

**Public high school and college in São Paulo:
the contrast between meritocratic curriculum policies and affirmative policies**

*Ensino médio e superior público de São Paulo:
o contraste entre as políticas curriculares meritocráticas e as políticas afirmativas*

*Enseñanza media y superior pública en São Paulo: el contraste entre políticas curriculares
meritocráticas y políticas afirmativas*

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Abstract: This study evaluates the importance of quota policies for the democratization of higher education. In a quantitative analysis, we analyzed the differences in performance between students from public and private schools in the state of São Paulo, also considering ethnic self-declarations in applications for the vestibular system of the Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP). This research is part of the project School: neoliberalism, necropolitics, and the processes of resistance, which investigates data on exclusion and the social resistance classes and ethnic groups seek to establish in confronting the neoliberal policies applied to education. We examined candidates' results in the exams from 2010 to 2018 to investigate which policy determined the access of students from public schools in São Paulo to the public university. To this end, we analyzed the inclusion policies adopted by UNESP in 2010 and 2014 in contrast to the curriculum policies of the state of São Paulo, implemented under the discourse of improving public schools. We show that the percentage of vestibular candidates who attended secondary education in public schools increased from 30% in 2010 to 44% in 2018, and that this was only possible because a vacancy reservation program ensured access to these candidates. We also highlight the maintenance of performance differences between Black and white students, and the slight increase, produced by this vacancy reservation policy, in the number of Black students, who mostly come from public schools, admitted to the university. These results show that the struggle and social organization strategies of Black communities, in the consolidation of affirmative policies, are fundamental for their access to public higher education.

Keywords: School performance. Affirmative Action. Access to higher education. Quota policy.

Resumo: O artigo apresenta uma avaliação acerca da importância das políticas de cotas para a democratização do ensino superior. A partir da análise quantitativa são analisadas as diferenças de desempenho entre os alunos oriundos de escola pública e escola privada no estado de São Paulo, considerando ainda as declarações étnicas apresentadas, quando da inscrição do sistema de vestibulares da Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP). A pesquisa se insere no projeto Escola: neoliberalismo, necropolítica e os processos de resistência, que investiga os

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dados de exclusão e as resistências sociais que classes e grupos étnicos buscam estabelecer no enfrentamento das políticas neoliberais aplicadas na educação. Examinamos os resultados dos postulantes nas provas de 2010 a 2018, com a finalidade de averiguar qual política determinou o acesso de estudantes egressos das escolas públicas paulistas na universidade pública. Para tanto, foram analisadas as políticas de inclusão adotadas pela UNESP em 2010 e em 2014, em contraponto às políticas curriculares do estado de São Paulo, implementadas sob o discurso de melhoria da escola pública. Demonstramos que o aumento do percentual dos convocados que cursaram o ensino médio em escolas públicas foi ampliado, de 30% em 2010 para 44% em 2018, e esse aumento só foi possível porque o programa de reserva de vagas assegurou o acesso destes candidatos. Destacamos ainda a permanência das diferenças de desempenho entre alunos pretos e brancos e que a política de reserva de vagas produziu um pequeno aumento de convocações de alunos pretos, que estudam majoritariamente em escolas públicas. Estes resultados evidenciam que a luta e as estratégias de organização social das comunidades pretas, na consolidação de políticas afirmativas, são fundamentais para o acesso ao ensino superior público.

Palavras-chave: Desempenho escolar. Ação afirmativa. Acesso ao ensino superior. Política de cotas.

Resumen: El artículo presenta una evaluación de la importancia de las políticas de cuotas para la democratización de la educación superior. A partir de un análisis cuantitativo se analizan las diferencias de rendimiento entre alumnos de la escuela pública y de la escuela privada del estado de São Paulo, considerando también las declaraciones étnicas presentadas al inscribirse en el sistema vestibular de la Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP). La investigación forma parte del proyecto Escuela: neoliberalismo, necropolítica y procesos de resistencia, que investiga los datos de la exclusión y las resistencias sociales que las clases y grupos étnicos buscan establecer para enfrentar las políticas neoliberales aplicadas a la educación. Examinamos los resultados de los postulantes en los exámenes de 2010 a 2018, con el fin de averiguar qué política determinó el acceso de los estudiantes egresados de las escuelas públicas de São Paulo en la universidad pública. Para ello, se analizaron las políticas de inclusión adoptadas por la UNESP en 2010 y en 2014, en contraposición a las políticas curriculares del estado de São Paulo, implementadas bajo el discurso de la mejora de la escuela pública. Demostramos que el aumento del porcentaje de quienes cursaron el bachillerato en escuelas públicas se amplió, pasando del 30% en 2010 al 44% en 2018, y este aumento sólo fue posible porque el programa de reserva de plazas garantizó el acceso de estos candidatos. También destacamos la permanencia de las diferencias de rendimiento entre los alumnos negros y blancos y que la política de reserva de plazas produjo un pequeño aumento de las convocatorias de alumnos negros, que estudian mayoritariamente en centros públicos. Estos resultados muestran que la lucha y las estrategias de organización social de las comunidades negras, en la consolidación de las políticas afirmativas, son fundamentales para el acceso a la educación superior pública.

Palabras clave: Rendimiento escolar. Acción afirmativa. Acceso a la educación superior. Política de cuotas.

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Introduction

The discussion that we promote in this study is situated on the existing mismatch between the public and private education spheres regarding access, via vestibular exams, to public universities. Using as an empirical analytical basis the performance of high school students from public and private schools in the vestibular exams for the Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) from 2010 to 2018, we show how differences in the results between these two high school dimensions have been increasing in recent years. This datum ratifies the central problems of neoliberal policies in public schools, putting in check its social role as a right and consolidating education as a commodity service.

The historical context of education in São Paulo State is marked by the set of neoliberal policies that were introduced in Brazil in the 1990s, and, in this aspect, we intend to point out the main impacts of these policies centered on a curricular perspective based on “competencies and skills” which show content “secondaryization” and the limits of an education focused on the labor market and not on general, critical, and emancipatory education. The concept of “skills and abilities”, in fact, masks the neo-technicism in the discourse of “active methodologies” and “innovations” based on the pedagogical current known, in Brazil, as “Escolanovismo” (Newschoolism), which has its roots in the pedagogical pragmatism, of a liberal and meritocratic character, of Americans John Dewey and Jerome Bruner. (ALBUQUERQUE, et. al, 2021).

We can briefly summarize neoliberalism as a political-economic doctrine centered on privatization, commodification of life, and market liberalization (HARVEY, 2005, DARDOT, LAVAL, 2016). Nowadays, the public education model is seen as a new frontier to be exploited by capital (SOUZA, 2021), a market that aggregates diverse sectors and millions of people. This onslaught of the neoliberal project on the educational sector has erected new attack fronts on public education which, in turn, demand new measures from the institutions responsible for governing and organizing the federal, state, and municipal educational apparatus.

Over the past 30 years, São Paulo State has implemented a set of educational policies that follow this logic, imprinting, on state schools, meritocratic practices of business management into the school structure. Based on mass evaluation and bonus systems, as a palliative to salary degradation and rights curtailment, these governments have promoted the fragmentation of curricula and the homogenization of school content. These strategies are linked to the blaming of teachers for education

performance and quality and to the discourse that curriculum policies would improve the quality of the educational process, proposing the end of the differences between what is taught in each school. The answer to this supposed improvement would be linked to measuring the degree of teaching efficiency in the contents proposed by official state curricula, thus, forming a verification system that is performed by applying large-scale exams based on tests that can generate indices and serve as a reference for “new public policies to be adopted.” (SANFELICE, 2010). Such mechanisms disregard these measurements and distort them by “courses and classes” which prepare students specifically for exams, denoting the “blindness” on how the “school ground” is established.

Neoliberal policies, which originated in the 1990s, reinforce the idea of a managerial and technical management of public education based on target plans established at the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand (1990). These policies received strong support from major international organizations in their development and implementation in several countries, such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (CARVALHO; RUSSO, 2014, ALBUQUERQUE, et. Al., 2021).

On the other hand, the public-school community (students, teachers, and parents), faced today with the concrete reality of inefficient curriculum reforms, sees how these distance it from training in the minimum standards required by university entrance exams, as well as curtail their access to public higher education, requiring the community to consolidate a direct dispute for entry via affirmative action policies.

Affirmative action began to be implemented as a mechanism to equalize access to universities for different social and ethnic strata. They have proven to be a positive emergency measure in the face of a socioeconomic structure that impedes the condition of formative equality in school education, a fact consistent with indicators of racial and social inequality in the Brazilian socioeconomic structure. According to data released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2018), between 2005 and 2015, the percentage of Black people in universities increased from 5.5% to 12.8%. However, this percentage is relativized by the expansion of the public university system which took place in this period, considering that the growth of admission for whites in the same time interval was 26%. These data point to the need to expand policies that promote equality and combat inequality not only in Brazilian universities, but in all formal or informal, institutional, civil or political environments since the

distribution of positions in the most prestigious economic and social professions is unavailable, for example, to Black people. As we have affirmed, even in labor administrations, when such programs are energized, they fail to significantly alter the (racial) social picture of employability and training, denoting the permanence of excluded populations, which are incapable of breaking with the structural racism present in Brazilian society.

Faced with these structural differences, what is the role of the State and the public power to provide better conditions of insertion for the less favored classes? We corroborate the thesis that

It is not enough for the State to refrain from discriminating or treating unequally, but it is necessary for it to positively act to reduce social inequalities. Thus acting, the realization of the constitutional principle of equality presents itself to the public power as an objective that must be consolidated from two approaches: the prohibition of discrimination and the adoption of concrete measures that reduce inequality (HAAS; LINHARES, 2012, p. 849).

It follows from this framework that the necessary structural changes in Brazilian society, glimpsed from 2012, when the Law of Social Quotas was sanctioned (Federal Law no. 12.711/2012, which provides for admission to Federal Universities and Federal Institutions of Technical High School Education, among others), are far from eliminating existing ethno-racial segregationist practices in the country.

The Law of Social Quotas, an important political landmark to expand access to public universities for Black and Indigenous people, defines that 50% of the vacancies in federal institutions of higher and technical education linked to the Ministry of Education should be reserved for public school students and, of these 50%, an amount representing the proportion of Black and Indigenous inhabitants in that unit of the federation should be reserved for these candidates. However, higher education institutions run by units of the federation or by the private sector, are not covered by the law and therefore do not have this same obligation.

As the debate on quotas in São Paulo State matured due to social pressure, other proposals for inclusion policies were elaborated, such as the Programa de Inclusão com Mérito no Ensino Superior Público Paulista (Program for Inclusion by Merit in Public Higher Education in São Paulo - PIMESP). It suffered strong resistance from the academic community for lacking a project to effectively include the historically marginalized population into the public higher education system, creating even more obstacles for the conclusion of this purpose.

The resistance to the implementation of the quota policy in public universities and higher education institutions in São Paulo did not have the same strength as the opposition to the establishment of the Programa Universidade para Todos (University for All Program - ProUni)³, which, in redistributive terms, is the affirmative policy with the greatest impact in higher education, since the private sector incorporates the great majority of students in this education stage. One realizes that what is at stake is not only racial criteria but also how public resources are used and which portion of the public benefits from these policies (LIMA, 2010). In 2018 alone, ProUni granted more than 400,000 scholarships, of which more than 230,000 were full ones, configuring an effective transfer of public funds to the private education sector.

Is the dome opening? The construction of an effective inclusion policy

Public universities have always been seen as if covered by a glass dome, isolating them, in certain aspects, from society in general. In the case of UNESP, since 1986 the Programa de Divulgação Vestibular UNESP (UNESP Vestibular Promotion Program) aims to increase the participation of students from public schools in São Paulo vestibular exams. The program seeks to educate students about the selection process and, recently (2010), the possibilities of exemption from enrollment fees, in a movement that understands that a greater participation of public school candidates in the vestibular could increase approval numbers. According to Cury (2016), despite the effort of promoting vestibular exams, there were no major changes in the percentage of students from public schools entering Unesp. Given this picture, in 2019, UNESP-VUNESP signed an agreement with the Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo⁴, aiming to promote a “program to publicize the UNESP Vestibular and the inclusion of public-school students in the University⁵.” It is in this context of pressures for inclusion policies in universities that we find the changes in the vestibular process of UNESP, the central theme of our research.

It is worth mentioning that before this agreement was signed in 2019, in 2010 VUNESP changed the model of its vestibular exams, which, from that edition on,

³ The University for All Program - ProUni aims to grant full and partial scholarships for undergraduate courses and specific training courses in private higher education institutions. Created by the Federal Government in 2004 and institutionalized by Law no. 11.096 on January 13, 2005, it offers, in return, tax exemption to those institutions that adhere to the Program. Source: <http://prouniportal.mec.gov.br/o-programa>. Accessed on: 20/10/2020.

⁴ Agreement signed on 05/02/2019 and in force until 28/04/2019 Source: Covenant Registry, available at: <https://sistemas.unesp.br/convenios/publico/listaPublica.xhtml>. Accessed in January 2020.

⁵ Until then, the program was established in a non-institutionalized way. Visits took place when school directors agreed to receive the Unesp teachers and students who did the promotion.

would be held in two phases: the first, consisting of a general knowledge test and the second, of a specific knowledge test and an essay. This change was not only structural. Its fundamental objective was to bring vestibular contents closer to the São Paulo State Curriculum.

The first phase of vestibular exams, the initial focus of our investigation, is composed of 90 objective questions distributed equally among specific high school knowledge areas, according to the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* (National Curricular Parameters - PCNs). With this change, guided by Unesp Resolution no. 50, of July 13, 2009 whose 11th article signals an explicit approximation between the preparation of vestibular exams and the content to be taught in the São Paulo public education network.

According to Cury (2016), this change in the preparation of the UNESP vestibular would mean an action to improve public school students' performance in vestibular exams, thus characterizing it as an affirmative policy. The fact is that performance analyses, as we will see, show that the problems of public schools and their gap with the levels and/or standards required by São Paulo public universities run deeper than formal changes focused on the curriculum.

Another central aspect of the affirmative policies implemented by Unesp stems from the fact that, in 2014, the university determined that vacancies in its courses would be progressively destined to public school students. This is an achievement of the struggle of social movements for inclusion, as seen in the *Sistema de Reserva de Vagas para Educação Básica Pública* (Vacancy Reservation System for Public Basic Education) coming into effect, a move by VUNESP toward access democratization. In 2014, the year the system was established, UNESP reserved 15% of the vacancies offered in its undergraduate courses for candidates who had received all their secondary education in public schools, intending to gradually increase this number until it reached 50% of its vacancies destined for the program in 2018.

Thus, we analyzed students' performance data on the exams applied from 2010 to 2018. It is worth noting that, in this same period, the *Secretaria da Educação do Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo State Education Department - SEESP) took as its main reference for the implementation of new public policies the *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação de São Paulo* (São Paulo Education Development Index - IDESP)⁶, generated by the *Coordenadoria de Informação, Monitoramento e Avaliação Educacional*

⁶ The IDESP is an indicator that evaluates the quality of schools. This evaluation considers good schools in which most students learn the competencies and skills required for their grade/year, in an ideal period - the school year. Source: http://idesp.edunet.sp.gov.br/Arquivos/Nota%20tecnica_2018.pdf.

(Coordination of Educational Monitoring, Evaluation, and Information - CIMA), via the Sistema de Avaliação do Rendimento Escolar do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State School Performance Evaluation System - SARESP)⁷ and analysis of school flow.

With the centralization and standardization of content, this mass evaluation system became the model by which the quality of the teaching-learning process came to be measured in a targeted way. A set of tests linked to the texts and exercises in the São Paulo State curriculum which “disregards” that many schools conduct pre-tests, preparatory classes, and reinforce a hierarchy and direction of content, mnemonically implemented based on stimulus-responses. In this context, subjects like Mathematics and Portuguese are privileged, whereas Arts, Philosophy, Sociology, History, and Geography are secondary. In turn, two other problems are accentuated: the first refers to the quantitative evaluation system in which the development of thinking and reasoning are relegated to a secondary place in favor of training students to answer questions in an extremely behaviorist logic. The second refers to the fact that the dimension of competencies and skills is demarcated by “empiricism and common sense,” failing to promote abstraction processes and a critical reflection about reality. Moreover, the entire collective of teachers, coordinators, and leaders is pressured by reward programs, reinforcing a meritocratic logic that reverberates in bonuses and control systems for teaching, highlighting that performance also implies the transfer of resources to schools. (FREITAS, 2018).

Defenders of the application of standardized curricula think of school institutions as undifferentiated from each other and assume it possible to overcome all the problems of public education by providing the same “content” for all, disregarding factors outside the school that influence the schooling process. In fact, they end up forbidding the possibility of these schools to produce their curricula based on the needs and contradictions posed by the social practice in which they are inserted and to provide new answers for daily demands. Thus, the policy of adjusting curricula, implemented in the last 30 years, as a discourse of school improvement and expansion of its inclusive capacity is ineffective and contradictory.

According to Freitas (2018), the educational programs adopted in recent years by São Paulo, such as the “São Paulo Faz Escola” (São Paulo Sets School Trends) program, in line with business reforms and the ambitions of the privatizing education

⁷ The São Paulo State School Performance Evaluation System (SARESP) is a test which aims to produce a diagnosis of the situation of basic education in São Paulo State. Its results allow schools to analyze their performance and, supported by the State Secretary of Education, to improve the quality of learning of their students and school management. Source: <https://www.educacao.sp.gov.br/indices-educacionais>.

project, have only encouraged meritocratic pedagogical practice and competition among schools by adopting a managerial and business model.

Azanha (2011) also alerts us to the pedagogical abstractionism in conducting research based on strictly quantitative data that, detached from the objective reality of schools and indifferent to inequality conditions, has drawn an unreal picture of the educational situation in the country. In this context, large-scale evaluation systems become central to the educational public policies sanctioned by the state government, whose results stop being references for the elaboration of curriculum proposals. A vicious circle, such as the one that gave rise to the official 2010 curriculum, was taken as a parameter for the changes in the UNESP vestibular exam, adopted from that year on.

In the Relatório Vestibular Unesp (Annual Vestibular Report), VUNESP (2010) justifies these changes as a movement to adapt its exams to the reality of public education.

At a time when the need to adapt vestibular exams to the reality of education is discussed in universities and throughout the media, Unesp contributes to it with a concrete example, changing the model itself, previously performed in a single phase, now applied, without division by area of knowledge, in two phases: the first in objective tests, designed to select, among the many candidates enrolled, the best prepared to compete in the second, of a discursive nature and classification purpose. (...) The Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais and the Propostas Curriculares do Estado de São Paulo have already been adopted for some years in schools and should promote, in the medium and long term, a real revolution in national education. It was imperative, therefore, the immediate adaptation of vestibular exams to this guideline since they can also represent a way to measure the progressive results of the new conception of education in Brazil. (VUNESP, p. 5, 2010).

Thus, we now scrutinize: what are the effects of these changes? What are their effects on the performance and, consequently, on the access of candidates coming from public schools in São Paulo? According to VUNESP itself, the new vestibular model, based on The Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (National Curricular Parameters – PCN) and the Propostas Curriculares do Estado de São Paulo (Curricular Proposal of the State of São Paulo – PCESP), has the intention of improving the selection process for higher education, paying attention to the cultural universe of students leaving basic education. (VUNESP, 2010).

As this action meant an intentional approach between the UNESP vestibular and high schools offered by the public basic education system, our research was guided by the need to assess whether the measure taken by VUNESP was an affirmative action, in the sense of expanding access to public higher education for candidates coming from public schools in São Paulo, or if the tendency to democratize access, observed in recent

years of research, was ensured by affirmative policies, such as the policy of reserving vacancies for students from public schools, which came into effect in 2014.

Conceptually, we share Oliven's (2007) understanding that affirmative action refers to

'a set of public policies to protect minorities and groups who, in a given society, have been discriminated against in the past. Affirmative action aims to remove barriers, formal and informal, that prevent certain groups from accessing the labor market, universities, and leadership positions. In practical terms, affirmative action encourages organizations to take positive action to give people from discriminated segments of society the opportunity to rise to positions of leadership (p. 30).

Thus, we show candidates' performances in UNESP vestibular exams from 2010 to 2018. The data referring to vestibular exams were kindly provided by VUNESP, composed of annual tables containing the general information of all candidates enrolled that year. Among the information on each candidate, in addition to their results in each vestibular phase, separated by area, were the answers to a socioeconomic questionnaire which VUNESP applied to all applicants.

Item 9 of the socioeconomic questionnaire identifies the origin of the candidates according to their high school background. This question allows us to differentiate between candidates who mostly attended secondary education in public institutions and private institutions.

Question 27 of the socioeconomic questionnaire asks candidates about their skin color according to the classes adopted by the IBGE. So, possible answers for this question are: white, brown, Black, yellow, and Indigenous. It is worth pointing out that the questionnaire is based on candidate's self-declaration, and absolute numbers may contain variations and inaccuracies since they are not data obtained from a more in-depth and careful investigation of the profile of the candidates enrolled in the vestibular.⁸

By the composition of a database matrix of vestibular candidates, we could compare the performance of each group per year of selection process, giving us a historical average. The level of detail of the data on vestibular candidates fails to enable us to disaggregate those who were approved for enrollment via the quota system or by broad competition. However, by associating the results of candidates' performance with variations in the averages of inclusion of the groups investigated, we can assess if access was established by the state policies to restructure curricula, from

⁸ It is worth noting that because it is self-reported, Unesp started receiving complaints about certain discrepancies in the racial-ethnic declarations of subjects with the physical characteristics of Black and brown people, setting up a Comissão Temporária Assessora do Conselho de Ensino, Pesquisa e Extensão (Temporary Advisory Commission of the CEPE - Teaching, Research and Extension Council) of the University, to deal with ethnic matters (Ordinance Unesp, of 6/12/2016).

the quota policy for public education, or from aspects centered on meritocracy or arising from social struggles for inclusion and implementation of affirmative policies.

Results

As pointed out, the reflections of our research are based on the data made available by the Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista (São Paulo State University Vestibular Foundation - VUNESP). VUNESP claims that the new composition of vestibular exams would represent an approximation between the contents it demanded via its exams and the public education offered by the state of São Paulo. According to the norms that guide the new way of preparing vestibular exams for UNESP, the content of the tests should be aligned with PCN and PCESP.

This change, which dates to 2010, was the first measure adopted by VUNESP which intended to democratize access to public universities; a policy of curricular approximation between the vestibular and public education that would guarantee inclusion via merit.

The analysis of the vestibular as a selection process, guided by a certain theoretical conception, added to the information set on students' performance by area and analytical framework, allowed us to answer the question proposed at the beginning of our investigation, i.e., whether, in fact, public school students' performance improved in face of the set of curricular programs implemented (LIMA, 2020; PARENTE, 2020). In other words, if differences in performance between public and private school students decreased or disappeared, this would characterize a qualitative change in teaching and learning. If so, the changes proposed in the Unesp vestibular would consist in an affirmative policy strategy linked to public education. Otherwise, results show the continuous exclusion of public high school students from the public higher education system in São Paulo.

In this survey, we considered as "coming from public educational institutions" those candidates who stated having totally or mostly attended secondary education in public schools. We proceeded with candidates coming from private educational institutions in the same manner, considering as belonging to this group all candidates who declared having mostly attended private schools.

The number of public high school applicants in 2010 was 29,075, 41% of the total, of which 16,960 declared themselves women and 12,115, men, a difference of 40% between genders. At the end of the selection process that year, they represented 30% of those

approved for enrollment, i.e., 14% of the candidates who attended secondary education in public institutions were approved in the selection process.

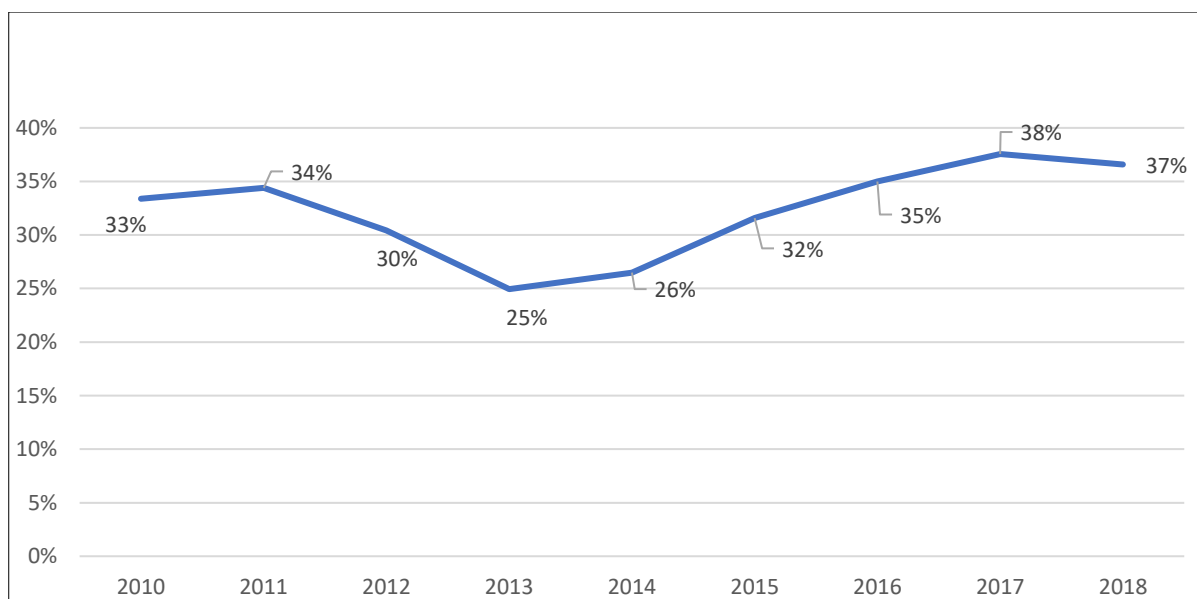
In 2018, we identified a significant change in this number, in which 40% of candidates (39,334) were students who had graduated from public high schools, of which 23,676 were women and 15,658, men, 51% more women than men. Of the total number of candidates approved for enrollment, 44% belonged to this group.

We, then, found that private network applicants in 2010 were 42,435, 59% of the total number of applicants, of which 24,308 were women and 18,126, men, i.e., 34% more women than men. This group represented 70% of the total number of approved candidates that year. Considering the total of candidates who attended secondary education in private schools, 22% were approved in the exams and, consequently, invited to enroll.

In 2018, private school candidates comprised 60% (59,313) of applicants, of which 23,394 were men and 35,919, women, a 54% difference. Although the proportion of the total number of applicants has changed little compared to 2010 figures, the percentage of candidates approved for enrollment in this group has fallen to 56%. That year, 17% of private school candidates passed the exams, a 5% decrease.

When we compare performance in the first vestibular phase between private and public school candidates, it is evident that the distortions were not corrected after the “new vestibular exams” were implemented.

Graph 1 - Evolution of the percentage of right answers between public and private school system candidates by year in the first vestibular phase (2010 to 2018).



Source: Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista. AVERSA, SOUZA, 2021.

The graph above represents the percentage difference between performance averages at the end of the first vestibular phase. It is evident that, despite the negative inflection between 2012 and 2014, the tendency is to maintain the differences in performance of the compared groups at levels higher than 30% of correct answers.

Public school candidates, who theoretically would benefit from the changes in the vestibular, showed no improvement in their performance in the first exam phase, widening the difference in relation to private school applicants from 33% to 37%, which shows that the new UNESP vestibular, as a model to promote better performance of public school students in its selection process, failed to have a significant impact on test results. This leads us to consider that the educational policies implemented in public schools, even if Unesp has aimed to bring its questions closer to the contents and learning processes indicated in curriculum proposals, were unable to produce any change in the level of students' education.

Cury and Souza (2015), when analyzing student performance in the first year of the implementation of policies to approximate Unesp vestibular exams to the São Paulo curriculum, indicate that:

a specificity occurred in 2010, when the performance of enrolled students from public schools was 4% higher in question two than the overall performance of enrolled students, a phenomenon that had not been observed in the period of analysis. This also occurred in question 13, although to a lesser extent, about 1% more for public school candidates. (CURY, SOUZA, 2015, p.3864).

The authors point out that only the fact that these questions were identical to the exercise shown in students' booklets (São Paulo State curriculum) enabled public school candidates to perform better than private school ones. In general, this fails to result in a difference in the formative distances between these two student groups.

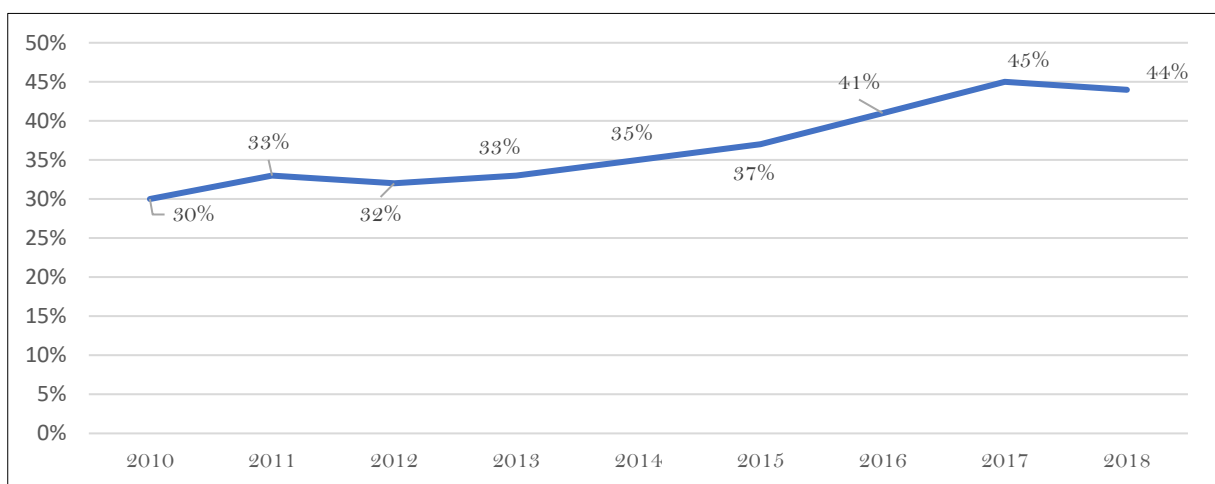
Table 1 shows that, due to their inability to carry out inclusion, curricular policies fail to establish a tendency toward access democratization, but in the gradual expansion of the quota policy for public school students manages to do so, reaching 50% of 2018 vacancies. In total, 70% of all candidates who were approved for enrollment in 2010 had mostly studied in private high schools. This number has shrunk to 56% in 2018. Consequently, public school graduates' the percentage of enrollment increased from 30% to 44% during the years of our survey (Graph 2).

Table 1 - Proportion of candidates' application, enrollment and their variation by analytical groups - UNESP 2010 and 2018.

| Analytic Groups | 2010 (A) | | 2018 (B) | | Variation (A/B) | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| | Applicants | Enrolled | Applic. | Enrolled | Applic. | Enrolled |
| Public High School Graduates/Egressed | 41% | 30% | 40% | 44% | (-1%) | 14% |
| Private High School Graduates | 59% | 70% | 60% | 56% | 1% | (-14%) |

Source: Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista. AVERSA, SOUZA, 2021.

Graph 2 - Percentage of public-school applicants approved for enrollment in 2010 to 2018 - Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP).



Source: Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista. AVERSA, SOUZA, 2021.

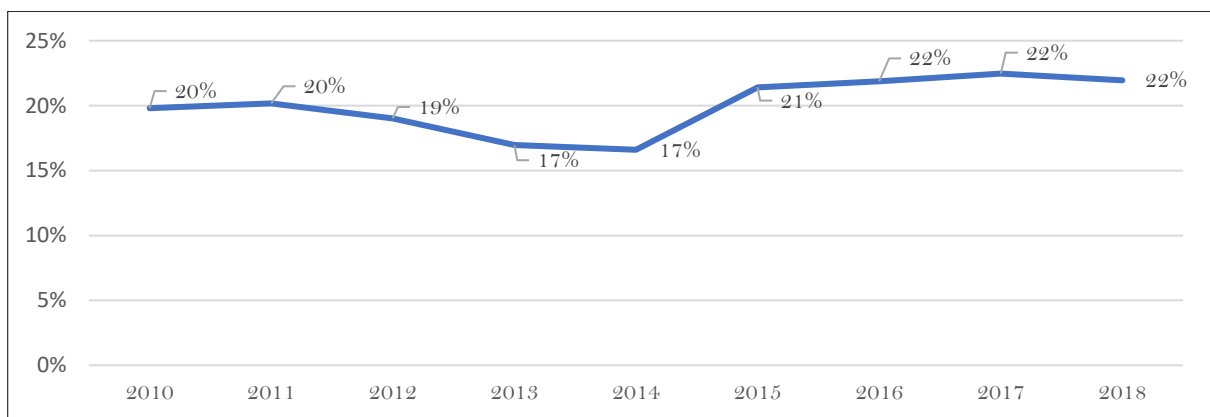
Considering the affirmative policies linked to ethnic-racial issues, we found that 73% of the self-declared Black group who took the first vestibular phase in 2010 mostly or entirely attended secondary education in public schools. That year, self-declared white candidates numbered 56,115, 78% of the total, of which 23,357 were men and 32,758, women, a 40% difference. Of these, 47% attended secondary education in public institutions and 10,816 were approved for enrollment, representing 81% of total approvals that year. In 2010, 19% of self-declared white candidates who took the vestibular were approved.

In the last year of our investigation, 2018, self-declared Black candidates represented 5% of the total enrolled candidates who took the first vestibular phase, numbering 5,099 representatives, of which 2,071 declared themselves men and 3,028, women, a 46% difference. Of these, 68% attended most or the entirety of their secondary education in public schools. At the end of the process, 919 applicants were approved for enrollment, representing 5% of the total number of applicants that year. In 2018, 18% of self-declared Black candidates who took the vestibular were approved, a 5% increase in relation to 2010, in which only 13% of self-declared Black candidates had been approved for enrollment.

In comparison, self-declared whites numbered 70,826 candidates in 2018, i.e., 72% of the total applicants who took the first vestibular phase, with 27,684 being men and 43,142 women, a 56% difference. Of the more than 70 thousand self-declared white candidates that year, 33% were public high school graduates. At the end of the selection process, 18% of the self-declared white candidates who took the vestibular were approved for enrollment. In absolute numbers, of the total 18,067 candidates invited to enroll that year, 12,943 were self-declared white candidates (60% of approvals), of which 4837 were public high school graduates.

We observed that the number of Black women, in relation to the number of black men, increased from 23% in 2010 to 46% in 2018. There was also an increase in the percentage of white women relative to the number of white men in the period of our investigation, from 40% in 2010 to 56% in 2018. What we observe by looking at these data is that public university spaces are still hegemonically white, with a reduced change in recent years, at least on the part of its students since, although the amount of self-declared black applicants has timidly expanded, the proportion of self-declared white applicants approved for enrollment decreased by more than 20% during the years of this research.

Graph 3 - Percentage evolution of difference in right answers between self-declared white and self-declared black candidates by year in the first vestibular phase (2010 to 2018).



Source: Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista. AVERSA, SOUZA, 2021.

We can see that, in 2010, the difference in performance between white and Black candidates at the end of the first vestibular phase was 20% of the total number of correct answers and that, among small variations, it evolved to 22% in 2018. Natural Science and Mathematics are the areas in which we noticed the greatest evolution in the disparity of results during the years analyzed.

We highlight the fact that, despite the Sistema de Reserva de Vagas para Educação Básica Pública (Vacancy Reservation System for Public Basic Education)

allocating 35% of the total reserved vacancies to self-declared Black, mixed-race or Indigenous candidates, there is little significant variation in the number of self-declared Black candidates approved for enrollment in relation to the total between 2010 and 2018, a fact that reflects the deep social exclusion that manifests itself in entrance rates into public universities.

Table 2- Proportion of applicants, enrolled candidates, and their variation by analytical groups - UNESP 2010 and 2018.

| Analytic Groups | 2010 (A) | | 2018 (B) | | Variation (A/B) | |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| | Applic. | Enrolled | Applic. | Enrolled | Applic. | Enrolled |
| Self-declared Black | 3% | 2% | 5% | 5% | 2% | 3% |
| Self-declared White | 78% | 81% | 72% | 60% | (-6%) | (-21%) |

Source: Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista AVERSA, SOUZA, 2021.

According to the data presented, we also observe that self-declared white candidates' representativeness has slightly decreased both among the total number of candidates and those approved for enrollment. In 2010, 81% of approved candidates in the vestibular declared themselves white. This percentage was progressively reduced until it reached 60% in the final year of the survey.

A group that was not the target of our investigation but has great representativeness are candidates who self-reported having brown skin. They are part of the group of participants in the selection process representing a considerable portion of the total. In 2010, they comprised 9,365 candidates, 13% of the total number of participants in the first vestibular phase, and, of these, 1,498 were approved, 11% of the total number of approvals for enrollment. In 2018, self-declared brown candidates numbered 18,373, 19% of the participants in the first vestibular phase, of which 3,224 were approved for enrollment, 18% of the total. This datum indicates that the largest reduction in vacancies previously linked to white students must have been absorbed by brown students.

Naturally, we do not defend any colorism thesis in the field of representation and ethnic identity, but Brazilian "morenism"⁹ accompanies the changes in inequality and social insertion. This datum only reinforces the structural racism in our society since it follows ethnic traits whose essence is color; the more Black, the more excluded. The remaining candidates who make up the group of applicants for admission to public higher education declared themselves to have yellow or Indigenous skin.

⁹ From *moreno* – a denomination for people born from interracial relationships with a lighter complexion (children of white and Black people).

In relation to public school candidates, their total number of approvals in vestibular exams grew 14% in the reference years of this research. The importance of the policy of reserving vacancies to democratize access to public higher education is evident, vis-à-vis the discrepant reality in which our basic education system finds itself. Making the public university space accessible is a fundamental step towards social justice, since

(...) the introduction of quotas, especially if adopted in the most competitive courses, will bring a new profile of student who, if lacking in a series of contents tested in the vestibular (and that are generally disregarded later in the graduation courses), is rich in others, resulting from a greater knowledge of the real country, the one where the majority of the population lives, which will bring a quality gain to the institutions of higher education, not to mention those coming from a more diversified social composition (PINTO, 2004, p.753).

As Professor Whitaker (1983) wisely notes, the costs of this level of education, considering the expenditure required for years of study, especially in private institutions, are an impediment that only affects the less economically favored portion of the population.

For a rich student, the prospect of paying tuition fees is nothing terrifying, but for the children of the middle classes, especially in some sectors undergoing a rapid process of proletarianization, the non-existence of a free university can mean giving up higher education. (WHITAKER, 1983, p.129).

Thus, it is obviously not about conceiving vestibular exams simply as an elitist phenomenon that, to integrate part of society, must reduce its scientific rigor, but to rethink which mechanisms can be created before and after access, so that the more disadvantaged sections of society can repair the formative damages caused by a public school (primary and secondary) that is also excluding. Thus, our intention here is to elucidate the problems involving public schools as opposed to public universities, highlighting the disarray between these spheres of education, without losing the fundamental meaning of the university, based on the freedom of investigative research and scientific dissemination.

Quota policies have been employed in Brazil in the processes of admission to public universities. They are neither only a policy of reparation for historical damages nor simply a matter of social justice for those assisted by a deficient public education system and for the poorest who were historically excluded from access to university, but they effectively are also a policy of social interest in the sense of reducing the inequalities present in our context.

Conclusions

We conclude, based on the results obtained in this research, that the problems concerning the performance of public-school candidates in vestibular exams are deeper than the way contents are worked and showed. Vestibular exam reformulation is based on the hypothesis that bringing the content of tests closer to the curriculum proposals of São Paulo State would have positive effects on public school candidates' performance in São Paulo. Based on the analysis of candidates' performance, what we show is that the increase in the percentage of those approved for enrollment in this group, from 30% in 2010 to 44% in 2018, is a result of the vacancy reservation program, and not of the curriculum approximation policy, which neither generated positive results in candidates' performance nor combated the problem of access inequality via vestibular exams.

Our research is based on the analysis of candidates' performance with the intention of showing that the curriculum approximation policy adopted in 2010 by VUNESP is unconsolidated as an affirmative policy, since it failed to guarantee the access of public school students to a public university, which the quota policy achieved since the existing disproportions between the groups, regarding their average performance in the first vestibular phase, increased or remained constant. Besides this fact, it is important to highlight the fact that the gap between public and private school students' performance is increasing, which is indicative of the disastrous policies adopted by the public basic education system of São Paulo, linked to the liberal pedagogy of skills and competencies.

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