

## **Public Policies for reducing inequalities in Federal Brazilian higher education: main findings**

### **Introduction**

This paper analyses the shift in the students' profile in Brazilian higher education due to public policies to reduce inequalities and improve access and retention for the underrepresented social groups.

The study draws on documentary analysis and descriptive statistics and uses the official quantitative data about freshmen, enrolments, courses and graduates in federal higher education institutions during the period between 2004 and 2014, extracted from the Higher Education Census produced by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP).

Furthermore, we will compare the three editions (2004, 2010 and 2014) of the Socioeconomic and Cultural Profile Survey of Undergraduate Students in Federal Higher Education institutions that have produced by National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (Andifes) and National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Community and Student Affairs (Fonaprace) in order to analyse the major changes in the student's profile in Brazilian federal universities.

### **The policies for reducing inequalities**

The Brazilian higher education system is very heterogeneous. There are more than 2,000 institutions, which are classified as public (state) and private universities, university centres and faculties. The public sector is free and comprised of federal, state and municipality institutions. In 2015, only 12% of institutions and 25% of enrolments were public. The private sector (for-profit and non-profit institutions) accounted for 75% of enrolments and 88% of institutions. Furthermore, 72% of private enrolments were for evening courses.

In the last decade, the Brazilian government has prioritized the increase in access to higher education. In 2004, the gross enrollment rate was 20% and net enrollment rate of young people aged 18-24 was 11%. In 2015, these rates sharply increased to 35% and 18%, respectively. However, in this year, the net enrollment rate was only 7%, for lower-income families. For black people, this rate was about 12%.

At the same time, policies for reducing inequalities in access and retention were implemented by the federal government: the **REUNI** (2008) – Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities Program, whose objective was to increase enrollment and reduce the dropout rate, by means of expansion of current federal universities; the **PNAES** (2010) – National Student Support Program was created to improve the student retention and graduate rate in federal higher education, through reducing the effects of social and regional inequalities in dropout rates; and the **Quota Law** (2012), which reserve 50% of spots for afro-brazilians and indigenous students, students from low income families and who have graduated from public high schools.

### **Equity Policies and the Student's Profile**

These programs have become an object of interest for national and international researchers, such as Teranishi et al (2015); Gairín (2015); Gutiérrez, Rivera, Contreras, Centeno y Ambrosio (2017).

In this paper, we chose core variables related to the three criteria used for the public policies: race/colour, family income and type of secondary education background.

Regarding race/colour, the whites, who in 2004 and 2010 were the majority among the students at the federal universities (59% and 54%, respectively), in 2014 were 46% of this group. In contrast, the participation of blacks and browns grew from 6% and 28%, in 2004, to 9% and 32% in 2010 and to 10% and 38% in 2014. Currently, adding blacks and browns, the percentage of these students is higher than the percentage of white students.

The percentage of indigenous students decreased to 2% in 2004; 0.9% in 2010 and 0.6% in 2014. The same occurred with the yellows (Asians), who were 4.5% in 2004, in 2010, 3.0% and 2% in 2014.

In the same way, the number of poorer students in the federal universities increased. The analysis was done by social classes, according to criteria of the Brazilian Association of Research Companies (ABEP) and demonstrated that, between 2004 and 2014, the concentration of students in higher classes – A, B – was giving place to a greater participation of students from lower social classes – C, D, E.

The data for 2004, 2010 and 2014 revealed that there was a high percentage of students (more than 60%), who needed some institutional support for retention and conclusion in the undergraduate courses. These students were, in general, of the social classes B2, C, D and E. The analysis of family income point to a greater presence of the poor in the federal universities.

In 2004, the family income of the students of the social classes B2, C, D and E ranged from US\$ 150 to US\$ 1,210, considering the Purchasing Power Parity of World Development Indicators (PPP/WDI). In 2010, this group that was the target of the access and retention programs had family income from US\$ 260 to US\$ 1,250.

The biggest difference occurred after the Quota Law. In 2014, the participation of students belonging to social classes D and E in federal universities was higher than in previous years of the Survey. The family income of these students was less than US\$ 704. In contrast, the participation of richer students, who belong to social class A (more than US\$ 4,691) fell significantly: in 2010, they were 17%, in 2014, 11%. This is a great shift in the social economic profile of the students of Brazilian federal universities.

Regarding the secondary school background, the results showed that less than half of the students at the federal universities had attended all the secondary education in public schools in 2004 (46%) and in 2010 (45%). However, in 2014, the majority of students (60%) reported having completed all the secondary education in public schools.

## **Conclusion**

We concluded that the implementation of these policies for reducing inequalities has been changing the social economic profile of the students in the federal universities. In spite of these main findings, historical social inequalities which characterise the Brazilian society as a whole, and higher education, in especial, remain pointing to a large contingent of students who need support policies to improve the access and the retention in federal

public universities. Finally, the enrolment expansion with equity has continued to be the huge challenge in Brazil.

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