

The quality of education through public-private relations and the right to early childhood education in the municipality of Uberlândia-MG¹

A qualidade da educação mediante as relações público-privadas e o direito à educação infantil no município de Uberlândia-MG

Calidad educativa en la primera infancia: relaciones público-privadas y garantía del derecho en el municipio de Uberlândia-MG

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Abstract: This article aims to introduce the concept of quality in early childhood education, to identify how the right and quality of this stage of basic education have been implemented in the municipality of Uberlândia through the public-private relationship established with civil society organizations (CSOs) and also to identify how the right to quality early childhood education is presented in Brazilian national legislation. In order to achieve this goal, a bibliographical search and a document analysis were carried out. The research has shown that the legal situation regarding the right to early childhood education has evolved, but that the state is still reluctant to offer quality at this stage of education. We also found that education is provided through various institutional arrangements such as agreements and public-private relationships, which jeopardize the implementation of public and quality education for all.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Quality of education; Right to education; Public-private relationship.

Resumo: Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar o conceito de qualidade na educação infantil, identificar como o direito e a qualidade dessa etapa da educação básica têm se efetivado no município de Uberlândia, por meio da relação público-privada estabelecida com as Organizações da Sociedade Civil – OSCs. Visa ainda identificar como o direito à educação infantil de qualidade se apresenta na Legislação Nacional Brasileira. Para isso, foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica e análise documental. A pesquisa evidenciou que houve uma

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evolução no campo jurídico no que diz respeito ao direito à educação infantil; contudo, ainda existe uma resistência, por parte do Estado, na oferta de qualidade dessa etapa da educação. Observamos a educação sendo ofertada por meio de arranjos institucionais diversos, como é o caso dos convênios e da relação público-privado, o que compromete a efetivação de uma educação pública e de qualidade para todos.

Palavras-chave: Educação infantil; Qualidade da educação; Direito à educação; Relação público-privado.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza el concepto de calidad en la educación infantil y examina su implementación en el municipio de Uberlândia-MG (Brasil) a través de las asociaciones público-privadas con Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil (OSC). Asimismo, evalúa el reconocimiento del derecho a una educación infantil de calidad en la legislación brasileña. Mediante una metodología cualitativa basada en investigación bibliográfica y análisis documental, el estudio identifica avances en el marco jurídico pero evidencia resistencias estatales para garantizar estándares de calidad. Los resultados demuestran que la provisión educativa a través de convenios y alianza público-privada afecta la materialización de una educación pública de calidad, generando tensiones entre la expansión del acceso y el cumplimiento de los principios educativos fundamentales.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil; Calidad educativa; Derecho a la educación; Alianza público-privada.

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Introduction

The right to education in Brazil is marked by public policies of responsibility transfer, omission, and abandonment. However, it is a fundamental human right supported by national and international laws and regulations. Rooted in the values of democracy, freedom, and equality, this right was enshrined in the 1988 Federal Constitution (CF of 1988) as a social right.

Early childhood education, comprising daycare centers and preschools, is under the primary, though not exclusive, responsibility of municipalities. The 1988 Constitution emphasizes, in its Article 208, that “the duty of the State with education shall be fulfilled by ensuring: [...] provision of daycare and preschool services to children from zero to five years of age,” thereby legitimizing the provision of early childhood education and the duty of the State (Brazil, 1988).

Many daycare centers and preschools began operating under precarious installation conditions, lacking even basic services such as water, sewage, and electricity. Beyond these deficiencies, many school buildings—especially at the early childhood level—were, and in some cases still are, adapted houses or spaces that limit the educational process.

Within this context, the quality of early childhood education has become an increasing concern, particularly regarding the conditions of teaching offered to children. Even with the development of educational policies aimed at improving basic education, disparities in access to quality education remain a reality in the Brazilian context, especially in public early childhood schools.

The term “quality of education” is polysemic and appears in countless national and international documents and guidelines. Thus, this principle is reiterated in policies for early childhood education that have been taking shape in Brazil, which, at the discursive level, aim to enhance the quality of institutions operating in the first stage of basic education.

From this perspective, this article sought to address service provision, access, and quality in early childhood education, initially identifying how this educational stage is inscribed in Brazilian National Legislation. We aimed to understand what the concept of quality in education entails and, at the local policy level, to observe how the provision of early childhood education in the municipality of Uberlândia/MG has been implemented and the public-private relations established through agreements.

Early Childhood Education in Brazilian National Legislation

The right to Early Childhood Education consists in educating and caring for children from zero to five years of age. Early Childhood Education is the first stage of Basic Education and gained legitimacy with the 1988 Federal Constitution of Brazil and with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education – LDBEN – enacted in 1996.

For many years, this stage of Brazilian education was characterized by a welfare-oriented perspective, limited to personal care and hygiene. Oliveira (2002, p. 37) highlights that the contribution of the LDBEN is decisive for early childhood education, as it granted this stage a role within the educational system that is “to initiate the necessary formation to which every person is entitled for the exercise of citizenship, receiving the basic knowledge required for the continuation of later studies.”

Since the enactment of the 1988 Constitution, a series of educational policies have been elaborated, based on projects, laws, decrees, and constitutional amendments, supporting the construction of curricula and policies implemented in early childhood schools throughout the country. Among them, noteworthy are LDBEN Law nº 9.394/96, Law nº 13.005/2014 which approved the National Education Plan – PNE (2014–2024), the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education – RCNEI of 1998, the National Quality

Parameters for Early Childhood Education of 2006, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education – DCNEI of 2009, which are guiding documents that establish principles and procedures for early childhood education in Brazil, Constitutional Amendment nº 59/2009, the normative document entitled National Common Curricular Base – BNCC of 2017, as well as the revision of the National Quality Parameters for Early Childhood Education (2018) and the approval of the Operational Guidelines for Quality and Equity in Early Childhood Education, among others.

The RCNEI was a document composed of three volumes: Introduction; Personal and Social Formation; and Knowledge of the World, aimed at guiding pedagogical practices in daycare centers and preschools in Brazil. It was presented by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in 1998, during the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. In that same year, the document “*Guidelines for the Accreditation and Operation of Early Childhood Education Institutions*” was prepared and published, consisting of a set of orientations and guidelines elaborated by MEC to assist municipalities and the Federal District in the expansion and regulation of early childhood education provision. At that time, the country was undergoing educational reforms that involved the redefinition of curricula, the creation of agencies such as the National Education Council, and the development of evaluation policies. Such reforms were correlated to the demands of the market, as Rosemberg (2002, p. 42) points out: “this reform, adopting economic-oriented guidelines, seeks to adjust educational policies to economic development policies aligned with the new world order.” Within this context, elementary education was established as the stage in which resources should be concentrated, to the detriment of other stages such as Secondary Education, Youth and Adult Education, and Early Childhood Education.

Additionally, the elaboration of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) took place, first approved in 1999 and later revised in 2009, when daycare centers and preschools were recognized as spaces for the construction of childhood citizenship. Vieira and Baptista (2023, p. 60) consider them “an essential document through which Brazil states what the identity of this educational stage should be and, consequently, of the professionals who work in it.”

Such Guidelines establish principles, foundations, and procedures to guide early childhood education institutions. For Andrade (2010, p. 101), “the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, of mandatory character, proposed new demands for institutions in the field, especially regarding curricular orientations and the elaboration of their pedagogical projects.” The author further adds that:

By recognizing the importance of the quality of care in early childhood education institutions, the Curricular Guidelines reaffirm the need for qualification of professionals involved in educational work with children, because, in order to transform institutional spaces into spaces for the exercise of children's citizenship, it is necessary that professionals be qualified for the defense and promotion of children's rights (Andrade, 2010, p. 103).

Thus, adequate training of education professionals is fundamental for guaranteeing children's rights and quality education, and in this context, it is necessary to emphasize that in addition to teachers, there are other professionals present in the activities developed and in interaction with children in daycare and preschool. They are generally called assistants, educators, or even school support professionals. Therefore, there is a diversity of people working directly in early childhood education, without having training or from different professional careers.

With the expansion and institutionalization of early childhood education, Brazilian educational legislation began to establish and define some requirements for workers in the area. According to Vieira and Baptista (2023, p.135), the historical framework whose professionals predominantly had no training to work in education, has been undergoing modifications in the first decades of the 21st century, making it possible to verify new conceptions reflected in educational legislation. The authors affirm they observe "a professionalization process in early childhood education, a process that accompanies the transformations in the modes of socialization and education of young children in our society and that bring consequences for the valorization of work in the area."

In this context, there was the elaboration of the National Education Plan Law No. 10.172 of 2001, and we can say that the PNE of that year presented several relevant aspects regarding access and permanence, organization, furniture, resources, training, curriculum, learning spaces, prioritizing the quality of this stage of education. Early childhood education was contemplated in 25 specific goals.

This Plan also determined the minimum infrastructure standards of educational institutions and established the implementation of a National Training Program for Early Childhood Education Professionals with the aim of achieving the goal for teacher training, so that in five years all teachers would have specific secondary-level training and in ten years 70% would have higher education training. However, as Dourado (2010, p. 684) states, "the PNE, despite presenting far-reaching goals, indicating great challenges for improving national education, was configured as a formal plan, marked by the absence of concrete

financing mechanisms," not constituting itself as a base and guideline for policies, planning and management of national education.

In 2014, Law 13.005 was approved, which instituted the PNE with a validity of ten years (2014 – 2024). This Plan brought important contributions to early childhood education, establishing the universalization of preschool by 2016 and the expansion of daycare vacancy offerings in order to serve 50% of children in the age group of 0 to 3 by the end of the Plan's validity. Côco et al. (2015, p. 80) affirm that "educational indicators signal this distance between the offer destined to the preschool age group (with better indicators) and that of daycare." The plan also discusses the initial and continuing training of teachers and their valorization in early childhood education. Still according to Côco et al. (2015, p.82), the Quality Indicators in Early Childhood Education affirm that teacher training "is important for the development and improvement of this stage of basic education, as it constitutes the process of training and professional development related to the specificities of education for young children."

In the PNE (2014-2024), which had its validity extended until December 31, 2025, through Law No. 14.934/2024 sanctioned by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, there are 20 goals with their own strategies. After ten years of its validity, we can affirm that the goals related to early childhood education were not met. According to the 'Report of the 5th monitoring cycle of the National Education Plan goals – 2024', in early childhood education, until the year 2022, attendance reached 37.3% of the population aged 0 to 3 years. For the population of 4 and 5 years, the goal provided for universalization by 2016, which was not achieved. In 2022, attendance reached 93% and, according to the report, it is necessary to include 425,000 more children in the educational system.

The Document of the National Campaign for the Right to Education emphasizes that about 90% of the objectives foreseen in the PNE should not be fulfilled⁵. The Campaign also states that fulfilling the new PNE that is being processed in the National Congress requires guaranteeing adequate public investments in education.

On December 20, 2017, the National Common Curricular Base – BNCC was approved and, according to its text, "it is a normative document that defines the organic and progressive set of essential learning that all students must develop throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education" (Brazil, 2018, p.7).

This document discusses the importance that early childhood education has in students' academic life, Brazil (2018, p.36): "as the first stage of Basic Education, Early

⁵ Available at: <https://campanha.org.br/acervo/balanco-do-pne-plano-nacional-de-educacao-2023/>. Accessed on: Jun. 29, 2025.

Childhood Education is the beginning and foundation of the educational process." It also presents the concept of childhood that aims to overcome the passive view of children in the educational process, conceiving the child as a being who observes, questions, raises hypotheses and builds their knowledge through interaction, imposing the need to imprint educational intentionality to pedagogical practices.

However, it is necessary to consider the Brazilian political-social and economic context in which the BNCC became a central agenda of the Brazilian Government. In the period after the 2016 Coup d'État, which led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, there were several attempts to impose privatist measures on education and to regulate educational action. Among them, as highlighted by authors Barbosa, Silveira and Soares (2019, p. 80), is the "proposal sent to the National Congress in 2016, altering the PNE, including a new paragraph to determine that the BNCC, through a proposal from the Executive Branch, would be approved by the National Congress and not by the National Education Council (CNE)." Although this Bill was archived in 2019, the determination and regulation of the Base was defined by a new CNE, composed in the post-coup period, dismissing members contrary to governmental positions. Regarding the National Curricular Base for Early Childhood Education, the aforementioned authors add that:

The detailed analysis of the BNCC indicates structural and content changes in the definition of rights to be guaranteed to all children, adolescents and young people. A fading can be observed regarding the formulation of constitutional rights, with important assumptions being removed/omitted in the second, third and fourth versions of the document. If the assumption of a business vision was already announced since the first version, maintaining a field of political disputes, the third and fourth versions of the BNCC assume the notion of competence as their axis (Barbosa, Silveira e Soares, 2019, p.85).

In this sense, being competent means using the knowledge constructed, dealing with an instrumental vision that serves both to control what the child will learn and the teaching work. Thus, even though the BNCC for early childhood education is structured in fields of experience and not in areas of knowledge as in elementary and high school, the document presents general competencies that must be developed throughout all basic education. Another point that draws attention in the BNCC-EI is the fact that it strips children of younger age, under 18 months, of the status of 'child', classifying them as 'babies', which can generate discrimination in care, as well as a setback in the fight for the care of all children from zero to six years in institutions assumed by educational systems, and no longer by social assistance.

The aforementioned document presents itself in a prescriptive manner. Barbosa, Silveira and Soares (2019, p.82) state that "what was meant to be a reference became a curricular prescription tending toward the homogenization of contents and organization of early childhood education in Brazil, contradicting the autonomy guaranteed in the LDB of 1996." Corroborating this statement, author Barbosa et al. (2018) points out that:

It is considered that in the education of children from 0 to 6 years of age it is not possible to treat knowledge and the processes of learning and child development based on linearities and in an instrumental way, as is expressed in the BNCC. From what is configured, maintained in this way, the BNCC declares itself as a form of control of educational work, giving way to large-scale tests and measures, often serving to oppress children and their families. As it is proposed, the BNCC mistakenly serves the proposition of an evaluative and formative process that homogenizes both children and their teachers (Barbosa, et al., 2018, p.4).

Freitas (2018) states that "the current BNCC will induce the anticipation of schooling in early childhood education, with considerable damage to our children from 0 to 6 years old." The author also emphasizes that teachers should not be supporting actors in this discourse that "will bring dire consequences for students and public education."

In 2023, there was the reinstallation of the National Education Forum, responsible for coordinating Conae – National Conference on Education, and presenting propositions for the PNE. Then came Conae 2024, which had the PNE as its sole theme. According to Dourado and Silva (2025),

In the period following the installation of far-right politics in the Brazilian governmental apparatus, at the federal level, we witnessed a historic milestone of civil society participation aimed at elaborating one of the most important State policies for the field of education: this refers to the constituent process of the National Education Plan for the new decade (2025-2034) (Dourado; Silva, 2025, p.22).

There was participation from Basic Education and Higher Education professionals, students, and social and union movements in municipal and state conferences in 2023, culminating in the national stage of Conae 2024, held in January 2024 in Brasília, when the Final Document was approved, entitled 'National Education Plan (2024-2034): State policy for guaranteeing education as a human right, with social justice and sustainable socio-environmental development'.

This mobilization around the elaboration of the new PNE, as authors Dourado and Silva (2025, p.32) affirm, was marked by a paradox: on one hand the disappointment due to the lack of success in materializing the PNE goals; and, on the other hand,

renewed hope in the mobilization of grassroots entities "due to the end of the Bolsonaro era, which was cemented by the advent of neofascism and bourgeois autocracy in the federal state apparatus and ratified by the election of a broad coalition government from the democratic field".

In March 2024, the final document of Conae 2024 was delivered to the Minister of Education with the objective of subsidizing the elaboration of the Bill for the National Education Plan for the next decade. In June 2024, the President of the Republic forwarded to the National Congress the Bill (PL) to institute the new PNE, a project then identified as PL No. 2,614, of 2024.

In the Reference Document of the National Conference on Education (Conae, 2023, p.18) there is the following statement: "To achieve Goal 1 of the Plan, it is necessary to include about 1.4 million children aged 0 to 3 years in daycare centers and about 300,000 children aged 4 to 5 years in preschool." The document also points out the fact that

The current political situation, after the election of a government in the democratic-popular field, result of a broad coalition, indicates, therefore, the resumption of the Democratic State of Law, for the construction of State public policies directed toward guaranteeing social rights, such as education (Conae, 2023, p.13).

With this, the aim was to resume social participation in education, making the PNE an instrument of planning, guarantor of education as a right and also the democratic implementation of its goals, making it the epicenter of educational policies.

The concept of quality in Early Childhood Education care

The conception of quality is plural and this term can be defined from different conceptual perspectives. Regarding the concept of quality in education, we understand that this is not neutral, especially in early childhood education, as there are various issues related to structure and physical space, vacancies and enrollments, pedagogical, administrative and financial resources, as well as aspects related to learning conditions, nutrition, relationship with families and public policies.

For Carreira and Pinto (2007) "quality in education is a historically constructed and disputed concept." Between the 1930s and 1950s there was an improvement in financing standards due to the constitutional linking of part of tax revenue to education. However, during this period the school excluded the majority of the country's population. With the beginning of the dictatorial period in 1964, and with the introduction of compulsory eight-

year schooling in 1971, a massification of access to public school was initiated in the country, in a period when the lowest spending on education was recorded, scrapping the few quality schools that existed (Carreira; Pinto, 2007).

From the 1980s to the 1990s, the Federal Constitution of 1988 was promulgated, with the expansion of rights; however, this period was marked by economic adjustment policies imposing restrictions on social policies and quality came to be seen as the pursuit of efficiency. In this sense, many documents and goals to be met were elaborated; but, with few resources, business techniques and total quality began to be part of many education networks.

Carreira and Pinto (2007, p. 21) emphasize that "it is very important that we are aware that when we use the word 'quality' we are in a field of dispute" and it is necessary to make explicit what is thought of as quality for all in a democratic perspective.

Starting in 2002, the National Campaign for the Right to Education established as one of its goals the construction of Student-Quality Cost references – CAQ. Three workshops were held and in the second one they reached what they called the reference matrix of Student-Quality Cost, which relates the quality offered in the stages and modalities of education with the necessary inputs. Carreira and Pinto (2007, p.25) report that "the consensus that was established is that in a mass education system the quality of teaching is associated with the quality of teaching and learning processes, which, in turn, relates to the quality of the inputs used." Thus, the idea that is established is that the guarantee of adequate inputs is a necessary condition for the quality of education. As a synthesis of the quality of education conceived for the cost per student of basic education establishments, the aforementioned authors also add the following assumptions:

There seems to be little doubt that an education with minimum quality standards presupposes the existence of daycare centers and schools with infrastructure and equipment adequate to their users, with qualified teachers (preferably with higher education training and working in their area of training), with remuneration equivalent to that of other professionals with equal training level in the job market and with paid hours dedicated to activity preparation, collective planning meetings, family visits and work evaluation. It also presupposes a ratio of students per teacher and students per class (and, in the case of early childhood education, children per educator) that does not compromise the learning process, with a student's school workday that progressively reaches full time and a teacher's workday that gradually obtains exclusive dedication to one school (Carreira; Pinto, 2007, p. 78).

The new Fundeb approved in 2020 has a permanent character as its main change. It determines that 50% of the complementation of the total annual value per student

(VAAT) be invested in early childhood education, with at least 15% to be allocated to investments in the respective education networks. This stage of basic education continues to have the need for investments that guarantee the expansion of the service network. Evaluating the quality of the offer at this stage demands verifying whether the essential rights of every child are assured. Therefore, constant monitoring of these resources is necessary, with the intention of promoting guaranteed access and quality for all children.

Quality education should be conceived as a means for the student to develop fully. According to Bauer, Arcas and Oliveira (2021, p.209), "quality education with equity is that which provides the resources and necessary conditions for all students to evolve according to their capacities and reach the maximum level of development and learning possible."

It is still complex to conceptualize the theme of education quality. According to Dourado, Oliveira and Santos (2007, p.9), the quality of education "is defined involving the relationship between material and human resources, as well as from the relationship that occurs in school and in the classroom," which involves teaching-learning processes, curricula and learning expectations, among others.

In the document National Parameters of Quality in Early Childhood Education (2018, p.11), there is the statement that "the quality aimed for Early Childhood Education in Brazil is based on the defense of a society in which organs, entities, Early Childhood Education Institutions and their professionals work together to guarantee the integral and integrated development of children."

Thus, quality does not translate into a single and absolute concept as different sectors of society and different educational policies may understand this term in diverse ways. However, as Carreira and Pinto (2007, p.9) point out, "quality for few is not quality, it is privilege"! Thus, a society that calls itself democratic must guarantee quality education for all.

With the discourse of universalizing basic education, especially early childhood education, we know that many municipalities adopt education privatization policies, establishing agreements with private institutions for the provision of this stage of education. In the municipality of Uberlândia-MG it is no different. With this, in the next section we seek to analyze the public-private relations in the provision of early childhood education in the aforementioned municipality.

Public-private relations in the provision of Early Childhood Education in the municipality of Uberlândia

The right to education is a fundamental human right supported by national and international laws and norms. It was enshrined in the Federal Constitution as a social right and, according to Ribeiro (2010), it is the duty of the State's Executive Powers the "implementation of public education policies" and it is the duty of families the "referral of children and adolescents to schools and in monitoring their studies."

However, this right in Brazil is marked by public policies of responsibility transfer, omission and abandonment. Ranieri (2010, p.35) states that "it is evident that the formal attribution of the right of access does not mean the possibility of exercising it under equal conditions," making it necessary to create conditions to achieve real equality of access and permanence for the entire population. However, what is standing out is education being implemented through diverse institutional arrangements. Thus, inequalities are legitimized, expanding an offer of diversified and differentiated education among institutions.

The neoliberal discourse emphasizes that the State should stop intervening in areas such as education and health. According to Dardot et al. (2021, p.89) "for neoliberals, the important thing, above all, is to perfect a type of State that allows for a radical break with the interventionist tendency in service of social interests [...]."

Tripodi (2016, p. 386) draws attention to the new governance sites that came to be constituted within the scope of public policies for education, stating that although "the presence of the private sphere in this area has been a constant, this 'condition' seems to be constituting itself as a permanent option for offering this right, assuming new contours with arrangements of a managerial nature." The aforementioned author also adds that:

If on one hand partnerships with sectors external to the state apparatus have been designed as a possibility for meeting the constitutional right of this stage of basic education, especially for municipalities, on the other hand arrangements of this nature seem not to be implemented without creating tensions in the consolidation of public values such as equality and citizenship, for example. (Tripodi, 2016, p. 387).

There occurs, therefore, a dispersion of the State's regulatory power. Tripodi (2016, p. 387) understands that "by redefining its role, the state sphere begins to allow the provision of education to be carried out by other actors, partially renouncing the

direct management and organization of the field of education, assuming the condition of regulator of regulation [...], "promoting the reconfiguration of the State's role regarding social rights in capitalist development.

According to neoliberals, the crisis in the educational system is explained by the State's inefficient character in managing public policies. Education functions poorly because it was nationalized and the absence of an educational market allows understanding the quality crisis (GENTILI, 1996).

In this sense, Laval (2019, p.117) states that "it is about removing education from the public sphere, governed by political authority, and delivering it entirely to the market in which both those who offer and those who seek act on their own account, without having to submit to the decisions of those who win elections." Freitas (2016) corroborates this assertion, stating that:

Privatization is the final destination of corporate reformers' policies, as it stems from the belief that the improvement of educational quality occurs through competition in an open market, just as within businesses. The market would purge lower quality institutions, keeping only those of higher quality (Freitas, 2016, p.141).

Building a discourse that the private sector is more efficient than the state, and with major attacks on the public character of social policies, what we see is the transfer of responsibilities from the State to society and to the private sphere, promoting the dismantling of public education and the creation of an education market, through 'partnerships' and other institutional arrangements.

Freitas (2018, p. 54) makes the distinction between public and private: "public is a common good managed democratically, it is a social 'institution'; and private is someone's property, an 'organization' administered privately – both from the point of view of the locus of power and methods." The corporate reform of education, as the aforementioned author denominates it, characterizes the model wanted for schools and other social rights, and has the intentionality of destroying the public education system, not inserting a new public management.

In this sense, the outsourcing of schools to social organizations initiated the process of creating the educational market, which can lead to the destruction of the public education system by transferring resources to private initiative and inserting schools under political and ideological control, dictated by private or confessional maintaining organizations. And in the municipality of Uberlândia it is no different, the city is located in the State of Minas Gerais in the Triângulo Mineiro region. It is the second most

populous municipality in the state of Minas Gerais and, according to the last census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2022 it had a population of 713,232 inhabitants (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2022) still according to IBGE, the estimated population in 2024 was 754,954 people. Its Municipal Education Plan for the decade 2015/2025 was approved in 2015, through Law No. 12,209, a period when there were political and social tensions in Brazil.

It is worth mentioning here that to fulfill the goal of universalizing preschool and expanding daycare services, the municipality of Uberlândia established partnerships with CSOs for the provision of places in early childhood education, omitting itself from the obligation to manage this stage of education and contributing to the end of the public education system and the promotion of the private sphere.

Regarding municipal network schools and Civil Society Organizations – CSOs, which offer early childhood education in the municipality, in 2025 the total is 117 (one hundred and seventeen), of which 67 (sixty-seven) are called Municipal School of Early Childhood Education – Emei, and 50 (fifty) are maintained by Early Childhood Education CSOs in partnership with the municipal government.

According to Pereira and Valente (2025) there was a growth of institutions that maintain agreements with local public power.

If we compare the evolution of the number of CSOs taking as reference the year 2008 in relation to the year 2023, there was an increment of 50% (fifty percentage points) of these institutions. Another important data is that in the period from 2015 to 2018 there was stability in the number of CSOs that maintained agreements with the municipality. However, starting in 2019, there is an acceleration in the quantity of CSOs in partnership with the municipality of Uberlândia (Pereira; Valente, 2025, p.5).

Starting in 2017 there was a decrease in enrollments in the public network and growth in the partnered private network. In that same year, public-private relations and agreements with CSOs were initiated more markedly, as observed in table 1.

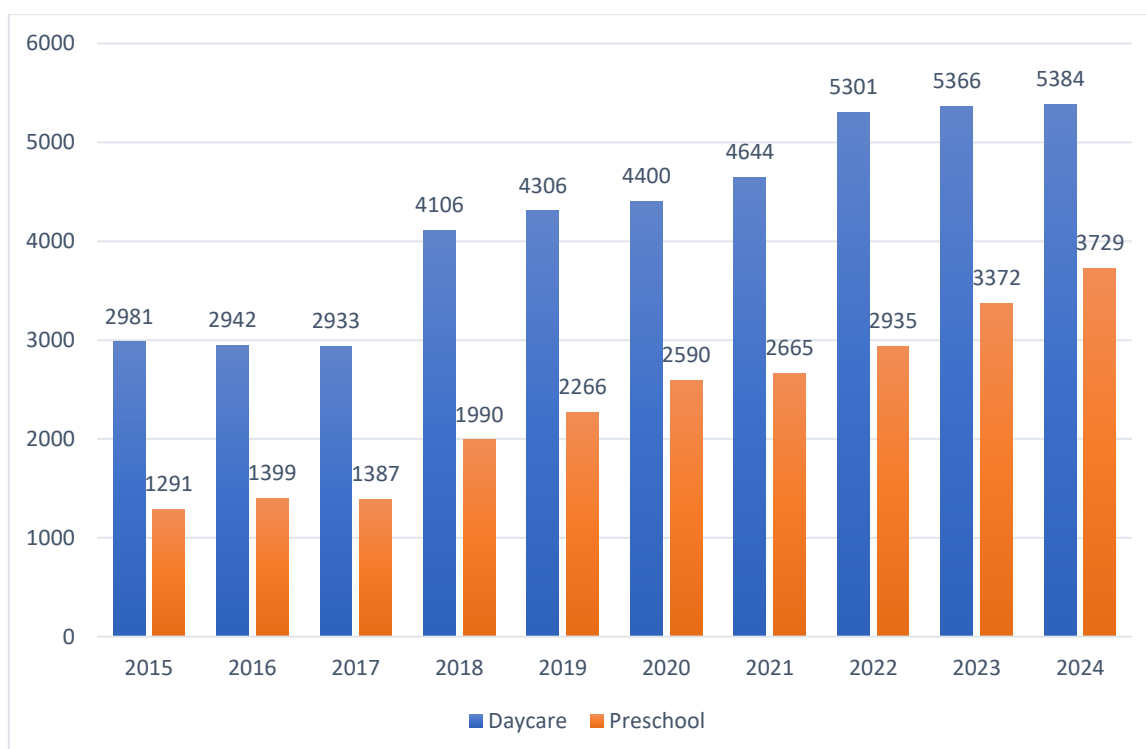
Table 1 - Number of Early Childhood Education enrollments in Municipal Education Schools of Uberlândia and partnered CSOs – 2015 to 2020.

Administrative Dependency	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Municipal	18.531	19.404	20.857	20.242	19.949	19.316
Private Partnered - CSO	4.007	4.088	4.158	6.067	6.539	6.990

Source: Prepared by the author from the Educational Data Laboratory – 2020.

With the increase of non-profit private institutions offering early childhood education through agreements with the PMU, the municipality continues to omit itself from the obligation to manage this stage of education and contributing to the end of the public education system and to the promotion of the private sphere, as revealed by the growing number of enrollments in institutions administered by CSOs.

Graph 1: Number of Enrollments of Early Childhood Education Children in the Network Partnered with the Municipality of Uberlândia.



Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the Child and Adolescent Observatory (2025)⁶.

⁶ Available at: <https://observatoriocrianca.org.br/Indicador?id=a5afe88f-49b1-4fbd-8cf3-3e373d5509a8>. Accessed on: Jun. 29, 2025.

The number of enrollments in these institutions is directly related to the increase in amounts transferred to private institutions partnered with local public power. Pereira and Valente (2025) bring important data about the financial contribution of transfers related to Fundeb and subsidies from the Municipal Government of Uberlândia, suggesting that starting in 2017 "the SME began to transfer a considerable volume of resources to CSOs, amounts that stabilized in the years 2019 and 2020, and that grew again in 2021, 2022 and 2023." According to the data presented by the authors, and with the municipality's transparency portal, in 2017 there was the transfer of 21.002 million reais to non-profit private institutions, and in 2023 this amount was 78.819 million reais. However, these amounts refer to the total accounting rendered by the institutions, with the actual amount transferred in 2024 being R\$246,951,448.68 (two hundred and forty-six million, nine hundred and fifty-one thousand, four hundred and forty-eight reais and sixty-eight cents), of this amount, R\$96,224,962.00 (ninety-six million, two hundred and twenty-four thousand and nine hundred and sixty-two reais), was the total accounting rendered, demonstrating continuous growth in the volume of transfers..⁷

The purchase of uniforms, school kits, meals, and other things provided by the SME to CSOs that have the same structure as school units and are maintained by municipal public power, are not included in the amounts mentioned above. That is, this public-private relationship implies investing public resources in the private sphere, in transferring responsibilities for providing places, in teaching inequalities, since management, administrative and pedagogical decisions are in charge of private institutions.

Authors Pereira and Valente (2025) also point out that:

with the partnership policy, there was a public "defunding" on several fronts in education, such as, for example, in the construction of new school units and in the valorization of public servants in the teaching staff. In summary, the data suggests that the privatization of Early Childhood Education is on the agenda in the municipality of Uberlândia, a reality facilitated by the legislation in force, which allows municipal management to finance through agreements. Furthermore, the reinforcement of agreements with CSOs directly reflects on students' right to education, especially in aspects of initial and continuing training, working conditions and salaries of workers in these institutions (Pereira; Valente, 2025, p.7).

In this sense, the quality of early childhood education in the municipality of Uberlândia is compromised. Early childhood education continues to be transformed into a commodity, becoming the object of commercial transactions between government spheres and the private

⁷ Available at: <https://www.uberlandia.mg.gov.br/portal-da-transparencia/terceiro-setor/>. Accessed on: Jun. 20, 2025.

sector. This public-private relationship appears as a "solution" to end waiting lists and to fulfill the goals of Education Plans. However, what is occurring is the rise of privatization, characterizing models of what is wanted for education and other social rights, with the intention of destroying the public education system.

Conclusions

Given the national scenario, what is standing out is education being implemented through diverse institutional arrangements. Thus, inequalities are legitimized, expanding an offer of diversified and differentiated education among institutions. Dourado (2020, p. 17) reinforces this statement by pointing out that this occurs due to "the diversified demand of the current phase of capitalist restructuring that, by engendering changes in the processes of organization, management and financing of education, advances considerably in new forms of appropriation of public funds by the private sector."

The privatization of education is a process that has been intensifying in Brazil and this practice has been expanding, first encompassing the so-called "support activities," with 'partnerships' for construction, renovations, production of didactic materials, and has also been advancing over the "core activity," with the provision of education by the private sector funded by public resources.

This fact implies investing public resources in the private sphere, transferring responsibility for providing places and institutions become responsible for the work carried out with children, for teachers' working conditions, for training policies and for the organization of work in school. The decisions and directions, both administrative and pedagogical, are the responsibility of private institutions, leading increasingly toward total privatization of education and the State's omission in the realization of this right.

There was an evolution in the legal field regarding the right to early childhood education; however, the State's resistance to fulfill the duty of guaranteeing education for all and with minimum quality standards is visible.

In this perspective, quality in education must be established as a democratic, continuous and permanent process. The right to quality education is inserted in various legal documents and, although Brazil has advanced in formulating policies for early childhood education, it still continues to be a complex process to reconcile policies written on paper with practices experienced in schools.

At the local level, in the municipality of Uberlândia, we can affirm that to supply the demand for early childhood education services, public power has opted for

agreements with Civil Society Organizations – CSOs. There was considerable growth in the number of CSOs that began to have agreements with the Municipal Education Secretariat, a relationship characterized not only by financing, but also by the provision of school kits, meals, uniforms, physical structure, that is, school buildings are constructed and delivered to private institutions. This implements a differentiated offer of early childhood education in the municipality of Uberlândia, one guided by municipal legislation and another by non-profit private institutions that, in their great majority, have relations with churches, do not require adequate training of professionals who work in classrooms, do not have career plans for employees, compromising and/or hindering the offer of quality early childhood education for all.

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