

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Institutional Reactions to Pandemic in Brazilian Higher Education

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Research Domain: Higher education policy (HEP)

Abstract:

This article (part of a collaborative project – Barbosa et al 2021) examines reactions to the pandemic among different sectors and types of institutions in the Brazilian higher education system. Institutions showed very distinct reactions. In common, their first movement was to emphasize the teaching function of universities. But they differed in timing and decision forms. It took two days for some private institutions to go entirely online. Many public institutions just began to offer ‘remote classes’ four months after the pandemic was installed. The disparities arose questions on quality and equity in higher education in the public debate. We propose to analyze how different types of institutions faced the pandemic: which policies or institutional actions were proposed by which institutions/institutional type? Is it possible to identify the impacts of these actions?

Neo-Institutionalism is our theoretical approach to investigate institutional positioning in the context of the pandemic.

Paper:

As in many countries, enrollment expansion in HE was associated with differentiation and diversification in Brazil. About three-quarters of students are enrolled in private institutions which offer mostly market-oriented courses. The public sector of HE, composed of elite institutions and responsible for a major part of research and strongly marked by academic bias. All institutions focused on keeping classes working. Even so, they differed in forms and timing and in the decision processes. There is no uniformity: one-fifth of private institutions had to interrupt classes; schools of Medicine did not close, nor did some Engineering schools. Humanities and social sciences courses were closed in public institutions but not in private ones. Award ceremonies were canceled, but many graduates managed to get their certificates. Teachers in the private sector were fired or had important wage reductions while their colleagues in the public sector kept their contracts. Students in public institutions were allowed bonuses for internet connection and computers. Many institutions lack basic computational structure and both students and teachers are not familiarized with online working. Some universities were restrained from acting on ideological grounds against distance education. As the Ministry of Education chose to ignore the pandemic, there is no legal or policy

guidance on how to cope with it. Even less money.

The expansion of higher education produced by diversification and institutional differentiation profoundly transformed its structure. Didactic forms, scientific standards, social profiles of students and professors, and institutional models have changed in the almost millenary history of the university. The very delimitation of what higher education is becoming a research problem. In the Brazilian case, where legislation clearly defines the contours of this system, the possible gray areas reside in the identification and definition of the prevailing institutional model in the country and the social characterization of administrative formats. Thus, administrative categories, the primary basis for defining the sectors of higher education, need to be combined with academic organization and other characteristics of the system's functioning so that a typology of institutional forms can be built.

The typology of dimensions in the diversification process (Huisman et al 2015) is used in our analysis of the structure of the Higher Education System. The expansion of the system and the intensification of social relations within it tend to intensify the technical division of labor and to differentiate the activities and their importance and distribution inside this system. The primary functions or missions of the higher education system (teaching, research, and third mission) change both in their form and in their relative importance within each institution. The distinction between the public sector and the private sector (or differentiation in the type of control or institutional governance) is an essential dimension and can be considered, for the analysis proposed here, as the key variable in explaining the movements of differentiation and diversification as well as in the analytical understanding of institutional actions. Considering the various government actions and determinations, Fumasoli and Huisman (2015) emphasize the capacity for action and strategic response by higher education institutions. They emphasize the strategic positioning of these institutions which would be the link between the institution and the Higher Education System.

Methodology:

Using the bibliography in the area, it is proposed to analyze the following dimensions, to which the definitions of specific variables are added:

1. Type of control or institutional governance: values 'Public' and 'Private'.
2. Size of the institution:
3. Types of diplomas and dominant teaching modality, with values referring to the proportion of courses offered: on-site or as distance education.
4. Arrangement of teaching, research, and third mission functions, with the values 'academic' and 'vocational'.
5. An assemblage of courses offered: proportion of courses in each area of knowledge as defined by the OECD.
6. Presence of inclusion policies (example selection with quotas) and funding among students, producing the values 'Yes' and 'No'.

Data:

All data necessary for the construction of this typology are public, available at Inep (National Institute of Educational Studies and Research) The types constructed from the Brazilian empirical data constitute the foundation for the scientific analysis of differentiated institutional actions to face the pandemic.

The construction of institutional types will be made with data already available (Brazilian Census of Higher Education). The innovative dimension will come from the joint study developed in partnership with the Higher Education Evaluation Board (DAES / Inep) that will do a pre-test (August) and questionnaires to all institutions in the Brazilian higher education system (October) with questions about the institutional reaction to pandemic.

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