

EDUCATION AND POVERTY: THE BOLSA FAMÍLIA PROGRAM IN THE PERCEPTION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CORUMBÁ-MS

EDUCAÇÃO E POBREZA: O PROGRAMA BOLSA FAMÍLIA NA PERCEPÇÃO DOS ESTUDANTES DO ENSINO MÉDIO EM CORUMBÁ-MS

EDUCACIÓN Y POBREZA: EL PROGRAMA BOLSA FAMÍLIA EN LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS ALUMNOS DE BACHILLERATO DE CORUMBÁ-MS

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this paper is to analyze the socially constructed perceptions about the Bolsa Família Program (BFP), with an emphasis on its relationship with Education, having as target a group of students enrolled in the 1st year of High School in two public schools in the city from Corumbá-MS. The study had 23 participants, 14 of whom were beneficiaries of the program and nine, non-beneficiaries. The data regarding the students' perceptions about the BFP were collected through questionnaires and, subsequently, we analyzed qualitatively using the techniques of Content Analysis. The results indicate that the students consulted, especially the non-beneficiaries of the BFP, have superficial knowledge about the program and also point to the existence of divergences between the perceptions of beneficiary and non-beneficiary students in the way of conceiving the program and its educational conditionality, as well the expectations regarding the continuation of studies/ professional performance.

KEYWORDS: Bolsa família program. Social policy. High school. Students' perceptions.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo consiste em analisar as percepções socialmente construídas sobre o Programa Bolsa Família (PBF), com ênfase em sua relação com a Educação, tendo como público-alvo um grupo de estudantes matriculados no 1º ano do Ensino Médio em duas escolas públicas da cidade de Corumbá-MS. O estudo contou com 23 participantes, sendo 14 deles beneficiários do programa, e nove não beneficiários. Os dados referentes às percepções dos estudantes sobre o PBF foram coletados por meio de questionários e, posteriormente, analisamos qualitativamente a partir das técnicas da Análise de Conteúdo. Os resultados indicam que os estudantes consultados, especialmente os não beneficiários do PBF, possuem um conhecimento superficial sobre o programa e também apontam para a existência de divergências entre as percepções de estudantes beneficiários e não beneficiários no modo de conceber o programa e sua condicionalidade educacional, bem como nas expectativas em relação ao prosseguimento dos estudos/atuação profissional.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Programa bolsa família. Política social. Ensino médio. Percepções de estudantes.

RESUMEN: El artículo analiza las percepciones socialmente construidas a cerca del Programa Bolsa Familia (PBF), con énfasis en su relación con la Educación. La investigación desarrollada fue dirigida a un grupo de estudiantes matriculados en la escuela de nivel secundario de dos instituciones públicas de Corumbá-MS. El grupo contó con 23 participantes, 14 de los cuales en la condición de beneficiarios del programa y nueve no. Los datos que registran las percepciones de los estudiantes a cerca del PBF fueron recogidos con la aplicación de un cuestionario y, posteriormente, fueron analizados cualitativamente utilizando las técnicas de Análisis de Contenido. Los resultados indican que los estudiantes consultados, especialmente los que no se benefician del PBF, tienen un conocimiento superficial del programa; además, los dato también señalan la existencia de divergencias entre las percepciones de los estudiantes beneficiarios y no beneficiarios en la forma de interpretar el programa y su condicionalidad educativa, así como las expectativas respecto a la continuación de estudios/desempeño profesional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Programa bolsa família. Política social. Escuela secundaria. Percepciones de los estudiantes.

Introduction

The way of understanding poverty is not unanimous and, many times, this understanding tends to naturalize it or blame the “poor”, seen as the one who lacks something, generally, material goods (CAPUCHA, 2004). However, it is believed that the effects of poverty are not restricted to insufficient income, which is expressed in consumption habits, but involves precarious access to health services, education, sanitation, infrastructure, professional qualification, etc. From this perspective, the fight against poverty is not limited to guaranteeing minimum subsistence conditions but involves quality of life and conditions for full development, which implies access to qualified school education. Therefore, poverty must be understood as a social problem arising from the very structure of society and whose understanding (or naturalization) has implications for public policies.

Education is a political act and, as such, has a role in tackling poverty. In this sense, it is worth clarifying that education and politics are different practices, but that they come closer and are configured as modalities of social practice. In the class society, marked by antagonistic interests, these modalities have reciprocal dependence, however, education is greater in relation to politics, from which the objective conditions of pedagogical practice derive. However, there is a relative autonomy on the part of education that allows it to be placed at the service of the students' interests, in order to enhance their political practice (SAVIANI, 2018). It is under the

bias of the possibility of social transformation through education as a specific practice of appropriation of the historically constructed culture and human development, that we take the Bolsa Família Program as an object of analysis, which, in essence, is a social coping policy of poverty.

The idea that poverty is undesirable and that it needs to be overcome through political interventions is not new (GEREMEK, 1988; WOOLF, 1989). Over the past few centuries, this idea has coexisted with different practices of identification, classification and control of the poor and has produced what Mourell (2002) called “*legitimación social de la pobreza*”. In its most recent stage, which started in the second half of the 20th century, the fight against poverty has been considered a condition for guaranteeing Human Rights and, at the same time, it has motivated political actions aimed at the realization of fundamental rights, among which stand out education and protection of children and adolescents (MINETTO; BECK, 2019).

By reviewing the history of tackling poverty and focusing our attention on treating poor children, we can identify two important changes that occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries. The first change concerns the emergence of childism and the construction of different legal treatment for children and adolescents who break the law; and the second was the recognition that the State has a duty to ensure conditions for the full development of children. According to Zanella (2019), childism took on an initial form in the United States in the 19th century and was marked by the emphasis on punishing the smallest offender and by suppressing the power of parents who are unfit to educate their children. It is noteworthy that, despite its moralistic aspect and reaching especially poor families, childism fostered an important discussion about the State's responsibility for the education of the child. Subsequently, with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN in 1959, this discussion overcame the emphasis on the punishment of children and raised the need for public policies aimed at ensuring access for all children to school education, health, sport and culture.

Brazil, a country considered to be developing and whose social inequality is of great magnitude, reaffirmed its commitment to the protection of children and adolescents in the Constitutional Charter of 1988 and in the Statute of Children and Adolescents, promulgated in 1990. Currently, Brazil the Bolsa Família Program has an instrument for direct and conditional cash transfers to minimize the most immediate effects of poverty. In addition, health and education conditionalities aim to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Table 1 shows values for 2019 for families in poverty or extreme poverty, referring to the type of benefit and possibility of accumulation.

Table 1 – Types of benefits of the Bolsa Família Program in 2019

Benefit	Poverty	Extreme poverty	Possibility of accumulation
Basic	R\$ 0,00	R\$ 89,00	0
Variable from 0 to 15 years	R\$ 41,00	R\$ 41,00	5
Variable to pregnant women	R\$ 41,00	R\$ 41,00	0
Variable nursing	R\$ 41,00	R\$ 41,00	0
Variable youth	R\$ 48,00	R\$ 48,00	2

Source: Devised from Caixa Econômica Federal website³

The amount of the benefit received varies according to the condition of poverty or extreme poverty, the existence of pregnant women, children, and adolescents in the families. The basic benefit is intended only for families that live in extreme poverty, that is, with per capita monthly income that does not exceed R\$ 89.00. In these cases, receiving is not linked to the presence of children, adolescents, or pregnant women at home, unlike what occurs with those located in the poverty range, which includes the variation between R\$ 89.01 and R\$ 178.00.

The variable benefits apply to both groups as long as their purposes are satisfied. There is a variable benefit of R\$ 41.00 conditioned to the existence of children and/or adolescents aged 0 to 15 years, accumulating up to five times a month. This same amount is paid when there is a pregnant woman in the family composition or child between 0 and 6 months of life (nursing variable). The variable for pregnant women can be paid for up to nine months and the nursing variable for up to six months. The youth variable, on the other hand, represents the amount of R\$ 48.00 per month destined to households with adolescents between 16 and 17 years old and can be accumulated up to two benefits (BRASIL, 2019).

The school attendance rate of young people aged 15 to 17 years in 2018 reached the percentage of 88.2% (IBGE, 2019), still not reaching the universalization of education for this age group, as foreseen in goal 3 of the National Education Plan (BRASIL, 2014). This reality justifies the existence of the “youth variable” benefit, since in families that live in conditions of severe material deprivation, adolescents are easily tasked with contributing to family income.

This program has been the focus of several research, which are developed from different perspectives. The bibliography referring to the Bolsa Família Program (BFP) allows us to identify a set of themes that are recurrent in the approaches formulated by the academy or by government agencies regarding the respective program. Among the most recurring themes, we

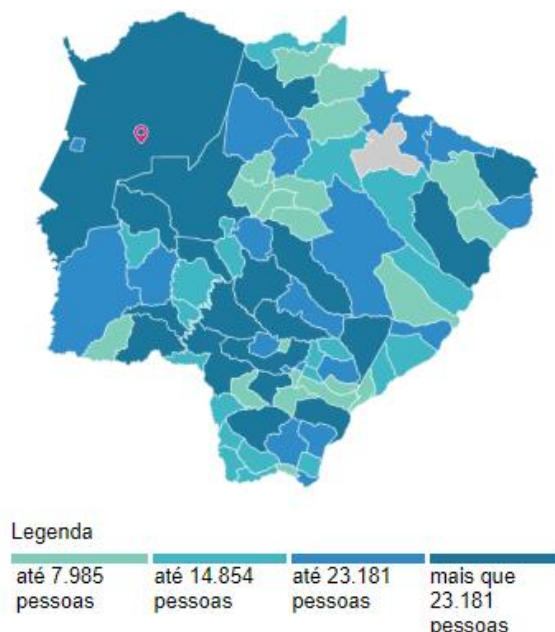
³ Available: <http://www.caixa.gov.br>. Access: 10 Sep. 2020.

can highlight (i) the objectives and instruments of operability of the BFP (ALMEIDA; SILVA, 2016; CARNELOSSI; BERNARDES, 2018); (ii) the monitoring of the established conditionalities (AMARAL; MONTEIRO, 2013; PIRES, 2013; ABREU; AQUINO, 2017); (iii) the relationship between the program and access to health services (DENES; KOMATSU; MENEZES-FILHO, 2018); (iv) valuing women in the composition and definition of the family budget (AGUIAR, 2012); (v) and the impact of the BFP on the school performance of the beneficiaries - impact measured from factors such as school attendance, dropout, passing/failing and age/grade gap (CAVALCANTI; COSTA; SILVA, 2013; GONÇALVES; MENICUCCI; AMARAL, 2017).

During the literature review, we found that most of the studies published on the BFP follow a bureaucratic rationality that is marked, on the one hand, by the need to monitor the effects of this income transfer instrument and on the other by the discussions about costs/benefits. Bureaucratic rationality, although necessary to ensure transparency in the application of public resources and to make gradual corrections to the program feasible, presents little space for the beneficiaries' opinions. However, studies such as those by Pires (2013), Testa *et al.* (2013), Zimmermann and Espínola (2015) contemplate the opinion of the beneficiaries and are important exceptions.

Without disregarding the importance of the bureaucratic rationality observed in the consulted bibliography, we chose to develop another perspective of the BFP approach, and during 2019 we conducted a survey in the city of Corumbá (MS) to find out what the students and mothers of the beneficiaries think about the intentions, procedures and results of the BFP, especially with regard to schooling. Figure 1 shows the location of the city of Corumbá in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

Figure 1 – Corumbá location on the map of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul



Source: IBGE website⁴

The municipality of Corumbá is bordered by Bolivia and Paraguay, has a territorial extension of 64,962,854 km² and has a population that in 2019 was estimated to be approximately 111 thousand inhabitants. According to IBGE data for 2017, 15,626 people were formally employed, which represented 14.2% of the municipality's population (IBGE, 2020). The high rate of unemployed (or underemployed) economically active population in Corumbá is an indication that there is a large population in the municipality that falls under the category of social vulnerability, and, consequently, the city concentrates a significant number of families benefited by the BFP: in June 2019, the program served 5,898 families (BRASIL, 2019).

In view of such a large universe of beneficiaries, to make the work of collecting and analyzing data viable, we directed the research to students enrolled in the 1st year of high school in public schools.

According to the Statistical Synopses of the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), Corumbá had 4,361 enrollments in high school in 2017, with the majority of students being female and brown, as shown in the Table two.

⁴ Available: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/>. Access: 10 Sep. 2020.

Table 2 – Distribution of students enrolled in high school according to gender and color in 2017 in Corumbá

Gender	Color						Total
	White	Black	Brown	Yellow	Indigenous	Not declared	
Female	306	32	1.113	9	7	756	2.223
Male	309	20	1.048	4	8	749	2.138
Total	615	52	2.161	13	15	1.505	4.361

Source: INEP website⁵

This direction placed us in front of a group of students who were homogeneous in their level of education and, hypothetically, concentrated many students with the experience of having been benefited by BFP throughout Elementary School. However, the group was too large for the research objectives and it was necessary to reduce the number of schools contemplated. In this reduction, the determining criterion was the number of students benefiting from the *Bolsa Família* Program. Based on this criterion, we elected an educational institution located in the central area of the city (school B) and another located in the peripheral area (school A).

Based on data from the *Presença* System for the year 2017, 1,760 students aged 16 and 17 were beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Família* Program in the city, with 198 attending school A and 126 attending school B.

In relation to students up to 15 years old, school A had 343 enrollments, totaling 541 beneficiaries. In turn, school B had 283 beneficiaries in this age group, with a total of 409 students enrolled in the *Bolsa Família* Program.

School A had eight classrooms for the 1st year of high school and school B, three, with around 350 students. We conducted an initial survey with all students to identify those who were beneficiaries of the BFP and located 52 students whose families received the benefit. These were invited to participate in the research. Subsequently, based on the number of beneficiary students who accepted, we extended the invitation to non-beneficiary students, with the intention of composing two quantitatively identical groups. However, the acceptance rate was low and the sample was composed of 14 beneficiary and nine non-beneficiary students, totaling a group of 23 students. The students were identified by the letter P followed by numbering, assigned at the time we surveyed beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in both schools.

⁵ Available: <http://inep.gov.br/sinopses-estatisticas-da-educacao-basica>. Access: 10 Sep. 2020.

After receiving the signed consent form from the students, together with the Informed Consent Form from the guardians authorizing the research, we applied a questionnaire with questions about the BFP for the total group of 23 students. The data were analyzed qualitatively, by cutting and categorizing the statements according to the assumptions of Content Analysis (BARDIN, 2016).

The methodological procedures described succinctly in the previous paragraphs were necessary to ensure the possibility of a more in-depth interpretation of the perceptions of high school students regarding the BFP. It should be noted that the questionnaire applied contemplates two aspects of the BFP that are distinct, but interconnected. They are: the relationship between BFP and Education and the role of the Program in the broader context of public policies to tackle poverty in Brazil.

Conceptions of high school students about the *Bolsa Família* Program and schooling

The 23 students answered a questionnaire of open questions about their conceptions in relation to the study and the BFP. The analysis of the data pointed out the existence of categories: (1) Expectation about the continuity of the studies; (2) Conception about the BFP; (3) Conditionality of school attendance; (4) Contribution of the BFP to poverty reduction. Such categories were divided into subcategories, and these were organized in tables. Next, we present the results starting with the subcategory with the highest recurrence in each group of students (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries).

(1) *Expectations about continuing studies*

The students were asked about the expectations presented in relation to the continuation of their studies and it was possible to observe that not everyone wants to enter university or in technical courses. Chart 1 shows the subcategories contained in “Expectation about the continuity of studies”.

Chart 1 – Subcategories of “Expectation about continuing studies”

Beneficiaries	Non-Beneficiaries
Better future	Higher education
Higher education	Armed Forces
Employability	Positive
Positive	Employability

Source: Devised by the authors

The analysis of the students' expectations about the continuity of studies shows that non-beneficiaries of the BFP tend to set more objective goals, such as: attending college (5) or joining the armed forces (2), with less incidence of vague responses that express only the positivity of expectations, without specific notes or that are summarized in “[...] having a profession” (P1, 2019). Among the beneficiaries, there was a recurrent desire to have a better future (5), as well as entering a university (5). The subcategory “Employability” also emerged significantly (4), with those who simply indicated a positive expectation (2).

Considering that the subcategory “Better future” was present only among the beneficiaries of the BFP, without being directly related to the continuity of studies, we can infer that the absence of this subcategory in the speech of non-beneficiary students is an indication of the difficulty in making projections clear for adolescents living with socioeconomic deprivation. As highlighted by Arruda (2017), people living in poverty tend to deposit their dreams in meeting basic needs for subsistence. We observed this logic in the response of student P30 (2019), who expressed the desire to “[...] have a better future, having my own house, my car, having my money with my work” (our translation).

The sub-category "employability" follows the same direction in that the most important function of the job is the possibility of having a job, which, consequently, must guarantee survival. In this case, it is interesting to observe the response of the student P39 (2019), who said he expected from the future to have “a job” to fit “in society”. The sub-category "employability" follows the same direction in that the most important function of the job is the possibility of having a job, which, consequently, must guarantee survival. In this case, it is interesting to observe the response of the student P39 (2019), who said he expected from the future to have “a job” to fit “in society”.

According to Nascimento and Barros (2018), the neoliberal perspective, which has guided Brazilian education since the 1990s, guides the educational process in the search for immediate results, expressed in large-scale evaluations, and does not promote human emancipation from from understanding society's contradictions with a view to overcoming them. In this sense, the concepts that naturalize social inequalities and limit the horizons of those living in poverty are understood.

(2) *Conception about the Bolsa Família Program*

This category shows us that the beneficiary students have greater knowledge about the BFP than those who do not receive the benefit, which is understandable. On the other hand, it suggests that the general population lacks information about the program's functioning and

purposes so that they do not cultivate misconceptions. The following are the subcategories related to the “Conception about the BFP”.

Chart 2 – Subcategories of “Conception about the BFP”

Beneficiaries	Non-Beneficiaries
Incentive to study	Income supplement
Income supplement	Help
Insufficient resource	Incentive to study
Related to conditionalities	
Help	

Source: Devised by the authors

The subcategories “Incentive to study” (5) and “Income supplement” (5) were the most prevalent among the beneficiaries of the PBF. In the first, the relationship between the program and Education was valued: “[...] it is a program with the objective of encouraging the student to attend school and have a good performance at school, and to cancel, if possible, the failure rate and with it the rate of illiteracy and malnutrition” (P33, 2019, our translation); in the second subcategory, knowledge about the program's purpose in reducing the effects of poverty was expressed: “It is a program that helps needy families, with a monthly cash value” (P79, 2019, our translation). There were also students who revealed that they understood the PBF as an insufficient resource in the face of needs (2) and the establishment of a relationship with the fulfillment of conditionalities (1): “You have to participate in the meetings, you have to go to the post, you have to be up to date with the vaccine, you have to be up to date with the school” (P16, 2019, our translation). Finally, the subcategory “Help” (1) in which vaguely mention something similar to: “Helps the family” (P21, 2019, our translation). This last category was the one with the highest recurrence among non-beneficiaries (4), together with an answer that defines the PBF as “Income complement” (4). Two responses referred to the “Study incentive”. Of these, we highlight the answer formulated by the student P138 (2019); according to this student, the PBF “[...] guarantees these families the right to education. So children don't have to stop going to school to help support their home” (our translation).

In view of the responses collected, we found that there is a very simplified perception of the BFP, especially in the segment of non-beneficiary students who answered the questionnaire. The relationship between the benefit granted and the incentive to continue studies for low-income families seems to be clear. However, we found that most of the students who answered the questionnaire thought the BFP based on the situation of vulnerability of the benefited families, without articulating the program as the main objective of overcoming the

intergenerational cycle of poverty. Thus, it is worth noting that not only permanence, but the quality of education is decisive for this overcoming, since it depends on the appropriation of the historically elaborated culture capable of providing critical awareness of reality and, consequently, emancipation (NASCIMENTO; BARROS, 2018).

(3) *School attendance conditionality*

Below, Chart 3 expresses the subcategories linked to the students' perceptions about the educational conditionality imposed by the BFP as a requirement for receiving the benefit, namely, the school attendance of at least 85% of school days for children and adolescents up to 15 years old, years of age and 75% for adolescents aged 16 and 17.

Chart 3 – Subcategories of “School attendance conditionality”

Beneficiaries	Non-Beneficiaries
Contribution	Agreement
Agreement	Contribution
Obligation	Disagreement
Indifference	Unfamiliarity

Source: Devised by the authors

The “Concordance” subcategory comprises the set of responses in which the student claims to be in accordance with the requirement of school attendance, however, without giving a reason. In the group of non-beneficiaries, it was the most recurrent (6), followed by the one that expresses the understanding of conditionality as a social contribution (2): *“I agree with the requirement, because this way we will be better able to overcome the situation of poverty”* (P1, 2019, our translation). One student did not know how to answer, and another, positioned himself contrary to stating that he does not think it is correct *“because it forces, at least a little, the student to go to school, in my opinion, it should not have this rule”* (P44, 2019, our translation).

Among the beneficiary students of the BFP, most conceive the requirement as a contribution that exceeds the subject (student) and extends to the social collective. As an example of this type of interpretation that relates the requirement for school attendance to the interest of society, we quote the response from student P39 (2019, our translation): *“This requirement helps to reduce the percentage of young people on the street, and who may have a chance in the middle to society, instead of being addicted to drugs and alcohol”*. Four adolescents expressed simple agreement with the requirement, while one expressed indifference, and two understood it as an obligation *“to continue receiving the bolsa familia”* (P41, 2019, our translation).

The responses collected, despite varying, corroborate Pires' statement (2013) regarding the conditionality of school attendance set by the BFP. According to this author, many beneficiaries understand the conditionality of school attendance as the counterpart of the conclusion of a contract, and for the author, this relationship of exchange and reciprocity favors the sense of belonging and social recognition. Our questionnaire did not explore the symbolic meaning of school attendance conditionality, as did Pires' study; however, we capture a predominantly positive perception of the requirement of minimum school attendance to grant the benefit.

(4) *Contribution of the Bolsa Família Program to the reduction of poverty*

In the two groups of students, there was agreement and disagreement in relation to the conception that the BFP contributes to the reduction of poverty. The reasons for agreement were more convergent than those for disagreement. The subcategories that make up this category are shown in Chart 4.

Chart 4 – Subcategories of “Contribution of the BFP to poverty reduction”

Beneficiaries		Non-Beneficiaries	
Agreement	Disagreement	Agreement	Disagreement
Help	Insufficient resources	Help	Insufficiency of conditionality
Academic formation	Maladministration	Academic formation	Má Maladministration
Satisfaction of basic needs	Misuse	Satisfaction of basic needs	
		Unfamiliarity	

Source: Devised by the authors

There were several subcategories that emerged regarding the contribution or not of the BFP to poverty alleviation. In both groups, the majority believe in the effectiveness of the program in fulfilling this purpose. Nine among the beneficiaries are those who see the BFP positively in terms of poverty reduction, of these, four insert their perceptions in the “Help” subcategory, briefly emphasizing the assistance provided to families, but without explaining the reasons for such understanding; three relate it to “Academic formation” and two, to “Satisfaction of basic needs”. Let us look at two examples of responses that emphasize the satisfaction of basic needs: *“I think so because some people manage to graduate, attend college and get a better job”* (P25, 2019, our translation). *“In my case, this money arrived at a good time, with that money I buy my school supplies, clothes and our own food”* (P14, 2019, our translation).

For non-beneficiary students, the reasons for the success of poverty reduction follow the same logic as the subcategories of the previous group and are associated with “Help” (3), followed by “Academic formation” (1) and “Satisfaction of basic needs” (1), with a student who expresses agreement with the contribution, but claims not to have greater knowledge to present justifications. Sample responses: “Yes, because money is used to buy school supplies” (P7, 2019, our translation). “Yes, because it helps with an income” (P12, 2019, our translation).

In contrast, seven beneficiaries and three non-beneficiaries stated that the BFP was not able to reduce poverty. In the group of non-beneficiaries, two responses fall into the subcategory “Insufficiency of conditionality”. One of the young people believes that the BFP keeps the beneficiary students at school with the sole motivation of financial resources (P138), while another states that there are still school-age people who exchange their study for work activity (P24, 2019). The subcategory “Maladministration” also emerged, in which the student expresses the view that there are payments made improperly due to insufficient supervision.

The beneficiaries of the BFP who do not certify its effectiveness in reducing poverty do so, mainly, based on the “Insufficiency of resources” (4), since they emphasize the low value of the benefit in face of the demands of life today: “No, because the money I receive is too little to help me with my studies or more” (P21, 2019, our translation). However, one of the students shifts the focus of the benefit and deposits it in the school's conditions:

In a way yes, and in another way not. He really achieved his plan, but it didn't help much, because schools are lacking in resources, books, libraries and teachers are lacking, and yes, it reached the goal for the student that have less worries about things around him, but other students gave up the lack of schools (P33, 2019, our translation).

The second subcategory that expresses disagreement between the beneficiaries was “Maladministration” (2), in which they state that there are families that need the benefit and do not receive it, while others need less and receive a higher value than supposedly poorer families. These statements indicate ignorance of the rules of the program, which consider factors other than income itself, such as the number and age of children, for example, as explained in Table 1. In the subcategory “Misuse”, a student reports that there are beneficiaries who they use assistance with expenses that are not related to family support or schooling for their children. This student's opinion, despite being an exception, deserves a brief reflection. We believe that the statement about “Misuse” is based on limited knowledge about the BFP, since there are no restrictions on the use of the resource received. In common sense, there is the idea that the benefit feature should be used on essential items, however, the feature can be used for different

purposes, such as renting the property, paying water and electricity fees, clothing, furniture, medication, etc. It is important to note that the BFP is an income supplement that aims to guarantee minimum conditions of survival and its granting is not conditioned to a list of expenses authorized or disallowed by the government.

The students' conceptions about the BFP and schooling reinforce the importance of school attendance conditionality for overcoming poverty, although people who survive in contexts of material deprivation have some difficulty in setting audacious goals, standing out the intention of being able to provide existence itself with resources from work. In this perspective, the statements of P33 are resumed regarding the quality of education offered to the poorest sections of society, since “*schools are lacking resources, books, libraries and teachers are lacking*” (our translation). It is interesting to note that the aforementioned speech is similar to the position of several Education researchers, in that it emphasizes that it is not enough to keep poor children and adolescents in school without offering the conditions for the maximum development of their potential. This student's ability to interpret the problem of school performance is perceived beyond the question of the benefit of the BFP.

When discussing the relationship between Education and poverty, Yannoulas, Assis and Ferreira (2012) warn that measures related to the guarantee of food, uniforms, school supplies and others, often considered to be assistentialist, do not exist because the public school receives children considered “in need”. Similarly, actions and programs to improve school performance are necessary to fill gaps resulting from “deficits” caused by the scarcity of material/cultural resources. These concessions are nothing more than the respect for rights legally guaranteed both in the Federal Constitution and in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education and in the Statute of Children and Adolescents. In this light, the authors emphasize that the quantitative expansion of schooling is not capable of promoting, by itself, the expansion of social justice. The permanence of children and adolescents from impoverished contexts at school must be accompanied by qualitative aspects that consider the economic, political, cultural and educational implications involved in the schooling process in order to provide the necessary conditions for the exercise of citizenship.

Final considerations

Throughout the article, we analyzed the socially constructed perceptions regarding the objectives, procedures and results of the Bolsa Família Program. The analysis explored data

from two schools in the city of Corumbá (MS) and included 23 students from the first year of high school, being 14 beneficiaries of the BFP and nine non-beneficiaries.

Considering that the BFP is present in all cities in Brazil and, considering that the bibliography consulted emphasizes the existence of regional differences in the audience of beneficiaries and in the school performance that this audience presents, we are aware that the data collected in the survey do not allow generalizations. However, we believe that the questionnaires answered by high school students in Corumbá - MS offer important elements for a reflection on how society thinks and interacts with the BFP.

One of the research conclusions concerns the predominance of a positive perception of the BFP among high school students in Corumbá. With the proviso that we observed varying degrees of positivity, most students agree with the conditionality of mandatory school attendance and believe that the BFP contributes to the continuity of the studies of the beneficiaries. However, few students related the granting of the financial benefit to the guarantee of minimum rights or to overcome the generational cycle of poverty. The absence of a more elaborate perception of the BFP's intentions points to the need for greater openness for discussing the program in the school environment. We believe that issues related to BFP refer to the concepts of citizenship, public policies and social equity, and, consequently, demand greater attention from schools and social segments directly involved in school education, that is, students and teachers. Another conclusion drawn from the student questionnaires is the difference between the beneficiaries 'and non-beneficiaries' future expectations. In this regard, it is important to note that the beneficiaries, despite living in unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, also draw up plans for the future and perceive the existence of a relationship between school education and professional opportunities, although they make less objective projections in terms of career.

Finally, we consider it pertinent to register our conception regarding the importance of student participation in discussions about the BFP. We believe that the school can make an important contribution to society by promoting the debate on the objectives of the BFP and by encouraging discussion about the structure of the program and the results achieved. In this sense, we are in favor of proposing teaching practices that make it possible for students to be involved with issues related to public policies to tackle poverty and that encourage a critical understanding of the social inequalities that permeate the reality of Brazil.

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