

Research articles

Performance in Basic Education of graduates of pedagogy courses: a descriptive analysis of institutional differences

Atuação na Educação Básica dos egressos dos cursos de pedagogia: uma análise descritiva das diferenças institucionais

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Abstract

The shift toward university-based teacher education in Brazil is a recent phenomenon characterized by public policies that have prioritized privatization. The impact on the educational background of teachers working in K-12 education remains largely unexplored. The objective of this study was to explore the institutional differences among graduates of teacher education programs who work in K-12 education. The methodology is quantitative and observational, utilizing data from the School Census. Three main findings can be highlighted: a growing predominance of training in private institutions, though with a significant role played by state policies in the 2000s; a still modest impact of federal training policies on federal public institutions; and the use of initial training as a means of in-service training. More in-depth studies of these data can inform teacher training policies that reduce the gap between training and practice, as well as improve the quality of the service provided.

Keywords: School Census; Basic Education; teacher training; graduates; Higher Education evaluation.

Resumo

A universitarização da formação dos pedagogos no Brasil é fenômeno recente, marcado por políticas públicas que privilegiaram a via da privatização. O impacto desse processo no perfil formativo dos professores em atuação na Educação Básica ainda é pouco explorado. Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo analisar as diferenças institucionais entre os egressos de cursos de pedagogia que atuam na Educação Básica. A metodologia adotada é quantitativa e observacional, fazendo uso de dados do Censo Escolar. Três principais resultados podem ser apontados: predomínio crescente da formação em instituições privadas, mas com um papel relevante de políticas estaduais nos anos 2000; impacto ainda tímido das políticas federais de formação para as instituições públicas federais; a utilização da formação inicial como meio de formação em serviço. Estudos mais aprofundados sobre esses dados podem subsidiar políticas de formação docente que reduzam a perda entre formação e atuação, bem como aumentem a qualidade do serviço oferecido.

Palavras-chave: Censo Escolar; Educação Básica; formação de professores; egressos; avaliação da Educação Superior.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of higher education began in economically developed countries, especially the United States and Western Europe, but spread rapidly across the globe (Schofer; Meyer, 2005). This movement has also found its way to Brazil, a country that continues to face challenges, as evidenced by its national education plans aimed at increasing access to higher education for young people aged 18 to 24. Also, there is an effort to provide higher-level professional training to individuals who missed out during that age range (Senkevics, 2021).

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In the specific case of Pedagogy teachers, the major driver for their higher education training was the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases. Under this legislation, albeit with some exceptions (Carvalho; Damasceno; Moura, 2019), a full teaching degree (*licenciatura plena*) became the basic requirement for practicing the teaching profession. This included teachers in the early years of basic education and early childhood education, who had previously been trained primarily in secondary-level courses that were the successors to the old normal schools.

The decision to adopt a privatization-oriented model to meet the demand for teacher training, involving the creation of new institutions and programs, soon raised questions regarding the quality of the training provided and, consequently, the need for the State to regulate the system through assessment (Afonso, 2000, 2013). In this context, state regulation of institutions and their undergraduate programs materialized through Law 10.861 of 2004, which established the National Higher Education Assessment System. The assessment dimensions outlined in the aforementioned law encompass various aspects, inputs, and outputs of the university, including its graduates.

While there is already extensive research on the privatization of teacher training, particularly in Pedagogy programs (Gatti et al., 2019; Meneghel; Westphal, 2020), literature concerning the career trajectories of these graduates remains quite scarce (Bof; Caseiro; Mundim, 2023; Vieira; Paul; Barbosa, 2023). Consequently, the effects of privatization policies on graduates who actually go on to teach in basic education remain largely unexplored. Were the majority of teachers working in basic education, specifically those with degrees in Pedagogy, trained at private institutions? While the literature offers extensive details on federal teacher training policies, it often neglects state-level policies. This raises the question of whether more teachers were trained at federal institutions compared to state ones. Did various public policies for teacher training, such as PARFOR and UAB, result in a larger number of teachers trained while in service?

The questions raised above can be answered by analyzing the institutional differences in the training of Pedagogy graduates who actually work in basic education. This is because not everyone who completes a teaching degree program goes on to work as a teacher in basic education schools; the attrition rate can exceed fifty percent of the graduates (Bof; Caseiro; Mundim, 2023). Several factors contribute to this scenario, ranging from the lack of prestige associated with the teaching profession to its low valuation in Brazil, characterized by low salaries, a lack of public civil service exams, and underfunding. Thus, this research aims to explore the institutional differences among Pedagogy graduates working in basic education. The study seeks to identify some of the impacts of the teacher training policies implemented in Brazil in recent years.

METHOD

The research uses a quantitative, observational methodology, with descriptive statistical tools for data analysis. The data are derived from INEP microdata regarding the 2019 school education census, the last year for which data were available, disaggregated at the teacher level and including information on teacher qualifications (Brasil, 2019).

As the data were secondary (Cohen; Manion; Morrison, 2018), a cleaning process was essential for selecting relevant variables and, where feasible, identifying and correcting any issues that might compromise subsequent analyses. The procedures for constructing the dataset with the chosen variables and the necessary exclusions are detailed below.

The 2019 School Census database on teaching staff is based on teaching roles, as a single individual may hold multiple positions, such as working at more than one school, teaching more than one subject, or performing duties other than classroom instruction. Consequently, the database contains 11,538,371 teaching roles. The data are not limited to classroom teachers but also include information on assistants, monitors, Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) translators, and support staff. Since the research focuses on classroom teachers, 693,497 roles not involving classroom instruction were excluded. Following this step, 10,841,874 roles performed by 2,259,309 unique teachers were identified.

Issues regarding teacher training remain widespread across all states of the federation. Educational statistics indicate that a significant number of active teachers still lack a higher education degree. Even excluding those who did not graduate from full undergraduate degree programs (*licenciaturas*), there remained 1,925,998 teachers with some form of higher education. The School Census allows for the reporting of up to three distinct higher education qualifications. However, in 2019, most teachers held only a single higher education qualification; only 9.5% had two or three registered qualifications. The challenge lay in identifying which of these qualifications corresponded to the *licenciatura* degrees and determining which was the initial *licenciatura* in cases where a teacher had graduated from more than one program of this type. Using the graduation year variable, an algorithm was created to identify whether a course was a *licenciatura* and, subsequently, to determine the one with the earliest completion year. This process identified 1,766,043 teachers (91.7%) who held at least one full undergraduate degree (*licenciatura*).

The teacher's age at the time of completing their first full undergraduate degree is one of the variables selected for the analysis. This variable is not natively present in the dataset; it is derived by subtracting the difference between the census reference year and the year of degree completion from the teacher's age at the time of the census. Upon calculating this new variable, 5,329 teachers were identified as being under 18 years old at the time of course completion, with 2,161 under 13. A decision was made to exclude these teachers, as the data presented a serious inconsistency, and the accuracy of the figures could not be relied upon. In this study, this variable was a proxy for in-service training; if a teacher was older at the time of their initial training, we assumed they were already working as a teacher.

The administrative category of the institutions where the teachers obtained their degrees is a crucial factor in this study. Consequently, 299,194 teachers (16.9%) were excluded from the final sample due to missing information regarding their training institutions, preventing analysis based on administrative categories. In addition, 811 cases were removed because they provided details about the institution, but did not specify its administrative category. Thus, the final sample consisted of 1,461,897 teachers. It is important to note that this final sample size cannot be calculated simply by subtracting the figures for the excluded groups since there is an overlap of 1,118 teachers among those with age-related data issues and those associated with unregistered higher education institutions. The outcome sample includes teachers who have at least one identified degree and available information regarding the administrative category of the institution from which they were trained.

In summary, the variables selected for the study were: administrative status, year of completion of the first full undergraduate degree, and the teacher's age at the time of completing that degree. The data were analyzed using the R language (R Development Core Team, 2023), and the graphs were created in Excel for Microsoft 365.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The policy regarding teacher qualification in Brazil, following the 1996 LDB, particularly for teachers in early childhood education and the early years of elementary education, is characterized by the universitarization of teacher training. This term is understood here in a broad sense as higher education-level training, though not necessarily conducted within a university institution (Campos, 2002; Maués, 2003; Menter, 2023). However, it is important to note that the very law establishing the full undergraduate degree (*licenciatura plena*) as the standard for initial teacher training also creates exceptions allowing for training at the secondary education level, in response to historical shortages and needs (Carvalho; Damasceno; Moura, 2019).

Driven by the higher education attainment targets set by the National Education Plans, enrollment in teacher training programs increased exponentially (Meneghel; Westphal, 2020). This expansion aimed to accommodate not only recent high school graduates but, above all, practicing teachers who lacked a higher education degree. Consequently, initial teacher qualification evolved into an in-service training policy for Brazilian teachers, particularly those working in early childhood education and the early years of elementary education, who began to be served by Pedagogy degree programs (Gatti; Barreto; André, 2011).

There was a significant expansion in the number of programs and enrollments, transforming Pedagogy into one of the largest undergraduate degree programs in the country. This demand is explained by the fact that the pedagogue is a versatile, generalist professional responsible for virtually the first ten years of school, including Early Childhood Education (Gatti et al., 2019). In an analysis of enrollment figures from 1999 to 2021, Minhoto, Bielschowsky and Aguiar (2024) demonstrate that the growth of this program was driven by privatization and the extensive use of distance learning as a cost-reduction strategy. Therefore, public provision of these teacher-training programs appears to play a secondary or supplementary role, particularly in less developed areas where private capital fails to reach (Gatti et al., 2019).

Literature on the professional practice of Pedagogy undergraduates in basic education remains scarce. In their analysis of the teacher shortage in basic education, Bof, Caseiro and Mundim (2023) focused exclusively on teachers holding degrees in specific subject areas. Vieira, Paul and Barbosa (2023) examined factors associated with the professional activity of teacher training undergraduates by cross-referencing data from ENADE and RAIS. Regarding Pedagogy graduates, the study reveals that while 81% were employed three years after graduation, only 36% were actually working as teachers. There is still insufficient research on how teacher training policies affect the profiles of active teachers, particularly given the significant debate regarding the quality of training provided, especially by private institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the initial sample of 1,461,897 full undergraduate teachers working in basic education, 687,727 had completed a degree in Pedagogy (OECD code 142P01), accounting for 47.0%; this makes Pedagogy the largest group among active full undergraduate teachers, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers with degrees in Pedagogy and other teaching degree programs, by administrative category.

Administrative category	Pedagogy	%	Other undergraduate degrees	%	Total
Federal	65,527	29.3	158,316	70.7	223,843
State	148,142	44.3	186,287	55.7	334,429
Municipal	16,821	33.1	33,997	66.9	50,818
Private	457,237	53.6	395,570	46.4	852,807
Total	687,727	47.0	774,170	53.0	1,461,897

Source: School Census (Brasil, 2019).

Private institutions were responsible for training 66.5% of the educators in basic education in 2019. The pressure for higher education qualifications, following the LDB/1996, was likely a decisive factor in the private sector’s large-scale provision of pedagogy undergraduate degree programs. Undergraduates of other teacher-training programs (*licenciaturas*) come predominantly from public institutions. Higher education institutions (HEIs) stand out in this comparison, as only about one-third of their graduates come from pedagogy programs. Gatti et al. (2019) show that private institutions focused much of their effort on offering pedagogy programs, whereas the provision of specific subject-area teacher training, notably in the sciences, a field known for low student demand, was left primarily to public institutions.

The trend of privatizing teacher education is not a recent practice. It has gained traction in recent years through government programs such as PROUNI and FIES (Ristoff, 2018; Santos; Chaves; Paixão, 2021; Sguissardi, 2015). The School Census database offers a way to visualize the history of this process by analyzing the year teachers completed their degree programs. It is reminiscent of viewing the archaeological traces of past educational journeys that continue to shape the profile of today’s teachers. Figure 1 illustrates this perspective.

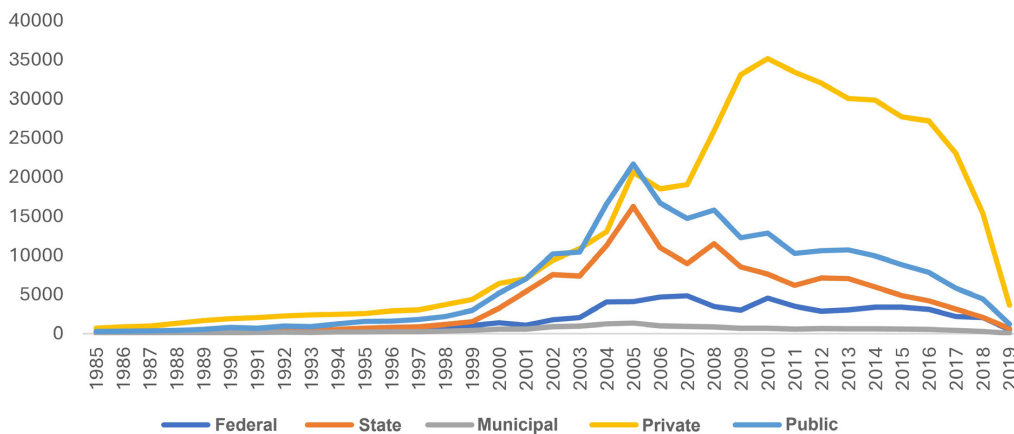


Figure 1. Administrative Category by Year of Completion (1985-2019).

Source: School Census (Brasil, 2019).

An analysis of Figure 1 indicates an early trend towards the privatization of teacher training, as most teachers active in 2019 who had trained in the 1980s and 1990s graduated from private HEIs. However, this hegemony was disrupted in the early 2000s, primarily due to a significant presence of graduates from state institutions. Despite policies aimed at increasing capacity in federal institutions, there has yet to be a marked impact on the profile of teachers. Only at the end of the time series, the lines representing federal institutions begin to converge with those of state institutions. This suggests that only in more recent years have graduates from federal HEIs, specifically those from Pedagogy programs, begun to constitute a larger share of teachers working in basic education. Figure 2 helps visualize the varying proportions of the administrative categories of the HEIs in which these teachers were trained.

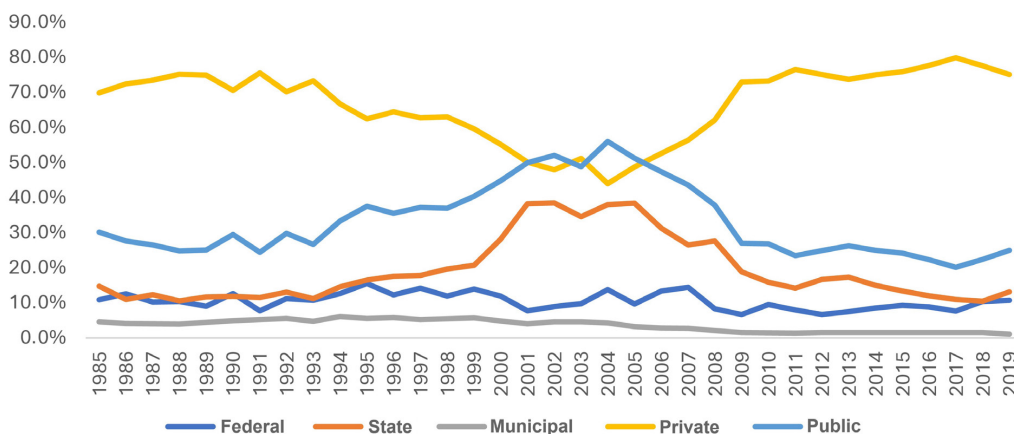


Figure 2. Share of Administrative Categories by Year of Completion (1985-2019).

Source: School Census (Brasil, 2019).

Figure 2 clearly shows the disproportionate nature of the privatization of teacher training in Pedagogy's full undergraduate degrees. Except for 2002, 2004, and 2005, years when graduates from public HEIs were more than 50% of these professionals' training, the dominance of graduates from private HEIs is evident. This gap has widened in recent years, with private institutions accounting for nearly 80% of the training of pedagogy graduates working in basic education in 2019. During the few years when public institutions surpassed private ones, the role of state-run institutions stands out. They were already producing more graduates than federal institutions by the late 1990s. However, after 2000, the number of teachers trained at state institutions truly surged, shifting the ratio of graduates between public and private HEIs. Given that we are dealing with the legacy of teacher training since many teachers trained in the late 1990s and early 2000s may already be retired, it is reasonable to suggest that state-level

teacher training policies may not have played a merely auxiliary or complementary role in shaping the profile of Basic Education teachers, contrary to what the literature in the field had assumed (Gatti et al., 2019), at least regarding pedagogues. A potential confounding factor is the specific region or state where these educators were trained, as a significant part of the state policies influencing the teaching profile may have originated in regions less favored by federal policies aimed at expanding teacher training.

Teacher training policies have also transformed the first teaching degree from a policy of initial training into one of in-service training. An analysis of teachers' ages at the time they completed their first teaching undergraduate degree can provide insight into the target demographic for this training expansion. See Figure 3.

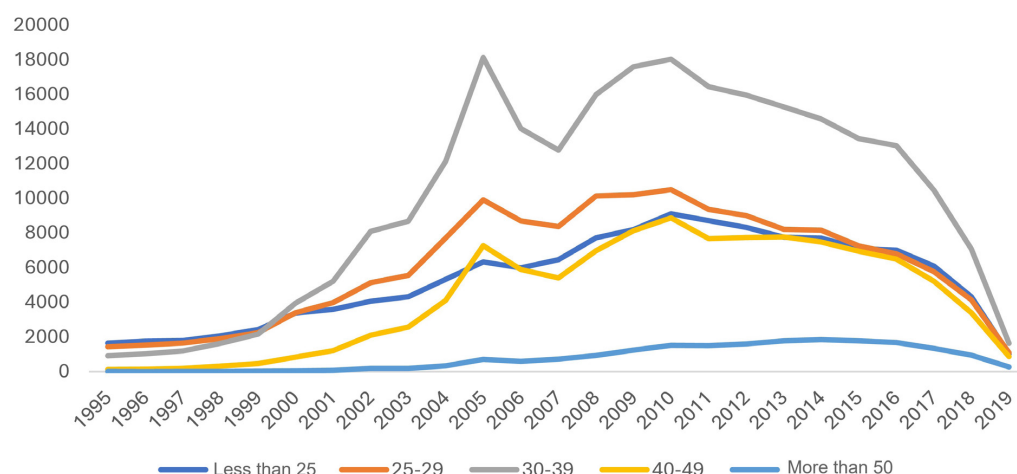


Figure 3. Age Group of the Educator in the Year of Completion of the Pedagogy Undergraduate Degree (1995-2019).

Source: School Census (Brasil, 2019).

Since the average career span of a basic education teacher is approximately 20 years (Gouveia, 2019), the primary age group served by teacher training programs between 2000 and 2019 was the 30-to-39 age bracket. This indicates that the participants were older and likely already active in the teaching workforce. The age range considered ideal for higher education is 18 to 24 years old, according to the National Education Plan. It ranks a modest third place, closely followed in recent years by the 40-to-49 age group. Serving an older demographic explains why recent studies have found students over the age of 30 to be overrepresented in samples of teacher training students, suggesting either the fulfillment of pent-up demand for professional training (Rocha; Carvalhaes, 2023) or the use of initial teacher training as a form of in-service professional development (Gatti et al., 2019).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results demonstrated, first and foremost, the potential of using the School Census as a data source for studying graduates of teacher training programs, particularly given the current lack of comprehensive, reliable databases for such research in Brazil. The School Census offers an opportunity to fill knowledge gaps regarding what happens after initial teacher training. This opens up the possibility of using these data to better evaluate the impact of teacher training policies implemented in the country in recent years.

In this context, it is evident that the privatization-oriented policy regarding teacher training has had a significant impact on graduates of Pedagogy undergraduate programs. This field was among those most affected by the LDB/96 and subsequent National Education Plans, which prioritized university-level education as the setting for the initial training of teachers for early childhood and early elementary education. Originally designed to train teachers for normal schools and educational administration roles, the Pedagogy program evolved into a

full teaching degree that also encompasses instruction for children in the first years of school. The shift of this professional training into higher education drove a significant increase in the availability of such courses, a demand rapidly met by private institutions. The upward trend in the number of Pedagogy graduates from private institutions clearly shows the impact of this policy. This privatization has intensified in recent years. Nearly four-fifths of Pedagogy undergraduates working in basic education obtained their degrees from private higher education institutions, a likely result of federal policies such as PROUNI and FIES. A key issue is the distinction between teachers trained by for-profit institutions and those trained by non-profit ones, given that higher-level teacher training has undergone an oligopolization process, with a small number of corporate groups controlling a substantial share of student enrollments.

From a historical perspective, the data also show that in the years immediately following the LDB/96, state educational institutions contributed significantly to the training of educators, suggesting that state policies focused on teacher training played a role that went beyond mere complementarity. This finding is particularly interesting given that, ever since the establishment of normal teacher training schools, teacher education in Brazil has been the subject of state rather than federal public policy. This is undoubtedly because most of the Basic Education students are enrolled in state and municipal schools. The fragmentation of these policies and the lack of consistent statistical data mean that the impact of state-level teacher training policies remains a story yet to be fully told.

A second analysis indicates that federal teacher training programs conducted by federal public institutions, specifically regarding the training of educators, have not had a significant impact on the profile of teachers currently working in basic education. Given that the primary objective of public policies expanding enrollment in teacher training courses is to address the shortage of qualified teachers in the nation's schools, the disconnect between training and actual practice suggests the need to consider alternative program models. Such models should aim not only to train large numbers of new teachers but also to bridge the gap between training and employment, encouraging more graduates to choose teaching as a professional career.

A third analysis is related to evidence regarding in-service training. The high number of individuals who completed their training after the age of 30 strongly suggests that teacher training policies still rely on initial teacher education programs, specifically in Pedagogy, as a strategy for the in-service professional development of teachers. This implies two things: (1) policies aimed at qualifying Basic Education teachers who lack adequate training have been effective, given the declining number of teachers without a teaching degree; and (2) many teachers still enter the profession without the necessary minimum qualifications, as teaching degree programs are classified as initial training. This scenario may indicate that such professionals are taking significantly longer to acquire what is considered the appropriate training for the teaching profession.

This study has several limitations. Future research could examine additional specific teacher training programs to determine if similar patterns emerge in other fields of study. The dataset does not differentiate between in-person and distance learning courses, which currently represent a significant share of enrollments in Education degree programs. While these programs are central to the Ministry of Education's (MEC) current quality assessment policies, specifically through the ENADE exam for teacher training courses, there remains a notable gap in research regarding the impact of distance learning programs on the profile of practicing teachers. It remains unclear whether graduates of these programs successfully enter the basic education job market. One possibility is that these programs work as a means of in-service teacher training, or that a large proportion of graduates do not actually work in the field, instead using the program primarily to obtain a higher education degree, which still offers upward social mobility for many people in Brazil.

An initial exploratory analysis of the training backgrounds of teachers currently employed in basic education schools reveals opportunities that have yet to be fully investigated. A thorough assessment that links teacher training environments to actual teaching practices could provide a robust evidence base for developing training policies tailored to regions most

in need of qualified educators. Importantly, training initiatives should align with policies that elevate the teaching profession, making it appealing once again to young people finishing high school. One area worth examining is the relationship between professional practice and the quality of training programs, as well as considerations regarding the employability of these educators.

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Authors contribution

FEPN: Writing, Methodology, Data analysis, Data visualization. JAFPJ: Contributed guidance, critical revision of the manuscript.

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