerabilities and not schools' vulnerabilities (Rodrigues, 2018a). And why do we prefer to use the term educational? Because, in many cases, there exist no vacancies for kids at schools or there are no schools.

To define educational vulnerabilities, we can use the understanding of Wallace Rodrigues (2018b):

Referring to the insufficiency of educational opportunities, it harms individuals in their social prosperity and development. The precarious provision of education, with few and poorly cared for public schools, lack of teachers, absence or insufficiency of school meals, great distances between home and school, among other factors, can be considered as problems that cause educational vulnerability. (RODRIGUES, 2018b, p. 290)

This educational vulnerability can be directly related to the neglect of public power in relation to public education. As one of the 10th biggest economies in the world, Brazil is still unable to offer public education to cover all the kids and adults who need it. With so many different social realities, Brazil does not manage to offer school education to all citizens.

As an example, we can cite the city of São Paulo. The richest city in Brazil does not have enough vacancies for infantile and pre-school education in the most socially vulnerable areas of the city (according to CENPEC, 2011). This increases the educational gap between the poor and the rich and it increases the already existing many inequalities.

Another example is the immense number of children and adolescents out of school. It was calculated by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) as being as high as more than 2 million, almost 5% of individuals in this age group. Also, almost half of the 800 municipalities surveyed are taking no action to end school exclusion. These municipalities do not monitor which children are not going to school. It is up to the parents, therefore, the responsibility of getting children's enrollment at a local public school (DUARTE, 2018).



Image 1 – Rural public school in the municipality Xiquexique - BA. Source: <https://avozone.com/2013/02/a-realidade-do-pessimo-estado-da.html>

Another point to think about is that one of lack of public investments in the education to the poor people. Ana Mae Barbosa (1995), a well-known Brazilian art education believes that as more illiterate the population is, as easier it is to manipulate their opinion to vote in specific candidates in the elections. We also need to inform that to vote is an obligation imposed on all citizens older than 18 years old and not voting brings many problems related to public services.

It is common to see in Brazil, in poor areas and in the interior of the country, many schools without basic sanitation, without qualified teachers, without materials for school activities, without food to be given to students, among many other problems. It is more common than one can believe. The kids of the poor population attended by these schools feel hopeless to complain, as the situation never changes.

If we believe that good education can be one of the ways to improve the quality of life of populations in social vulnerability, educational vulnerabilities, in opposition, can only make the life of those people more complicated to find employment, for example. These policies of exclusion, in the Brazilian case via school

education, only deteriorates the social situation of the country as a whole. Amartya Sen exemplifies these exclusion situations that cause vulnerabilities:

Relational exclusions may, in some cases, be brought about by a deliberate policy to exclude some people from some opportunities. For example, the decision of the United States Congress a couple of years ago to exclude permanent residents who were not US citizens from certain types of federal benefits was clearly an active exclusion, since it came about through policies directly aimed at that result. In contrast, the macroeconomic circumstances that may lead to a significant level of unemployment may not have been devised to bring about that result. Also, when particular groups—such as the young and the less skilled—suffer especially from being left out of the employment process, it is possible that the economic conditions causing that result (and even the economic policies precipitating those conditions) may not have been, in any sense, aimed at excluding these vulnerable groups from employment. The absence of direct aiming does not, of course, absolve the government involved from responsibility, since it has to consider what bad things are happening in the economy and how they can be prevented (and not merely the things that are directly “caused” by its own policies). Nevertheless, for causal analysis it may be important to distinguish between the active fostering of an exclusion—whether done by the government or by any other wilful agent—and a passive development of an exclusion that may result from a set of circumstances without such volitional immediacy. (SEN, 2000, p. 15)

In the Brazilian case, we believe that keeping the educational vulnerabilities to the poor population is part of a political mechanism to keep this immense number of people with a low critical sense, so they cannot really consciously decide to choose the politics, but are highly influenced. It could be seen in the last presidential elections in Brazil (2018), where fake news played a great role in benefiting the elected president.

We are expecting a great impact in governmental decisions related to education, as the newly elected government is trying to get support to the movement they call “Escola sem partido” (School without party). This initiative wants to get all political discussions out of education places. But this decision by itself is a political one. The conservative views on education of the just elected government are believed to continue benefiting the rich and to “indoctrinate” the poor to continue working without an increasing critical sense.

One other educational vulnerability, very common in Brazil, is teachers who are teaching disciplines that they are not fully prepared to teach. As an example, we can give the case of teachers who teach the discipline of Arts at basic school levels. This specific discipline is an obligatory one at basic education. Also, none of the teachers at Tocantins State schools in the city of Araguaína (the second biggest city in the State) have a degree in Arts. Hereby we do not question the quality of the teachers who teach this discipline, but the absence of a degree in one of the artistic areas (music, visual arts, theatre, and dance) shows a clear lack of information to teach in such area. It demonstrates a clear disinterest of the political educational authorities to offer quality public education.

Also, we believe that it is of political interest of some authorities (in this case, restricting public means to public education) to keep the poor population in some specific sorts of exclusion, as Sen, utilizing some ideas of Adam Smith, informs us that:

Adam Smith was much concerned with relational deprivations that would impoverish human lives in an absolute way. The idea of social exclusion fits well into this framework. Indeed, a good part of *The Wealth of Nations* is concerned with the instrumental importance of exclusion, and involves analysis of the effects of particular types of exclusion, for example people being kept out of markets (through legislation) or out of education (through lack of private means and public support). But in addition, Smith also discussed, with great clarity, constitutively relevant relational deprivations. He investigated the characteristics of social exclusion within a broader concept of deprivation in the form of inability to do things that one has reason to want to do. (SEN, 2000, p. 6)



Image 2 – Rural public school in the municipality Miguel Alves - PI. Source: <http://g1.globo.com/pi/piaui/noticia/2015/03/internauta-denuncia-condicoes-precarias-em-escola-de-taipa-no-piaui.html>

Sociologist Jessé Souza (2009) will tell us that the elite of the Brazilian society still relies on slavery thoughts to think about contemporary Brazil. The manipulation of the poor population in Brazil by the elite goes, not only via a lack of quality public education but via low salaries offered to those less prepared and less skilled, meaning the poor ones who could not attend private schools and universities.

In Brazil, little attention is given to the education of the poor population. That is why the thoughts of Paulo Freire are seen, by the new elected right-wing government, as so dangerous by Brazilian political and business elites, as Freire (1997) sees in the education a way to humanize people and to make them critical creatures, understanding the situations of oppression they are living in.

As an example, we still have an amount of 13.2 million illiterates in Brazil (Rádio Vaticano, 2016). These people are mostly black men, from the northeast region of the county, with low income, and ageing between 40 and 45 years old. 8.3% of the Brazilian population is illiterate. These numbers are unacceptable for one of the richest countries in the world.

We believe, as professor Dermeval Saviani, that education of excellent quality to all is a way to change a country, as it has a relation to all other situations in society.

It is, therefore, a question of electing education as a top priority, defining it as the axis of a national development project and, as a consequence, bringing to it all available resources. In this way, we would be attacking other problems of the country, such as health, safety, unemployment, poverty, transportation infrastructure, energy, supply, environment, and so on. Unfortunately, however, the trends that have been predominating in Brazilian education are moving against this proposal. (SAVIANI, 2009, p. 153)

In our work in the interior of Brazil, we could see that many schools in rural Brazil, mostly in the north and northeast regions, do not have the basic infrastructure to function with the minimum quality possible. Teachers are not always qualified to teach in specific areas, there is not always food for the kids attending the

classes, many schools lack toilets or basic sanitation, among other many problems, etc. These examples show how precarious the public education to the ones in social vulnerability in Brazil is. And such situations cause what we are calling educational vulnerability.

Also, a recurring problem is the food served to the children in public schools. Sometimes there is no food for months, in other cases, the meal is not enough, or the quality is not up to standards. Thinking about many kids who need to walk to go to school and getting no food or not enough food we can see the precarious conditions of many public schools. And the Brazilian legislation obliges a public school to provide a meal to students attending these schools.

Professor José Carlos Libâneo understands the economic-political issue influencing the offer of quality public education in Brazil, as he shows us in the following passage: “It is therefore illusory to believe that the idea of education as a central factor of the new productive paradigm and of economic development has a democratizing meaning. This discourse is restricted to the portion of those included” (2011, p. 21).

It is relevant to inform that during the years of the presidency of Brazilian Labour Party under presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016) the education indexes have improved drastically in terms of the number of people attended, but the quality still needed to be improved.

Furthermore, municipalities are the ones that should attend to the educational needs of the children of first level basic education (first 9 years of school education, starting from 4 years old), but many of them do not comply to offer quality education in good schools. In many municipal schools, students do not even have where to seat or what to eat.

Of course, not all public schools are in such a bad state as the ones that are shown in the pictures used in this paper, but as more to the interior of the country one goes, the worse the situation of schools and education offered to the children is. Some public schools, as the Federal Institutes (Institutos Federais) offer excellent quality education and have a very good educational structure and planned buildings, as well as publicly selected teachers. The Federal Institutes were implemented also during the governments of Brazilian Labour Party (PT), being created 360 campuses.

In addition to all that has been said in this paper, we consider that the Brazilian Labour Party (PT) has revolutionised education in Brazil, creating 18 new public universities (composed of 173 campuses), taking university education to the interior of the country and giving the possibility to poor young people to attend a public university.

Although all the efforts of Brazilian Labour Party (PT) to bring education to a large number of people, there still exist many problems that can cause education vulnerability to many children in school age or adults who need to complete their educational process.

After the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (2016), less money was spent on public education and the educational numbers have gotten worse. During the presidency of Michel Temer (2016-2018), the number of people under the poverty line has increased and less money was invested in education. Also, many educational reforms promoted during his government altered the educational laws, taking away the obligation to offer, at high school level, disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and arts. In such a movement, the Temer government cheapens the cost of public education, as teachers for the named disciplines are no longer necessary. In opposition, private schools for the rich children still will have these disciplines offered, as they were put in the legislation as facultative. It just increases the educational gap between rich and poor people in Brazil.

The perspectives for the government of newly elected President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019) are not the best, as his government views on education are very conservative, going back to the times of military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). His government values an education without criticism, without the influences of educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997), and there are plans to increase the number of military schools in the whole country. It makes us realize that the problems of public education in Brazil will only increase and that public education will only have the purpose to educate people to work without critical thinking.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper tried to comprehend how education vulnerabilities in Brazil public schools seem to be a political choice to keep the poor population (the ones attending public schools) in an exclusion situation. Such

exclusion must affect their critical sense in choosing a decent politician, creating a window where corrupt politicians can easily be elected by misinforming these uncritical people.

We also see that private media plays a crucial role in offering specific political meanings to those with low critical sense. These people are usually more easily manipulated by fake news or news to benefit specific political parties or candidates.

In this sense, the educational vulnerability in Brazil seems to be a mechanism of power. Such a mechanism is manipulated by the powerful ones within Brazilian society, such as important politicians, very rich people, and media business groups.

Concluding, the educational vulnerability in Brazil affects the poorest ones, the most socially vulnerable ones, the ones who depend on public schools. This population lacks means to attend private schools (considered to be the best ones in Brazil) and is kept within a system where they can not get out, where they are inserted to benefit a few businessmen and politicians. Also, with the educational proposes of the new elected Brazilian president, public education in Brazil will only get worse and will create uncritical subjects (ideal subjects to politicians who don't want critical people interfering in their business).

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