

The implications of neoliberal ideology on the policy of purchasing daycare places in Brazil: a review¹

*As implicações do ideário neoliberal na política de compra de vagas para a creche no Brasil:
uma revisão*

*Las implicaciones de la ideología neoliberal en la política de compra de plazas en guarderías en Brasil:
una revisión*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper was to investigate the implications of neoliberal ideology on the policy of purchasing places in daycare centers in Brazil, using a qualitative approach based on a literature review conducted in November 2024. The electronic tools used were the Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement (CAPES), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) and Google Scholar, using the keywords: "purchase of places" AND "early childhood education" AND "children aged 0 to 3". Eight articles were selected. The results show that, to expand the number of places in early childhood education, the government has used a strategy of achieving universal access targets by dividing services into parts, especially for preschools, and/or expanding agreements, primarily through the purchase of places, to care for children aged 0 to 3 in daycare centers. The consequences of neoliberal ideology on policies for purchasing places in daycare centers are accelerated by the process of judicialization and/or the social condition of the child. Therefore, it appears that a major problem lies in the lack of clarity regarding the quality of education offered by partner institutions and in the annual increase in the transfer of funds allocated to these partner institutions. Finally, it should be noted that this mechanism for purchasing places has weakened the quality of educational services offered in early childhood education, especially in daycare centers, as the right to access has taken prevailed over the right to quality.

Keywords: Daycare centers; Educational Policies; Judicialization; Privatization; Purchase of places.

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Resumo: O objetivo do presente artigo foi investigar as implicações do ideário neoliberal na política de compra de vagas para creches no Brasil a partir de uma abordagem qualitativa decorrente de um levantamento da literatura, realizado em novembro de 2024. As ferramentas eletrônicas utilizadas foram Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SCIELO) e Google Acadêmico, tendo como palavras-chave “compra de vagas” AND “educação infantil” AND “crianças de 0 a 3 anos”. Foram selecionados oito artigos. Como resultados, verificou-se que, para a expansão de vagas na educação infantil, o governo tem utilizado como estratégia o alcance das metas de universalização de acesso a partir da parcialização do atendimento, principalmente para as pré-escolas, e/ou da ampliação do conveniamento, via compra de vagas, fundamentalmente, para o atendimento das crianças de zero a três anos em creches. As consequências das influências do ideário neoliberal nas políticas de compra de vagas destinadas às creches são aceleradas por meio do processo de judicialização e/ou condição social da criança. Portanto, depreende-se que um grande problema reside na ausência de nitidez acerca da qualidade da educação oferecida pelas instituições conveniadas e no aumento anual do repasse de valores destinados para essas instituições parceiras. Por fim, destaca-se que esse mecanismo de compra de vaga tem fragilizado a qualidade do atendimento educacional ofertado na educação infantil, sobretudo nas creches, pois o direito de acesso tem prevalecido sobre o direito à qualidade.

Palavras-chave: Creches; Políticas Educacionais; Judicialização; Privatização; Compra de vagas.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo fue investigar las implicaciones de la ideología neoliberal en la política de compra de plazas para guarderías en Brasil, a partir de un abordaje cualitativo resultante de una búsqueda pesquisa bibliográfica realizada en noviembre de 2024. Las herramientas electrónicas utilizadas fueron: Portal de Periódicos de la Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SCIELO) y Google Scholar, utilizando las siguientes palabras clave: “compra de plazas” y “educación infantil” y “niños de 0 a 3 años”. Fueron seleccionados ocho artículos. Los resultados señalan que la estrategia del gobierno para ampliar las plazas en Educación Infantil ha sido lograr alcanzar los objetivos de acceso universal mediante la parcialidad parcialización de la oferta, especialmente para los centros de educación infantil, y/o la ampliación de los convenios a través de la compra de plazas, principalmente para niños de 0 a 3 años en guarderías. Las consecuencias de la influencia de la ideología neoliberal en las políticas de compra de plazas en guarderías se ven aceleradas por el proceso de judicialización y/o el estatus social de los niños. Así que, se puede observar que uno de los principales problemas radica en la falta de transparencia sobre la cualidad de la educación ofrecida por las instituciones asociadas y el aumento anual de la transferencia de fondos a estas instituciones asociadas. Por último, cabe señalar que este mecanismo de compra de plazas ha debilitado la cualidad del servicio educativo ofrecido en la Educación Infantil, especialmente en las guarderías, ya que el derecho de acceso ha primado sobre el derecho a la cualidad.

Palabras clave: Guarderías; Políticas Educativas; Judicialización; Privatización; Compra de plazas.

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Introduction

The reflection proposed in this research stems from studies on teaching, learning, and the development of children in early childhood education (ECE), from the earliest age. These investigations were made possible by the Study Group on Teacher Training and Pedagogical Practices in Early Childhood Education, affiliated with a public university in the northwestern region of the state of Paraná. The assumption is that children are constantly developing, and for this process to occur in a qualitative manner, they need to attend daycare centers and preschools that provide opportunities for mental activity and access to scientific and historical knowledge, based on structured planning for this purpose.

In this sense, it is essential to discuss children's opportunity and right to education, as well as the impacts that the expansion of the first stage of basic education (EB) has been suffering, especially since Law no. 12,796/2013, which amends Article 6 of Law no. 9,394/96, making it mandatory "for children to enroll in basic education from the age of four" (Brazil, p. 1, 2013). However, in general, most municipalities lack the infrastructure to guarantee care for all children, in accordance with their right to public education as guaranteed by law, and this structural insufficiency leads to the adoption of emergency strategies to provide places in affiliated daycare centers or to purchase places in private institutions.

Given this, interest arose in exploring the topic further, investigating the impacts of neoliberal ideology on policies regarding agreements and the purchase of places in Brazilian daycare centers. The question that guided this study was: what are the influences of neoliberal ideology on educational policies aimed at expanding the availability of places for children aged zero to three in Brazil, as pointed out in Brazilian literature? Furthermore, what strategies have been adopted by the government and municipalities to ensure the expansion of places in daycare centers across the country?

It is essential to understand the historical context of ECE and its entire process of achievement to recognize that not all educational environments offer children the necessary support for comprehensive development. For this reason, it is essential that early childhood teachers and society in general are familiar with the documents that guide the first stage of BE, to understand its purpose and importance.

In this scenario, among the essential documents that support ECE is the Law of Lines of Direction and Bases of the Education (LDBEN) no. 9,394/96, which defined it as the first stage of Brazilian basic education, this being a decisive moment in children's development. It is important to note that, following this achievement, ECE began to be

guided by new regulatory documents such as the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) of 2010 and Brazil's National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) of 2017.

The DCNEI consists of a set of principles and guidelines that guide the organization and pedagogical practice in the first stage of BE. These guidelines were approved in 2010 by the National Education Council (CNE) to ensure quality and equity in the provision of education for children aged zero to five (Brazil, 2010). The BNCC, approved by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in 2017, aims to guide teaching in Brazilian public schools, establishing guidelines for learning objectives at each stage of the BE. Regarding ECE, this normative document is structured around five fields of experience that form a curriculum focused on the development and consolidation of learning objectives (Brazil, 2017).

In this context, the studies discussed in this article relate to arguments in favor of children's access, from an early age, to free, high-quality public ECE, with the aim of promoting their comprehensive development. This development should occur through access to educational practices that engage children in mental activity, as authors and co-authors, so that, among peers, they have access to historically developed knowledge. This represents a non-welfare-oriented ECE, which is not in line with the neoliberal values of a capitalist society. Thus, there is an excessive emphasis on early literacy, on completing certain activities and on “pedagogical rituals,” aesthetics from an adult perspective to the detriment of the process of achievement. In addition, there is negligence regarding the child's overall development, covering social, emotional, physical, psychomotor, and cultural aspects.

Therefore, the objective of this article was to investigate the implications of neoliberal ideology on the policy of purchasing daycare places in the country, based on recent Brazilian research.

The implications of neoliberal ideology on the policy of purchasing places in Brazilian early childhood education: what the publications from 2014 to 2024 say

To achieve the objective of this study, a literature review was conducted based on publications written in Portuguese between 2014 and 2024. The searches were conducted in November 2024 using the following electronic platforms: Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement (CAPES), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) and Google Scholar. To locate relevant studies, a combination of the keywords “purchase of places” AND “early childhood education” AND “children aged 0 to 3 years” was used in all databases consulted.

The inclusion criteria adopted covered articles in Portuguese published in the last ten years that addressed the policy of purchasing places and expanding the supply of places for children aged zero to three years in daycare settings. Materials such as book chapters, event summaries, case reports, editorials, theses, dissertations, final course papers, essays, and opinion articles were excluded.

In the survey conducted on the CAPES, the combination of keywords mentioned was entered into the search bar, resulting in the identification of only one publication. In turn, in the SciELO database, an asterisk entered the search bar and the search button was clicked. Then, the same combination of keywords was entered, but no documents corresponding to the search were found.

Considering that these electronic platforms returned few results, it was also necessary to use the Google Scholar search tool. The search on this platform returned 620 works. Thus, a total of 621 works were identified. After reading the titles, 608 studies were discarded if they contained any of the following words and/or terms: “expansion of places,” “purchase of places,” “public-private relationship,” “right to early childhood education,” “access criteria,” “judicialization,” “financing,” and “privatization,” combined with expressions such as “early childhood education,” “daycare,” and “children aged zero to three.”

In analyzing the abstracts, considering the theme, objectives, and keywords, nine relevant publications were selected to reflect on the influences of the neoliberal ideal on the policy of purchasing places for the care of children in ECE in the Brazilian context. Next, a thorough reading was conducted, resulting in eight articles, as presented in the summary table below.

Table 1 – Selected materials

Date	Title	Authors	Objective	Results
2016	The expansion of early childhood education and likely implications	Valéria Silva Ferreira	Reflect on the factors driving the expansion of early childhood education in Brazil and examine enrollment data, particularly in the south of the country, analyzing the political and pedagogical implications of this expansion process.	It has become clear that the expansion of places in early childhood education reveals two government strategies for universalizing childcare: partialization and agreements.
2020	The public-private relationship in early childhood education and the new public management	Rosânia Campos, Janaína Silveira Soares Madeira	Discuss how the largest city in the state of Santa Catarina has provided early childhood education, especially after enrollment became mandatory at age four.	It was found that, after the approval of the law making enrollment compulsory at age four, there was an increase in the number of places available. This expansion is the result of two strategies: the partialization of preschool care at the expense of reducing the number of full-time places and the expansion of agreements for daycare services.
2022	Beyond Access: The Right to Quality Early Childhood Education Requires Adequate Funding	Maria Luiza Rodrigues Flores, Diego Lutz	Highlight the interdependence between the right to quality early childhood education and adequate funding for this stage within the national policy, considering quality standards in relation to supply.	The results indicated the existence of interdependence between adequate funding and the right to quality early childhood education, showing that early childhood education policy does not meet established national standards and that there are insufficient resources to meet demand in terms of quantity and social quality. In addition, it was found that per capita resources are still insufficient for daycare centers and preschools, and the Evaluation of the Quality of Early Childhood Education has not yet been fully implemented.

2023	A judicialização na Educação Infantil no município do Rio Grande e seus efeitos para a educação das crianças de 0 a 3 anos	Raquel Lempek Trindade, Maria Renata Alonso Mota	Examine and explore the growing demand for legal proceedings to guarantee places in early childhood education in the city of Rio Grande/RS, especially regarding children aged zero to three years old and the impacts of this on this stage of education.	It has been revealed that public policies aimed at children are formed within the logic of contemporary politics. Therefore, examining them implies recognizing that they function as a tool for guiding the behavior of children and their families. It was also evident that the quality of care provided has been weakened due to the growing process of judicialization, since the right of access seems to prevail over the right to quality.
2023	Social vulnerability as a criterion for access to daycare: challenges in the right to early childhood education	Denise Madeira de Castro e Silva, Rodrigo Manoel Dias da Silva	Analyze the repercussions of imposing criteria for access to daycare on the right to early childhood education in the municipality of Caxias do Sul in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.	The results showed that the adoption of social vulnerability criteria for access to daycare, although seeking fairness, ends up excluding other children who also need a place but do not fit these criteria.
2023	Privatization of Early Childhood Education: analysis of the Pé na Escola (Feet in School) project in the municipality of Salvador, Bahia	Marlene Oliveira dos Santos, Rosilene Guimarães dos Santos	Investigate the privatization of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the municipality of Salvador, Bahia, based on an analysis of the Pé na Escola (Feet in School) Project.	It has been noted that the privatization of early childhood education continues to expand at the local, national, and international levels. In the case of the Pé na Escola (Feet in School) Project, there has been an annual increase in the amounts allocated to private institutions to serve children aged two to five, but little is known about the quality of education offered by these institutions.
2023	The right to early childhood education: analysis of the Municipal Education Plan of Maringá, Paraná	Dalva Linda Vicentini, Elizangela Dias Santiago Fernandes, Marcia Galbero, Heloisa Toshie Irie Saito	Analyze the Municipal Education Plan of the municipality of Maringá-PR in relation to the fulfillment of goals for Early Childhood Education.	It was noted that, although the municipality of Maringá-Pr complies with the legal principles related to the organization and approval of the Municipal Education Plan (PME), the fulfillment of the goals established for early childhood education is still below expectations, and the enrollment of new children occurs mainly through the

				purchase of spots, especially for children aged zero to three years.
2024	Goal of expanding the availability of daycare centers and judicialization of the right to education	Marciano Seabra Godoi, Nicolle Zanato Di Francia	Assess the performance of Brazilian municipalities in relation to Goal 1 of the National Education Plan, which aims to expand the provision of daycare centers to serve at least 50% of children up to 3 years of age by the end of its term in 2024, relating this performance to the phenomenon of the judicialization of the right to early childhood education in the country.	It was found that failure to meet Goal 1 of the National Education Plan highlights persistent regional and socioeconomic inequality in access to daycare centers in Brazil. And the phenomenon of judicialization of the right to early childhood education has contributed to accelerating the expansion of daycare services.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2025).

In general, these productions address the complexity of the reality of early childhood education in Brazil, highlighting key issues such as the expansion of available places, access, quality, privatization and/or public-private partnerships, the judicialization of the right to education, social vulnerability, and the social implications of neoliberal policies on educational policies. They thus highlight the importance of reflecting on the ethical and political commitment to ensuring quality public education for children aged zero to five.

Considering this scenario, it is understandable that the complexity of ECE intensified with the approval of the 2014 National Education Plan (PNE), the Municipal Education Plans (PMEs), and Law no. 12,796/2013, which amended LDEBEN no. 9493/96, establishing compulsory basic education from four to 17 years of age, as well as compulsory enrollment at four years of age and the implementation of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Valorization of Education Professionals (FUNDEB). However, many challenges remain regarding how services are being provided and how the number of places available is being increased. According to Santos and Santos (2023, p. 141), FUNDEB “allows municipalities to increase the number of places available in Early Childhood Education by establishing agreements between the public and private sectors,” which implies differences in the provision of services to children at this stage of basic education.

Although the studies analyzed indicate that it is essential to expand ECE, this expansion cannot compromise full-time attendance or negatively impact the activities

carried out in daycare centers (Ferreira, 2016). Therefore, expanding access to ECE must be planned based on the mobilization of resources, respecting the working hours of children and teachers, the maximum number of children per teacher, and groupings. In addition, the spaces must be adequate, teachers must have adequate training, and it is essential that there be a plan to expand the teaching staff. However, the existence of an ECE that fulfills its sociopolitical function as a space for coexistence, the construction of collective identities, the expansion of diverse knowledge, and access to cultural goods is still a distant challenge. It is therefore essential to persist in the idea that children deserve to be respected as subjects of rights and desires.

In this context, municipalities have adopted strategies to comply with legal requirements, such as dividing services into parts and expanding agreements. However, this measure presents dilemmas, as the increase in enrollment did not represent a significant increase in the number of places available. In practice, this expansion reflected a decrease in the number of full-time places, showing that the option for agreements occurred more intensely in the daycare stage (Ferreira, 2016, Campos; Madeira, 2020).

One example is the municipality of Caxias do Sul, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where ECE was mainly offered in private schools, with no public places available due to the absence of Municipal Early Childhood Education Schools (EMEI). Silva and Silva (2023) point out that among private schools were those belonging to the affiliated network, responsible for 33% of care for children aged zero to three, as well as for-profit private institutions, in which the municipality purchased places, leading to neoliberal actions. The criterion used by the municipality was the social condition of the family, prioritizing those in the most vulnerable situations. This reveals a lack of transparency in the ranking generated by the management system's scoring, raising doubts and uncertainties about the waiting time for a place at ECE. The application of selective justice, made possible by a questionnaire that prioritizes children who are supposedly most in need, has become established as a mechanism that excludes a significant portion of the child population (Silva and Silva, 2023).

The municipality of Salvador has also intensified its efforts to privatize ECE through the “Pé na Escola” (Feet in School) project, which since 2019 has been transferring public funds earmarked for ECE to the private sector, with the aim of filling the gap in places available in the first stage of BE in the municipal network. Every year calls for accreditation are issued to establish contracts with private institutions that serve children in ECE. To this end, “the Municipal Education Secretariat (SMED) refers children on the waiting list to affiliated schools, resulting in a higher number of public enrollments in

daycare centers and preschools” (Santos; Santos, p. 141, 2023). With this project, public education policies follow neoliberal ideals of “privatization, outsourcing, and reduction of the role of the state and municipalities, distancing them from their responsibilities in relation to guaranteeing public, democratic, and quality education” (Santos; Santos, p. 154, 2023), increasing the amounts allocated to private institutions annually.

The problems caused by this agreement policy are denounced by Flores and Lutz (2022), particularly regarding the weakness of oversight of the quality of education offered in private institutions serving ECE children, as well as the implications of these actions for the implementation of quality public education. Thus, initiating legal proceedings has become a mechanism for accessing ECE, by increasing the pressure exerted by the Judiciary on Municipal Education Secretariats (SMEs). However, Trindade and Mota (2023) point out that the effect of these lawsuits has led to overcrowding in existing ECE classrooms, overburdening the institutions and professionals involved. Another effect observed is the purchase of places in private schools to meet demand, often without considering quality standards.

Therefore, it is urgent that researchers, society, and social movements remain attentive, mobilized, and coordinated to promote political advocacy that contributes to adequate and sustainable financing for ECE, as well as the implementation of public policies that guarantee the right of access, quality, and equity for all Brazilian children (Flores; Lutz, 2022).

Thus, through analysis of the works presented, it was revealed that 37.5% of the articles state that, to expand ECE places, the government uses two main strategies: partialization of care, especially in preschools, and expansion of agreements via the purchase of places, especially for children aged zero to three years in daycare centers; 12.5% of the studies highlight the influence of politics on the regulation and implementation of Fundeb as a factor in ensuring access, quality, and equity; 25% of studies show that the judicialization process has accelerated the expansion of childcare places, based on agreements with private institutions; Furthermore, 12.5% of the surveys indicate that access to ECE is not always guaranteed as a universal right, being conditional on the child's social situation, which keeps many out of the system; another 12.5% of the articles point to the lack of information on the quality of education offered by affiliated institutions, despite the annual increase in financial transfers.

Based on this analysis, all the studies selected to comprise the *corpus* of this study highlight the need for an ethical and political commitment to ensure that all children have access to quality public education and places in public daycare centers and preschools, considering the social and economic inequalities that impact this access. In

addition, they express a shared concern about the education provided, especially in a context where privatization and public-private partnerships can undermine children's education and development.

There is also criticism of the growing privatization of ECE, which can lead to dependence on private institutions and a reduction in the state's responsibility to ensure quality public education. It is also noted that some studies point out that the phenomenon of judicialization, in which families resort to the judicial system to secure a place for their children in ECE, reveals failures in public policies to meet the demand for access to the right to education.

Therefore, by demonstrating the social and political implications in the educational system, these studies highlight how these dynamics influence social inequalities, democratic management, and children's rights. This leads to an understanding of the importance of ethical and political commitment in building a more inclusive, qualitative, and developmental education, especially given the complex current scenario of Brazilian ECE.

Discussions on expanding access to daycare and policies for purchasing places in the context of Brazilian early childhood education

According to Montano, Peroni, and Fernandes (2021, p. 4), privatization processes occur in two ways: “[...] where the private sector acts directly in the provision of education and/or when the private sector acts in the direction of public policies or schools, with ownership remaining public.” This topic will address the expansion of access to daycare centers and policies for purchasing places in the context of Brazilian ECE.

It should be noted that privatization, especially through the purchase of places and public-private partnerships, has led to a progressive and continuous weakening of policies aimed at ECE over the years. This process compromises quality, equity, and social responsibility in the provision of this first stage of basic education (Ferreira, 2016; Flores; Lutz, 2022, Santos; Santos, 2023), as it favors the gradual transfer of state responsibility to private initiatives. This dynamic has become particularly entrenched in the provision of places, which is seen as a reflection of the state's inefficiency and inability to meet demand, resulting in the diversion of public funds to partner daycare centers.

Changes in the relationship between the public and private sectors in ECE are leading to a reconfiguration of the role of the state and delegating the implementation of educational policies to society, which is now taking on the role of supervisory agent (Campos; Madeira,

2020). Consequently, these changes negatively impact the realization of the right to education within a collective and emancipatory project.

The scenario surrounding the policy of purchasing places in daycare centers is alarming, as it compromises the quality of the educational services offered, since priority is given to guaranteeing places rather than providing quality education for children. In addition, there is a disregard for the fact that ECE aimed at children under three years of age has unique and specific characteristics that must be thought about and considered. This poses challenges for this stage of basic education and highlights the importance of adequate planning and the development of more effective public policies to guarantee and ensure access to and quality of education for children, without disregarding, above all, the specific needs of children aged zero to three years.

In this sense, history shows that daycare centers have always played a central role in caring for children. Over time, in different historical contexts, this institution was often seen only as a place for welcoming, sheltering, protecting, and providing basic care for the young children of working mothers who needed a safe place to leave their children. Thus, little or no qualification was required for work in daycare centers. These conditions were established in a context in which ECE was not yet linked to the educational sphere, but rather to philanthropic, community, welfare, and/or social welfare institutions (Rosemberg, 1994; Adrião; Borghi; Domiciano, 2010; Kuhlmann Júnior, 2015).

With municipalities becoming responsible for the first stage of early childhood education, regardless of the particularities of each federated entity, a series of growing challenges arose for municipalities, especially regarding managing the supply of places in daycare centers and preschools. As a result, many municipalities began to prioritize preschools, leaving daycare centers dependent on external strategies. This scenario has currently led to the purchase of places and the increasing privatization of these institutions.

Furthermore, the literature review reveals that the right to ECE has been denied in various ways, especially in view of the high demand for places and limited supply, which results in low-quality education in the first stage of BE. Meanwhile, Adrião, Borghi, and Domiciano (2010, p. 290) reflect on the expansion of ECE services, which has been consolidated “[...] through partnerships between the public and private sectors, via various forms of agreement, such as the transfer of public buildings and the payment of professionals hired by private institutions with public funds and school meals.” This process was intensified by the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Primary Education and Valorization of the Teaching Profession (Fundef), whose priority was primary education. As a result,

municipalities that did not receive federal funds for ECE ended up neglecting the creation of institutions aimed at serving children aged zero to five years old.

Gradually, this stage of basic education began to be taken over by private institutions. This movement intensified in the 2000s with the implementation of the National Education Plan (PNE – 2001-2010), whose purpose was to increase the availability of places in early childhood education. Subsequently, in 2007, the creation of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals (Fundeb) further accelerated the agreements signed to meet the targets, and ECE was gradually transferred to private institutions. These guidelines are supported by Article 77 of the Law of Lines of Direction and Bases of the Education (LDBEN) no. 9,394/96, which establishes the possibility of transferring public funds to the private sector on an exceptional basis. See:

The resources referred to in this article may be allocated to scholarships for basic education, in accordance with the law, for those who demonstrate insufficient resources, when there is a lack of places and regular courses in the public school system in the student's place of residence, with the government being obliged to invest primarily in the expansion of its local network (Brazil, 1996).

In this way, federal entities use this loophole in the law to implement a policy of scrapping the BE, promoting, above all, the drainage of public resources. Instead of investing in the quality of education, they choose to delegate responsibility for providing education for children aged zero to three to the private sector. This model generates two types of EI networks in municipalities: “[...] the direct network and the partner network” (Nascimento *et al.*, 2022, p. 13). Thus, this “[...] privatization of education hinders, or makes it practically impossible, to build a unified debate, identifiable as a public network [...]” (Nascimento *et al.*, 2022, p. 12).

Vicentini *et al.* (2023) point out that factors such as the insertion of children into the world of work, the sexualization of children mediated by media coverage, as well as homeschooling and voucher policies are strategies that reinforce neoliberal logic for the first stage of BE. In addition, the purchase of places has become established as a strategic mechanism to justify the lack of places in public educational institutions.

The project to purchase places in daycare centers in Brazil is an ideological mechanism that hides the absence of public authorities in the first stage of ECE. Furthermore, it reveals a historical neglect of daycare centers throughout their establishment, perpetuating the welfare-oriented nature attributed to these spaces and reinforcing a pejorative view of them and their practices.

This reality feeds back into the deterioration of daycare institutions in Brazil, resulting in the deterioration of public goods and compromising the quality of education that should be guaranteed to all children, including those served by these units. In this regard, Rosenberg (2002) already pointed out that policies designed for ECE in underdeveloped countries were structured based on economic guidelines and aligned with the new world order. Thus, when analyzed from a market perspective, ECE takes on the characteristics of a company, strengthening the transition from state responsibility to the private sector.

This strategy is based on neoliberal policy, which establishes the prerogative of private participation and fuels the advance of privatization. Privatization, on the other hand, consists of granting a public asset to non-state companies so that they can manage it according to market guidelines, prioritizing profit. This model causes serious damage to ECE, as the expansion of places by the private sector generates “[...] implications for the democratization of access and care for children, since the right to early childhood education is not fully realized, reinforcing inequalities in a class-based society” (Peroni; Susin; Montano, 2021, p. 1).

Vicentini *et al.* (2023, p. 131) state that, despite the defense of a developmental ECE, “[...] current public policies aimed at young children are based on the application of financial resources provided by the private sector and partnerships between companies and volunteer work.” In this sense, public-private partnerships contribute to the neglect of education, destroying the project to defend public schools, which is a subjective public right. Thus, these initiatives are contrary to the promotion of ECE and the pursuit of quality education in Brazil.

As a result, neoliberal ideology is solidified, since the enrollment of children waiting in line for a place in ECE is mainly carried out through the policy of purchasing places in the private network, especially for children aged zero to three years. This practice, in addition to indicating a lack of adequate places in public institutions, may also perpetuate inequalities in access to education. Therefore, careful monitoring is essential to identify contradictions between the goals and the reality experienced by children in their daily school lives. Furthermore, it is essential that everyone—society and government—be involved in guaranteeing the right to ECE, prioritizing the expansion of enrollment in a free, high-quality public network and greater investment in education, including the construction of municipal ECE schools.

Thus, thinking about the quality of daycare centers presupposes adequate infrastructure, decent working conditions, fair wages, teacher training, an adequate ratio

of children per classroom, and supplies provided for in the Initial Quality Student Cost (CAQi) and Quality Student Cost (CAQ). However, these aspects are often overlooked in the managerial model of ECE (Adrião, 2011; Ceccon and Drabach, 2020). As Ceccon and Drabach (2020, p. 13) point out, “the transfer of direct public provision of early childhood education [...] to private non-profit institutions takes away rights that have been historically won in this segment.” It is therefore up to social entities to monitor these practices, ensuring that they do not become universal.

Conclusions

With the aim of investigating the implications of neoliberal ideology on the policy of purchasing daycare places in Brazil, we can see the strong influence of the market as a demarcator of the new configurations of ECE. This strategy is part of a larger project designed for underdeveloped countries that are on the path to scrapping free, secular, quality public education. In this sense, the current policy of purchasing places is harmful and hides the real problem with the daycare stage. This neoliberal ploy only triggers the collapse of Brazilian daycare proposals.

It can be inferred that, with the policy of purchasing places, the concept of daycare seems to have reverted to a place solely for the care, protection, and safety of children while their families work. Or this may be a sentiment that has not disappeared when it comes to the education of children from zero to five years of age. So, even with so many advances for this audience, quantity has prevailed over quality, as no thought is given to the infrastructure, working conditions, and other elements that are established in partnerships. Therefore, it is understandable that the challenge lies not only in offering places, but above all in ensuring the quality of care.

Analysis of the research revealed that the expansion of places in early childhood education has been driven by two main government strategies: the partialization of care, mainly for preschools, and the expansion of agreements through the purchase of places for children aged zero to three in daycare centers. In addition, factors such as the regulation and implementation of Fundeb have influenced the adoption of the policy of purchasing school places. At the same time, the judicialization of the right to early childhood education has accelerated the creation of new places, often through agreements with private institutions.

Therefore, it appears that this practice is based on a logic that transfers responsibility from the state to the private sector, masking the inadequacy of structural public policies and

reinforcing a model of welfare-based and precarious care. Instead of investing in expanding and improving the public ECE network, the government has opted to enter into agreements with private institutions, channeling public resources without providing any concrete guarantees regarding the quality of the services offered.

This model, backed by legal provisions such as Article 77 of LDBEN No. 9,394/96, has deepened educational inequalities and compromised the construction of a public, free, secular, and high-quality educational system. The absence of clear criteria for evaluating affiliated institutions, combined with weak oversight of the services provided, compromises the right to education as a subjective public right and prevents the consolidation of a national early childhood education policy based on equity and respect for the specificities of childhood.

Furthermore, it has been identified that the judicialization of demand for places and the socioeconomic status of families have accelerated the adoption of this policy, without any real concern for the comprehensive development of children. Public-private partnerships, rather than representing progress, reaffirm a market logic that reduces the right to education to a simple place in school, disregarding the constitutional principles that govern education as a public and social good.

In this regard, the expansion of public funding for early childhood education places in private institutions is the result of the application of neoliberal principles in the field of education, which is a threat to public education and may lead to difficulties in the social control of the quality of education offered, worsening working conditions for education professionals, who are starting to work in spaces that are monitored and determined by excessive administrative and pedagogical procedures that are essentially bureaucratic. In this sense, as information on the quality of education offered by affiliated institutions is poorly known, it is necessary to implement policies and emphasize the essential nature of social mobilization in the quest to guarantee children's educational rights.

This reaffirms the urgent need to reverse this privatization process, with public policies that guarantee the expansion of the public network of quality daycare centers, the valorization of education professionals, and adequate infrastructure conditions. Only by strengthening the role of the state and committing to quality public education will it be possible to ensure the full right to early childhood education for all Brazilian children.

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