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Public Policy for equity of access and retention in Brazilian Higher Education – a comparative analysis between federal and private sectors

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Research Domain: Higher education policy (HEP)

Abstract:

This paper analyses the impact of public policy for equity of access and retention on academic trajectory of students in Brazilian federal and private higher education institutions. The study draws on documentary analysis and descriptive statistics and uses official quantitative data about freshmen, enrolments, courses and graduates in federal and private higher education institutions in 2017. We will investigate the last edition of the Socioeconomic Survey of the ENADE – the National Examination of Students' Performance also produced by the INEP. We have looked over the questions regarding the students' profile, the student financing aid and the institutional programs for retention. We have conducted a comparative analysis between federal and private institutions. To conclude, regarding availability, the for-profit sector has had huge growth to the enrolments. However, the federal sector has more significant contribution to improve the accessibility both in the reach of affirmative actions and the retention initiatives.

Paper: Introduction

This paper analyses the impact of public policy for equity of access and retention on academic trajectory of students in federal and private higher education institutions in Brazil.

The study draws on documentary analysis and descriptive statistics and uses official quantitative data about freshmen, enrolments, courses and graduates in federal and private higher education institutions in 2017. These data were extracted from the Higher Education Census produced by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP).

Furthermore, we have investigated the last edition of the Socioeconomic Survey of the ENADE (National Examination of Students' Performance) also produced by INEP. We have looked over the questions regarding the students' profile, the student financing aid and the institutional retention programs. We conducted a comparative analysis between federal and private institutions.

The selection of cases has obeyed of following criteria: the last year undergraduate students who attended face to face courses in the selected areas in federal and for profit and non-profit institutions that answered to the questions about evidence of knowledge and the socioeconomic survey. We have used the SPSS statistical package to produce descriptive statistics.

The Brazilian 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. This sector is free and comprised of federal, state and municipality institutions and represented 25% of enrollments in 2017. The private sector accounted for 75% of enrolments (43% for-profit and 32% non-profit institutions).

Between 2004 and 2012, the federal government implemented some public policies for reducing inequalities in access and retention to federal and private sectors. To regard to federal institutions, there were some initiatives, like, the **REUNI** (2008) – Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities Program 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; 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.

Regarding private sector, the **PROUNI** (University for All Program) is grants program for private students in for-profit or non-profit institutions. There are two different types: a full grant is for students whose family income per person is up to 1.5 times the minimum wage and the 50% grant is for students whose family income per person is more than 1.5 times up to 3 times the minimum wage. The program benefits students from low-income families, teachers work in public (state) school, students who attended free public high schools and minorities such as ethnic minorities and students with special needs. **FIES** is federal government student loans program for private students in for profit or non-profit institutions.

Equity of access and retention policies – a comparative analysis

For the comparative analysis of equity policies between federal and private institutions, our reference is McCowan (2015) paper. The author highlights three relevant principles for analysing higher education equity's policies: availability, accessibility and horizontality. (MCCOWAN, 2015). In this paper, we focus on the first two dimensions.

The first is related to number of existing vacancies. In 2004, the gross enrollment rate was 20% and net enrollment rate of young people aged 18-24 was 11%. In 2017, these rates sharply increased to 35% and 23%, respectively. (SIS, 2018). However, growth rates were very different between 2010 and 2017. Enrollments in federal institutions grew by 39%, while those in for-profit institutions grew by 74%, and in those non-profits there was a decline of 1% in the period. Despite the improvement in gross and net rates, Brazilian higher education remains lower **availability** than middle-income countries, including Latin America.

Regarding the second is linked to the conditions of access to existing vacancies by individuals from different strata and social groups. It is possible to observe that between 2004 and 2012, there has

been the increase of **accessibility**, because and specific policies to the underrepresented students (black and poor people) both in public (REUNI and Quota Law) and private institutions (FIES and PROUNI). These Brazilian programs have become an object of interest for national and international researchers, such as McCowan (2015), Carvalho and Moreira, (2018), Lenk and Pereira (2016) and Carvalho (2017).

According to data in this survey, regarding race/colour, the whites were 46% in federal institutions and 48% in for-profit and 61% in non-profit institutions. In contrast, the participation of blacks and browns was 44%, 46% and 33%, respectively. In addition, 27%, 20% and 17% of federal, for-profit and non-profit students declared that the access to higher education have occurred through affirmative action criteria.

To regard to family income, there was a greater participation of students from lower social classes. In this survey, 47% of federal, 51% of for-profit and 43% non-profit students were from family income up to to 3 times the minimum wage. The family income of these students was less than £250.

The data revealed that there was a high percentage of students, who needed some institutional support for retention and conclusion in the undergraduate courses. So, in addition, in this survey, we focus on some student retention policies, like as housing assistance and student financing aid.

Regarding student housing assistance, only 1% and 0,2% of federal and non-profit students live in students' residences. However, 7% of federal students receive some housing aid. Relate to student financing aid, 11% and 9% of federal students inform that receive student feeding aid and a retention financing. There are no statistics relevant data about these institutional initiatives in private sector.

Conclusion

We concluded that the implementation of public policies for reducing inequalities has been changing the social economic profile of the students in the federal and private institutions. Regarding availability, for-profit sector has had huge growth to enrollments. However, federal sector has more significative contribution to improve the accessibility both in the reach of affirmative actions and retention initiatives.

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