

## Neoliberal reforms and policies for expanding Professional and Technological Education (EPT) in the National Education Plans (PNEs)<sup>1</sup>

*Reformas neoliberais e políticas de expansão da Educação Profissional e Tecnológica (EPT) nos Planos Nacionais de Educação (PNEs)*

*Reformas neoliberales y políticas de expansión de la Educación Profesional y Tecnológica (EPT) en los Planes Nacionales de Educación (PNEs)*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to analyze the policies for expanding the provision of Professional and Technological Education integrated with Secondary Education, as established by the Brazilian National Education Plans for 2001–2010 and 2014–2024. Based on data from National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira reports, it is observed that the expansion of Professional and Technological Education occurred primarily through the growth of private-sector initiatives, given the absence of increased public funding. This process favored the adoption of public-private partnerships and the introduction of corporate-driven products, services, programs, courses, and training within the public education system. Consequently, these expansion policies have contributed to the privatization of Professional and Technological Education, undermining efforts to democratize access to mid-level professional and technological education. The study argues that reforms in Brazilian educational legislation over recent decades have been influenced by agreements with international agencies representing neoliberal interests, thereby compromising the right to equitable education and social justice.

**Keywords:** Professional and Technological Education; Neoliberalism; Educational Policy; Educational Legislation; Reforms.

**Resumo:** O artigo objetiva desenvolver a análise das políticas de expansão da oferta da EPT integrada ao Ensino Médio, estabelecidas pelos Planos Nacionais de Educação 2001-2010 e 2014-2024. Com base nos dados dos Relatórios do INEP, observa-se que a expansão da oferta da EPT se deu mediante crescimento da iniciativa privada uma vez que não houve incremento no financiamento público e foram favorecidas a adoção de parcerias público-privadas e a introdução de pacotes de produtos, prestação de serviços, programas, cursos e treinamentos fornecidos por setores empresariais na rede pública. Assim, as políticas de expansão serviram

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para o incremento da privatização da EPT em detrimento da democratização do acesso à formação profissional e tecnológica de nível médio. Compreende-se que as reformas na legislação educacional brasileira, nas últimas décadas, têm sido induzidas pelos acordos firmados com agências internacionais que representam interesses neoliberais, o que compromete o direito à educação com equidade e justiça social.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Profissional e Tecnológica; Neoliberalismo; Política Educacional; Legislação Educacional; Reformas.

**Resumen:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las políticas de expansión de la oferta de la Educación Profesional y Tecnológica (EPT) integrada a la Educación Secundaria, establecidas por los Planes Nacionales de Educación (PNEs) de Brasil para los períodos 2001–2010 y 2014–2024. Con base en los datos de los Informes del INEP, se observa que la expansión de la EPT se produjo mediante el crecimiento de iniciativas del sector privado debido a la ausencia de incremento en el financiamiento público. Este proceso favoreció la adopción de asociaciones público-privadas y la introducción de productos, servicios, programas, cursos y capacitaciones impulsados por empresas en la red pública. Así, las políticas de expansión contribuyeron a la privatización de la EPT, perjudicando los esfuerzos por democratizar el acceso a la formación profesional y tecnológica de nivel medio. El estudio sostiene que las reformas en la legislación educativa brasileña en las últimas décadas han sido inducidas por acuerdos con agencias internacionales que representan intereses neoliberales, lo que compromete el derecho a una educación equitativa y a la justicia social.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Profesional y Tecnológica; Neoliberalismo; Política Educativa; Legislación Educativa; Reformas.

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## Introduction

This article presents the results achieved in the research of the Master's Program in Education during the 2024-2025 period, which primarily focused on the analysis of the reforms within Brazilian educational policies under the influence of the global neoliberal agendas regarding the changes in the Brazilian educational legislation on the offer of Professional and Technological Education integrated with Secondary Education and the related effects to the terms ensuring equitable access to education and social justice.

The analysis of the policies in the development of this research is based on a post-structuralist theoretical-epistemological perspective, particularly on the concepts of Foucault (2006; 2008), and the studies of Ball (2022). On what concerns neoliberalism, such is understood as a rationality that works by means of governmental technologies and devices monitoring the behaviors of the agents and society as a whole, foreseeing risks, establishing goals, and promoting the balance between losses and gains, as a way of encouraging individual and social entrepreneurship.

Taking into account the geopolitical scenario of the expansion of neoliberalism, the idea is to understand the reforms in Brazilian Professional and Technological Education as fabricated policies in the game of influences of the global neoliberal agenda to meet the demands for vocational and technological training for qualification and insertion in the labour market, which challenge the Federative Units, agents, societies, and educational institutions and their systems.

In the Dissertation, the analysis of the Professional and Technological Education offer and expansion policies' timeline included the Brazilian Military Dictatorship period (1964–1982), through the redemocratization period when the current Brazilian Constitution was enacted in 1988, then with the sanctioning of Brazilian Law no. 9.394/96 (Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education), which culminated in the creation of the National Education Plans, 2001–2010 and 2014–2024 periods, with a special mention in this historical and political moment to the enactment of Brazilian Law no. 11.892/08 (29 December 2008), creating both the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific and Technological Education and the Federal Institutes of Education.

Thus, it can be highlighted that vocational technical education only became a priority as a promoted policy of the Brazilian government in the second half of the Twentieth Century, especially during the military regime (1964–1982). What was at stake at that moment was a developmentalist project based on international agreements and foreign capital, particularly from the United States.

After this period of great political and democratic backsliding and the tenacity of the resistance movements in those dark days, a new political landscape emerged in the 1980s, with the promulgation of a Federal Constitution in 5 October 1988, in a historic landmark for democracy and also for education and its policies directed towards the public interest. Since then, the Brazilian Government is responsible for guaranteeing the social rights that its *Carta Magna* (i.e., the Federal Constitution) promotes, assuring the achievement of full citizenship and promotion of a decent life for everyone. Article 205 of the Constitution says: “Education, which is the right of all and duty of the State and of the family, shall be promoted and fostered with the cooperation of society, with a view to the full development of people, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship and their qualification for work.”

It turns out that, after the 1990s, the political agendas in dispute of the global scenario started to promote successive reforms in educational policies in several countries whose economies have been directed towards the tenets of global capitalism, aided by the logics of competitiveness, productivity, effectiveness and efficiency in terms of results, entrepreneurship, and meritocracy (Ball, 2022).

In the midst of the neoliberal escalation, the Brazilian Government took part in the World Conference on Education for All, in three successive historical encounters in three different countries (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990; Dakar, Senegal, 2000; Icheon, South Korea, 2015), making

commitments for the equal access to education for poverty reduction, for improving the quality of education, reflecting in the reduction of school dropout and grade repetition, the technical and vocational training for the employability and increase of capitalist productivity, according to World Bank Group, UNESCO and UNICEF (Souza, Kerbaux, 2018).

Professional and Technological Education offer and expansion policies were priorities of the Brazilian Government when setting the goals and strategies for the National Education Plans for the 2001-2010 and 2014-2024 periods. Hence, the proposed analysis in this text considers it relevant to understand that the access to the training and professionalization of young and adult students are constituted before disputes of antagonistic interests around distinct objectives and projects, on the one hand, and that business sectors defend the adjustment of educational policies promoted by the State to the needs of capitalist employability, on the other hand, social segments demand public policies to guarantee education with equity and social justice. In order to understand that game of disputes, it is necessary to investigate the reforms promoted by the State through the definition of the National Education Plans goals and the results achieved.

### **National Education Plan 2001-2010: Professional and Technological Education offer**

National Education Plan - 2001-2010 period, was established through Brazilian Law no. 10.172/01 (9 January 2001) constituted by the set of 20 goals accompanied by 170 strategies, which were defined from a reduction of those that were planned and were not met in the National Education Plan of the previous decade. It is important to highlight that the National Education Plan, basically, pointed to a great impact on the general framework of enrollment in Basic Education and for quality improvement understood as an increase in the Basic Education Development Index, an indicator for measuring the quality of education that is calculated based on school flow rates (enrollment, failure and dropout) and the results obtained by public school students in national assessments. Here are the following goals established for National Education Plan, 2001-2010 period:

- Universalize school attendance for the entire population from 15 (fifteen) to 17 (seventeen) years of age by 2016, and raise the net enrollment rate in Secondary Education to 85% (eighty-five percent) by the end of the duration of this National Education Plan (goal 3);
- Promote the quality of basic education at all stages and modalities, with the improvement of school flow and learning, in order to reach the following national average grades for the Basic Education Development Index: 6.0 in the early years of Brazil's "Elementary/Primary School"; 5.5 in the final years of Brazil's "Middle School/Junior High School"; 5.2 in Brazil's "High School"/secondary education (goal 7);

- Raise the average educational level of the population from 18 (eighteen) to 29 (twenty-nine) years, in order to reach at least 12 (twelve) years of study in the last year of this plan, for the populations of the countryside, the region with the lowest education level in the country and the 25% (twenty-five percent) poorer, and equalize the average educational level among blacks and non-blacks declared to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (goal 8);
- Raise the literacy rate of the population aged 15 (fifteen) or older to 93.5% (ninety-three and five-tenths percent) by 2015 and, by the end of this National Education Plan, eradicate absolute illiteracy and reduce functional illiteracy rate by 50% (fifty percent) (goal 9).

With respect to the Professional and Technological Education expansion policy, goals 10 and 11 respectively pointed this way, indicating that at least 25% (twenty-five percent) of the enrollments in Youth and Adult Education in Primary and Secondary Education would be offered in an integrated form to vocational education, and that enrollments in the Professional and Technological Education would triple, ensuring the quality of the offer and at least 50% (fifty percent) of the expansion in the public segment (Brazil, 2001).

Despite maintaining the discourse of the universalization of access, at the end of National Education Plan 2001-2010, the planned public investments deemed necessary to guarantee the right to education with equity and social justice were not expanded. This made it difficult to meet the quantitative goals of expansion of the supply and maintenance of education networks, which were precarious by the lack of appropriate conditions of infrastructure and teaching work. But it was to be expected that, without sufficient public investment, all these goals would not be fully achieved. Aguiar (2010) points out that the goal of increasing investment in education accounting for 7% of the Brazilian GDP, foreseen in National Education Plan 2001-2010 was not reached, which exposes the persistence of a logic of scarcity of public investment in a strong evidence of the adjustment of Brazilian educational policies to neoliberal agendas that limit the role of the state in guaranteeing the right to education. The lack of financial resources mainly affects schools located in peripheral regions that include rural, indigenous and low-income populations, showing that educational policies, especially in contexts of austerity, perpetuate social and educational inequalities instead of ceasing them.

After the period of validity of National Education Plan 2001-2010, National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira reports show the growth of enrollment in primary education, reaching 97.6% of the population aged between 6 and 17 years, although, more than 40% of students of this stage at that moment were not in the age group corresponding to each grade, and took, on average, ten years to complete the first stage of Basic Education. With regard to enrollments in secondary education, the greater growth occurred in the courses that offered this stage articulated to Professional and Technological Education (780,162 students in 2007), 41% of

the enrollments correspond to night schools, and also there were high rates of school grade-age discrepancy (a little more than 50% of secondary education enrollments corresponded to the appropriate age group from 15 to 17 years).

Thus, Aguiar (2010) highlights that the results of National Education Plan 2001-2010 show the discrepancy between the population at age suitable for secondary education and effective enrollment. In 2007, for example, those between the ages of 15 to 17 years amounted to about 10.262 million young people, but only 50% of the enrollments corresponded to students at the expected age, while 3,643,528 enrolled were 18 years or older. This age-school grade distortion, associated with high grade repetition and school dropout rates, signaled the urgency of multitemporal investments to ensure timely completion and quality of education. For the author, such data reinforce the need for targeted policies that not only broaden access, but also correct historical inequalities and promote the efficiency of the education system.

However, the execution of Brazilian National Education Plan 2001-2010 was also affected by the disputes around the 2002 Brazilian presidential election, and the candidacy of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva president-elect of Brazil from 2003-2011 - had a strong and complex coalition between old and new political leaders who represented absolutely distinct and conflicting interests - popular, business and trade union segments, artists, intellectuals and clerics of various denominations -, a diffuse alliance in relation to the direction to be taken to implement reforms in times of deepening social inequalities.

During Lula's first tenure (2003-2011) there were significant changes in Brazilian educational policies. The pace of reforms in the field of educational policies was intense. The disputes around the allocation of financial resources for public policies were heated. In 2007, the Brazilian government replaced the Fund for Maintenance and Development of the Fundamental Education and Valorization of Teaching by the Fund for the Development of Basic Education and Appreciation of the Teaching Profession, and since then, federal funds have been allocated to the two stages of Basic Education - Primary and Secondary Education.

At that time, there was an emphasis on vocational education in Secondary Education educational policies, stimulating the growth of technical courses offered in public schools and by private organizations. Between 1991 and 2004, there was an expansion of enrollments in the country's Secondary Schools, from a total of 3,772,698 students entering secondary education to a total of 9,169,357 enrollments, of which 4,660,419 corresponded to students aged 15 to 17 (Silva; Oliveira, 2023).

It is also worth mentioning the substantial changes in Basic Education evaluation policies carried out by the Lula government, which began to link the transfers of financial



resources via Fund for the Development of Basic Education to state and municipal education networks by measuring the performances of schools and students in national assessments - Brazil Test, directed towards all nine school grades of primary education and the National High School Exam used to measure the performance of students in the 3rd year of secondary education, both measured every two years in all public schools in the country (Voss, 2012).

Voss' thesis (2012) on the educational policies starting with the Education Development Plan, created in 2006, reinforces the understanding of the adjustment of Brazilian educational policies promoted by the state to neoliberal patterns. With the Education Development Plan, the federal government has extended the link between the evaluation policy for improving the quality of education through Basic Education Development Index results to the management of basic education by municipalities and states. The federal entities that mobilized in the elaboration of the Plan of Articulated Actions, where improvements were planned in the infrastructure conditions of schools, teacher training, reduction of school dropout and grade repetition, among other measures aimed at raising the Basic Education Development Index have come to rely on technical support and financial subsidies from the Union, through the conclusion of agreements of the Ministry of Education with municipal and state public education networks. As such, the Brazilian public educational policies promoted by the federal government associated to the states and municipalities and aimed at improving the quality of education measured by Basic Education Development Index, materialize the logic of accountability and control of results, in a clear sign of the adjustment of policies to a neoliberal rationality (Voss, 2011).

It is also necessary to point out the strategies provided in National Education Plan 2001-2010 for compliance with the policy of universalization of access to higher education, using the results obtained by students in High School Exam; and, the policies to encourage schools that improve their performance in Basic Education Development Index, so as to value the merit of the faculty, the school board and the school community. Thus, National Education Plan 2001-2010 shows its connection to a neoliberal rationality that emphasizes efficiency and results-based management, since the definition of its goals and strategies prioritized the quantitative expansion of enrollments and the improvement of results in terms of reducing school dropout and grade repetition, as well as the increase of Basic Education Development Index, without the expectation of greater public investment and at the mercy of the conditions in which the education networks, schools and communities are called to achieve the expected results, which reinforces management administration practices in Brazilian education.

However, the socioeconomic indicators obtained from the 2005 National Household Sample Survey showed the continuity of structural inequalities in access to social quality

education in Brazil. According to Aguiar (2010), the data prove a direct link between income and educational level, pointing out that the economically vulnerable populations had significantly lower educational indexes. Besides, the historical disparities between rural and urban areas, as well as between ethnic-racial groups - white, black and indigenous -, persisted, revealing the complexity of the challenge faced by the State and society regarding the guarantee of access to education. These facts, according to the author, indicate the need for coordinated efforts and more robust public policies to universalize the right to education, overcoming not only economic barriers, but also geographical and racial inequalities rooted in the Brazilian social structure.

The expansion of secondary education in 2004 is also highlighted by Krawczyk (2014), which presents the figure of 9.17 million students enrolled (a growth of 34.5% in ten years). However, the author says that the results achieved do not prevent the change of social inequalities in terms of different regions, races and genders in the group of students who can enter this stage of education. In addition, there was a decrease in enrollments in 2007 and, in the period from 2008 to 2011, a new growth. According to this author: "this resumption of growth has to do with the implementation of the Fund for the Development of Basic Education and Appreciation of the Teaching Profession, which has stimulated the growth of vacancies, since specific financial resources would be available" (Krawczyk, 2014, p. 23).

Therefore, it is essential to understand that Brazilian educational policies implemented by the government in the context of the expansion of neoliberalism at a global level, operate through the discourse of quality arising from business culture, as emphasized by Krawczyk, (2014):

The management model (or technology) today valued for its efficiency and the pedagogical proposal that accompanies it form together a set of individual attributes to other attributes known of market relations: values and behaviors appropriate to the reproduction of the current stage of capitalism. From them derives a concept of educational quality proper to the business culture, which is based in competitiveness, efficiency, individualism, leadership, control of results and short-term return. In schools that adopt this concept there is a simulation, through the pedagogical model, of the strategies and skills necessary for a professional and/ or business enterprise, depending on the "dream of each student". It is the construction of a future based on the idea of individual effort, in a world "as it is", in which critical understanding capable of transforming it is not a thing. (Krawczyk, 2014, p. 33).

Although there are different curricular proposals in the Brazilian states in terms of the format of the secondary education courses, the curricular policies coming from the federal government force the national standardization of this level of education. Regarding secondary education, in 2008, after the signing of Brazilian Decree no. 5.154 and Brazilian Law 11.741 (16 July



2008), a new reform was instituted that made return to the concomitance of vocational training and propaedeutics. These reforms set the tone for numerous adjustments in the curriculum organization of secondary education. Krawczyk (2014) emphasizes that the intense reforms in the educational legislation regarding this stage of education constitute a complex and controversial process of defining policies and strategies to improve the school performance indexes, which has since been done in the game of disputes between different actors and political segments:

There is the federal government, with programs proposing a new pedagogical and organizational approach. There are the state departments of education, which bear the greater weight of the offer of enrollments, with the responsibility to meet the demands and implement ideas, strategies and actions. And there are also private actors, linked to the business world (foundations, institutes, NGOs, consulting companies), who not only offer material help to the public school, but also offer assistance to its management and even strongly influence curricular proposals. (Krawczyk, 2014, p. 25)

In 2009, the federal government created the Innovative High School Program, which offered technical and financial support to the Brazilian states where secondary education incorporated the propaedeutic character along with preparation for work. The curricular reorganization of schools was established assuming the ideas to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge, through the flexibilization of the curriculum and interdisciplinary articulation, through the promotion of pedagogical activities that favor the initiative, the autonomy and social protagonism of young people, based on work, science, technology and culture. In the same vein, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education were approved through CNE/CEB Opinion no. 7/2010 and CNE/CEB Resolution no. 4/2010 and, in 2011, new specific curriculum guidelines for secondary education were provided with CNE/CEB Opinion no. 05/2011 (Ferreti, 2018).

The results of Krawczyk's research (2014) on the configuration of secondary education in the State of São Paulo, show a tendency to offer this stage in full-time school mode, through the extension of the school day (morning, evening and night periods), as well as the expansion of the Professional and Technological Education offer integrated to secondary education, which denotes the congruence between state administrations and policies encouraged by the federal government at that time.

As a result, several different modalities and formats of this stage of education in Brazil took form, distributed in the following: "standard" Secondary Education (present in most public high schools in the country) and part-time (diurnal or nocturnal); Professional and Technological Education integrated with Secondary Education; Secondary Education concomitant with Professional and Technological Education (where both courses take place at the same time but can be taken in different institutions); Integral Secondary Education (or full-time); semi-integral Secondary Education (two full-time days); and integral Secondary

Education with shared management, in these occasions, the schools are managed by a professional of the public network and a representative of the company that offers the infrastructure and the human, technical and material resources, as well, elaborates pedagogical proposals to be followed in the curricular organization of Secondary Education in these educational institutions (Krawczyk, 2011).

According to Aguiar (2010) the absence of a clear identity of Secondary Education that oscillates between propedeutic, academic, professional or integrated proposals remains as a structural challenge for education in Brazil. According to data from the Census of Basic Education (MEC, 2010), highlighted by the author, enrollment in Professional and Technological Education integrated with Secondary Education reached 780,162 thousand students in 2007, indicating significant growth. However, these advances do not eliminate the need to increase state and municipal investments in order to universalize access to this stage of education integrated or not with Professional and Technological Education. Next, the analysis carried out in this text turns its attention to National Education Plans *2014-2024* period.

### **National Education Plan 2014-2024 period: Professional and Technological Education expansion goals**

National Education Plan 2014-2024 period, set very ambitious goals regarding the expansion of Professional and Technological Education integrated with Youth and Adult Education and Secondary Education, expecting an increase in the number of enrollments in the public network. It is also worth mentioning Brazilian Law no. 13.415/17 (Brazil, 2017), taking into account that this law meets the goals of National Education Plan 2014-2024, in which the State indicates public-private partnerships and the modality of Distance Education, as strategies to expand the vacancies in Secondary Education and Professional and Technological Education offer. In this sense:

It is pertinent to highlight both *PNE 2001-2010* and *PNE 2014-2024*, given the planned goals of increase in the offering of integrated Secondary Education with *ETP*, as well as the *EJA* modality, which would imply a greater number of vacancies, of education staff, of equipment, improvements in the facilities of municipal and state educational institutions of the network of public schools for Basic Education. However, these policies did not count on the increase in public funding foreseen in the *PNEs* to account for the repressed demand, since they actually reflected in the expansion of the private network and the investments of national entrepreneurship in the public system through public-private partnerships, the introduction of product packages, didactic and technological inputs, courses of didactic-pedagogical training, provision of services and programs marketed by national and international companies in public schools. (Voss; Krakhecke; Silva, 2024, p. 69-70)

According to the goals of National Education Plan 2014-2024, it was intended to equalize the level of education between men and women of white populations - with higher income, living in urban areas and regions with higher education - in relation to black populations, to people from the countryside, the less educated regions in the country and the poorest 25% (twenty-five percent). In other words, it is meant to equalize the level of average education between social segments with greater and lesser access to public policies guaranteeing the right to education, in order to increase the population in the age group from 18 to 29 years of age, with at least twelve years of education, until the last year of National Education Plan 2014-2024 (Brazil, 2014).

Goal 8 was consistent with goal 9 of raising the literacy rate of the population aged 15 years and over to 93.5% and, by the end of National Education Plan 2014-2024, providing for the eradication of absolute illiteracy (non-literate people) and a 50% reduction in the rate of functional illiteracy (people with less than 4 years of education). Also with regard to the goals of average schooling, National Education Plan 2014-2024 pointed to the raising of 12 years of study, in order to reduce inequalities of income, ethnic-racial and territorial inequalities in the Brazilian context.

In 2024, *INEP* launched the Report of the Fifth Cycle of Monitoring of the Goals of National Education Plan 2014-2024 (Brazil, 2024) in which it shows the results achieved by the country in the last ten years. In this research, it is important to analyze goals 8 to 12, which are related to the policy of expansion of the Professional and Technological Education offer integrated with Youth and Adult Education and Secondary Education.

According to the conclusions of the Report, "between 2012 and 2023, the literacy rate of the population aged 15 years or more in Brazil registered an increase of 2.8 percentage points (p.p.), evolving from 91.8% in 2012 to 94.6% in 2023" (Brazil, 2024, p. 212). However, the disparity of results among the regions of the country is noted, since "the standard of literacy in the South, Southeast and Central-West regions was characterized by higher rates than observed in the national average. The North and Northeast regions presented lower rates than the national ones in this period" (Brazil, 2024, p. 212).

It is also evidenced that the literacy rate in the urban area remained higher than in the rural area: "The disparity between urban and rural areas remained prominent throughout National Education Plan 2014-2024, despite the reduction of 3.7 percent, decreasing from 14.3 percent in 2012, an advantage in favor of the urban area, to 10.6 percent in 2023. This scenario shows a persistent educational inequality between urban and rural contexts" (Brazil, 2024, p. 216).

With regard to the inequalities caused by color/race in terms of literacy of the population aged 15 years or more, there was a significant reduction in disparities, since in the period from 2012

to 2023, the percentage of literate whites in this age group was already high (92.5%) and it increased to 96.8%, while the black population and mixed increased from 88.7% to 92.9%. As for gender circumstances, "the literacy rate of the female population reached 94.8%, while that of the male population reached 94.3%". The richest 25% at 15 years of age or older reached a literacy level of 98.8%, while the poorest 25% had virtually no increase in the literacy rate, as they remained in the 90% range from 2016 to 2022 (Brazil, 2024, p. 217).

Although the differences between the observed categories are not significant, it is possible to affirm that even with the improvement of the results of the goals of National Education Plan 2014–2024 in terms of the minimum level of schooling of 12 years, educational inequalities remain in terms of reducing absolute illiteracy among different social segments.

At the same time, the Report shows that functional illiteracy mainly affects rural populations: "the rate of functional illiteracy among the population aged 15 years and over in rural areas was 27.9%, while in urban areas it reached 10.0%" (Brazil, 2024, p. 222). Thus, "the goal of reducing functional illiteracy by 50% was not reached" (Brazil, 2024, p. 222).

It is important to highlight that the functional illiteracy of people aged 15 years or over has a direct connection with the problems of grade repetition and school dropout, and the absence of classes of complete primary school and secondary school in the peripheral areas of the neighborhoods, where there are groups with lower purchasing power, and also in the countryside, where most young people do not complete 12 years of schooling successfully. The reproduction of social inequality is evident, as the results of National Education Plan 2014–2024 show that the reduction in functional illiteracy of the poorest 25% remains insignificant (from 5.8% in 2016 to 4.7% in 2022) compared to young people aged 15 or over belonging to the wealthy classes of the richest 25% (from 22.8% in 2016 to 16.4% in 2022) (Brazil, 2024).

As for goal 10, which foresees an increase in the number of enrollments in Youth and Adult Education integrated with Professional and Technological Education, the *INEP* Report recognizes that the expected growth was not achieved, since, from 2016 to 2023, the percentage reached in this goal rose from 2.8% to 4.7%, way under the 25% indicated in Brazilian National Education Plan 2014–2024. In general, what is observed is the reduction of Youth and Adult Education enrollments: "In primary education, from 2013 to 2023, the number of regular Youth and Adult Education enrollments decreased by 37.0%, while the number of Youth and Adult Education enrollments integrated with vocational education decreased by 40.5%"; as for secondary education, the reduction resulted in "27.5% of the number of regular *EJA* enrollments" (Brazil, 2024, p. 231).

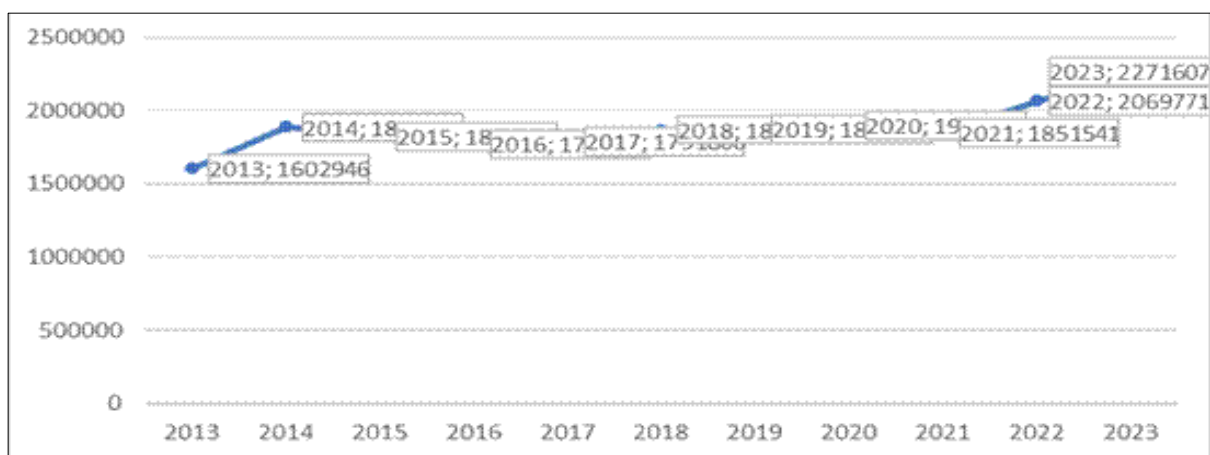
Youth and Adult Education Enrollments integrated with Professional and Technological Education showed a modest increase from 2013 to 2014 (0.8% to 1.1%),

followed by stabilization with a slight rise until 2015 (1.5%). However, from 2016, there is a sharp drop, reaching the most critical point in 2018, with only 1.3% adherence. This decline can be associated with factors such as reduced public investments, discontinuation of incentive programs and prioritization of educational policies focused on other modalities. The setback also reflects the contradictions inherent in a model that subordinates education to the immediate demands of the market, weakening integral training initiatives.

Starting from 2019, however, the data point to a significant recovery, culminating in a percentage increase to 4.7% in 2023. This resumption coincides with the restructuring of government programs that intensified the integration between Youth and Adult Education and Professional and Technological Education, especially through public-private partnerships. This dynamic reinforces the criticism of the neoliberal logic that permeates contemporary education, in which the integration between vocational training and formal education does not aim for a critical emancipation, but for the adaptation of individuals to the demands of capital. The oscillation of the enrollments, therefore, not only illustrates the volatility of educational policies in contexts of austerity, but also exposes the instrumentalization of education as a tool for productivity, to the detriment of its transformative social role.

In Goal 11 of Brazilian National Education Plan 2014–2024, it was intended to triple the enrollments in secondary education Professional and Technological Education, ensuring the quality of the offer and at least 50% expansion in the public segment, so as to reach 4.8 million enrollments in Professional and Technological Education integrated with secondary education by 2024. In the chart below are shown the data regarding the growth of enrollments in Professional and Technological Education integrated with secondary education:

Figure 1: Enrollments in Secondary Education Professional and Technological Education - Brazil (2013-2023).



Source: Brazil, 2024

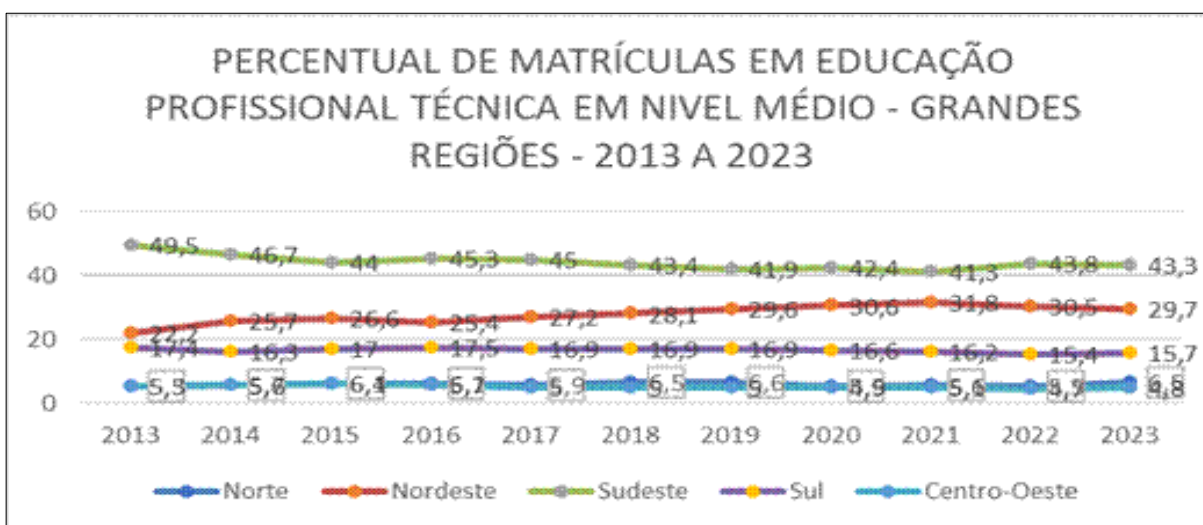


Although this goal was greatly expanded between 2021 and 2023, it was well below the proposed expectation, since, according to data from the *INEP Report* (Brazil, 2024), there is a significant deficit: in 2023, only 47.2% of the goal was reached (2.2 million enrollments).

However, according to the study of Silva and Oliveira (2023), the 2021 School Census shows that a total of 1,716,630 young people aged 15 to 17 still remained out of school, that this same year the country had a population of 9.5 million people in this age group, of which just over 400,000 did not have any school ties, and that 75.4% (6.4 million) were enrolled in secondary education and 18.9% (1.5 million) in primary education (Silva; Oliveira, 2023, p. 114), which indicates the historical problem of retention and age/grade distortion in relation to the transition from primary education to secondary education.

When analyzing the regional distribution of enrollment percentages in Professional and Technological Education integrated with secondary education in the period from 2015 to 2023, notably, the Southeast region experienced a decline in enrollments, from 2015 to 2021, partially recovering in the following biennium, while the Northeast region presented a continuous growth of the indexes throughout the entire period. Such Northeastern expansion coincides with the geographical displacement of strategic industrial sectors, especially the automobile industry, which closed factories in the Southeast region to establish new production plants in the Northeast region. This phenomenon clearly illustrates the argument of Ball (2022), according to which educational policies are structured according to the demands and movements of capital, operating under a logic commodified and guided by criteria of profitability and efficiency. The other regions maintained stability in their percentages, as shown by the following chart:

Figure 2: Enrollments in Secondary Education Professional and Technological Education by Regions – Brazil (2013-2023).

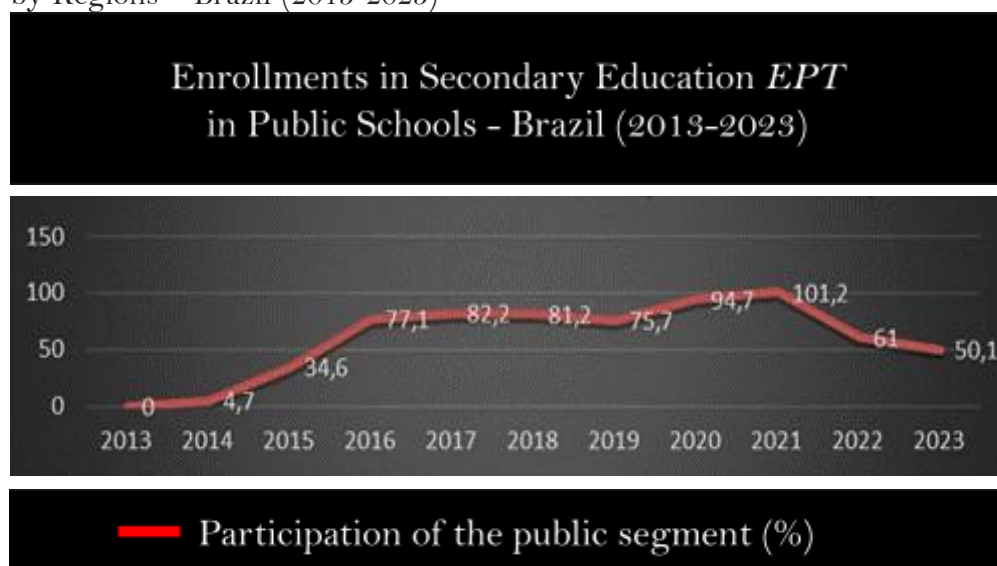


Source: Brazil, 2024



According to the *INEP* Report (Brazil, 2024), the distribution of enrollments in secondary education Education Professional and Technological between public and private institutions reveals a contrasting dynamic over the last decade. In 2014, a hegemony of the private sector stands out, with a peak of 68% of enrollments concentrated in these institutions, contrasting with 32% in the public sector. This initial imbalance can be attributed to the accelerated expansion of tax incentive policies to educational companies and the relaxation of regulations, which favored the activity of private entities. However, from 2015, there is a gradual reversal with the public sector. In 2021, the public sector assumed a leading role in the offer of Education Professional and Technological integrated with secondary education, reaching a preponderant participation of 101.2%, as shown by the following chart:

Figure 3: Enrollments in Secondary Education Professional and Technological Education by Regions – Brazil (2013-2023)



Source: Brazil, 2024

However, data for 2022 and 2023 point to a sharp recovery of the private sector, which reached 72% of enrollments in secondary education Education Professional and Technological, significantly surpassing the public sector (28%). This reversal coincides with the intensification of public-private partnerships. The exponential growth of private institutions also reflects the precariousness of public funding for Education Professional and Technological, combined with the growth of technical courses offered by business sectors and in the form of distance education (*EaD*), that has become a strong alternative for professional training aimed at self-entrepreneurship in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which ravaged the country, caused numerous deaths and led to the intensification of the precarization of the supply of jobs.

In general, all public basic education suffered significant losses during the pandemic, mainly due to the closure of schools and the adoption of remote learning. This also reflected in the high level gap between public and private secondary education Education Professional and Technological, with the private sector being much more favored and taking a major advantage.

In higher education, the *INEP* report shows that the growth was 40.5% in 2023, indicating insufficient progress, since goal 12 of Brazilian National Education Plan 2014-2024 aimed for the percentage target of 50%. The 25.9% net rate of schooling shows persistent inequalities, especially among marginalized socioeconomic groups (Brazil, 2024). The data presented in the next chart shows that, besides being insufficient, the expansion of enrollments in Higher Education also concentrated on private sector institutions, since in the public sector the growth was only 7.4%:

Therefore, based on the data from the Monitoring Report of the goals of Brazilian National Education Plan 2014-2024 Goals presented by *INEP*, it can be noted that during this period there was an expressive expansion of enrollment in Education Professional and Technological at secondary level in public education networks in Brazil. Parallel to this, the growth of Education Professional and Technological enrollments in higher education occurred in the private network.

It should be noted that the expansion of the Education Professional and Technological offer integrated with secondary education and higher education aims to meet the need for employability, which is an entrepreneurial demand. The analyzed data indicate the privatizing logic present in Brazilian National Education Plan 2014-2024 that essentially seeks to meet the demands of the corporations and the globalized market. Since one of the strategies foreseen in the expansion policy of Brazilian National Education Plan 2014-2024 is the expansion of public-private partnerships. The National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment, clearly exemplifies this alignment to neoliberalism. As pointed out by Frigotto (2018), *PRONATEC* implies an explicit appreciation of short technical courses, aligned to the needs of the labor market.

It is understood that the Education Professional and Technological expansion policy has a privatizing character, linked to the neoliberal rationality of productivism, business efficiency and competitiveness. Krawczyk (2014) highlights how the entrepreneurial presence in the formulation of educational policies, especially in Education Professional and Technological integrated with secondary education tends to shift the objectives from an integral and citizen training to a training that meets the immediate demands of the labor market.

The large portion of the Brazilian population formed by the poorest segments, including women, blacks and mixed, and also inhabitants of the suburbs and the countryside,

representing a high percentage of the population, rarely ascends to a higher level of schooling. According to the 2021 School Census conducted by *INEP*: "In 2021 the country had a population of 9.5 million young people in this age group, of which just over 400,000 did not have any school ties, and that 75.4% (6.4 million) were enrolled in secondary education and 18.9% (1.5 million) in primary education" (Silva; Oliveira, 2023, p. 114). Consequently, they end up occupying the informal or formal market of lower wages.

In this sense, it is pertinent to reaffirm that the improvement of the quality of education to business models does not account for the necessary changes in relation to social, ethnic-racial, gender and territorial inequalities of the suburbs and the countryside to have their right to education effectively guaranteed.

## Conclusion

Since the 1990s, neoliberalism has redefined the course of Brazilian education, replacing the guarantee of rights with a logic oriented towards efficiency and meritocracy. Policies such as the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education of 1996, and the National Education Plans consolidated a managerial model, aligned with global economic demands. As evidenced by Frigotto (2018), this transition transformed education into an instrument of fiscal adjustment, prioritizing quantitative metrics over structural investments. The emphasis on immediate results, such as enrollment rates, obscured historical inequalities, reconfiguring the educational system as an arena for the reproduction of social hierarchies.

The encouragement of public-private partnerships, especially through programs such as The National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment, prioritized short technical courses aimed at vulnerable populations. While urban and white young people attended higher education, black, poor and rural groups were directed to training aligned with the demands of the informal market.

This stratification reinforces the division between intellectual and manual work, reproducing inequalities of class and race. The naturalization of educational exclusions deepens historical marginalizations. Rural, black and indigenous populations face barriers such as inadequate school transportation and lack of contextualized teaching materials.

While the rhetoric of quality via performance evaluation metrics hides privileges, educational rankings lead schools to prioritize content dealt with on tests, emptying critical pedagogical proposals. Teachers, overburdened by bureaucratic demands, face low wages and precarious conditions, while being targeted for individual productivity.

Finally, it is proposed that the right to education as a public policy can only be desired

and built by breaking with neoliberalism policies. The main criticism of neoliberal educational reforms lies in the subordination of education to economic results, neglecting its role as a human right. Neoliberal policies of commodification of education compromise the vocational and technological training and secondary level aimed at full access to education and guarantee decent living conditions. Overcoming them requires rejecting the neoliberal mercantile logic and increasing investment of public resources in public education.

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