



UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Working Paper 2020-3

Inequalities in Higher Education Access and Completion in Brazil

Tristan McCowan

Julio Bertolin

Prepared for the UNRISD project on
Universities and Social Inequalities in the Global South

April 2020

UNRISD Working Papers are posted online
to stimulate discussion and critical comment.



The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

UNRISD, Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 9173020
info.unrisd@un.org
www.unrisd.org

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Working Paper has been produced in collaboration with Professor Ananya Mukherjee Reed with funds provided by the University of British Columbia and UNRISD institutional funds.

This is not a formal UNRISD publication. The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed studies rests solely with their author(s), and availability on the UNRISD website (www.unrisd.org) does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them. No publication or distribution of these papers is permitted without the prior authorization of the author(s), except for personal use.

Introduction to Working Papers on Universities and Social Inequalities in the Global South

This paper is part of a project which explores what role universities play in overcoming persistent and rising inequalities. Participation in tertiary education has increased significantly across the globe, in parallel with heightened social aspirations and the expectation of better labour market opportunities stemming from a university degree. However, these assumptions rely on certain economic and social conditions being fulfilled, some of which have worsened in the age of jobless growth. The project asks: What potential does higher education have today to increase social mobility, reduce inequality and contribute to the advancement of society through the production of knowledge and skills? Are institutions of higher education contributing to inequality rather than equality, and if so, through what specific actions and mechanisms? How can the transformative potential of such institutions be fully harnessed for overcoming inequality?

Working Papers on Universities and Social Inequalities in the Global South

Inequalities in Higher Education Access and Completion in Brazil
Tristan McCowan and Julio Bertolin, April 2020

Climbing the Ladder: Determinants of Access to and Returns from Higher Education in Chile and Peru
Anja Gaentzsch and Gabriela Zapata-Román, April 2020

“A Public and a Private University in One”: Equity in University Attendance in Kenya Since the Liberalization Reforms of the 1990s
Rebecca Simson and J. Andrew Harris, March 2020

Contents

List of Acronyms	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Keywords.....	iii
Bios.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
A Framework of Fairness in Access to Higher Education	3
The Higher Education System in Brazil	6
Methods and Data Sources	9
Analysis of Inequalities in the Higher Education System	11
The value of higher education in the labour market.....	11
Expansion of availability	12
Accessibility	15
Horizontality.....	17
Comparison of graduates by institutional type	17
Comparison of social groups by mode of study	18
Comparison of social groups by disciplinary area	20
Learning outcomes	22
Conclusion.....	23
Universities and social mobility	24
Policy implications/recommendations.....	26
International significance	27
Future research needs	28
References	29

List of Figures

Figure 1: Growth of the number (in millions) of enrolled students in Brazilian higher education from 1980-2017.....	13
Figure 2: Increase in students of lower socio-economic level among the completers of Enade cycles 1 and 3	18

List of Tables

Table 1: Proportion of students (completing undergraduate courses) benefiting from loans/grants and affirmative action policies, by disciplinary area, 2009-2017	14
Table 2: Net enrolment ratio by race/colour in Brazil, 2012-2018 (as percentage of total population group by race)	16
Table 3: Average scores for distance and face-to-face modalities on the specific component of Enade (2016), by background characteristics.....	20
Table 4: Proportions of those completing degrees in the last Enade (2015-2016-2017) from non-white backgrounds, low-income families, public secondary schools and mothers with low educational levels, by course.....	21
Table 5: Average of scores for the “general education” component for students completing their studies, by family monthly income (2015 Enade).....	23
Table 6: Percentage improvement in average scores for the “specific component” between entering and completing students, by educational level of mother (2007 Enade).....	23

List of Acronyms

ABED	Brazilian Association for Distance Education (<i>Associação Brasileira de Educação a Distância</i>)
BRL	Brazilian real (currency)
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
ENADE	National Assessment of Student Achievement (<i>Exame Nacional de Desempenho dos Estudantes</i>)
ENEM	High School National Exam (<i>Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio</i>)
F2F	Face-to-face learning modality
FIES	Student Financing Fund (<i>Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil</i>)
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HEIs	Higher education institutions
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (<i>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística</i>)
ILO	International Labour Organization
INEP	National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (<i>Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira</i>)
IPEA	Institute for Applied Economic Research (<i>Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada</i>)
NER	Net enrolment ratio
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNAD	National Household Sample Survey (<i>Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios</i>)
PROUNI	University for All Programme (<i>Programa Universidade para Todos</i>)
PT	Workers' Party (<i>Partido dos Trabalhadores</i>)
REUNI	Support Programme for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (<i>Programa de Apoio a Planos de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais</i>)
Semesp	Union of Private Higher Education Institutions in the State of São Paulo (<i>Sindicato das Entidades Mantenedoras de Estabelecimentos de Ensino Superior no Estado de São Paulo</i>)
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNICAMP	University of Campinas (<i>Universidade de Campinas</i>)
USD	United States dollar (currency)
USP	University of São Paulo (<i>Universidade de São Paulo</i>)

Abstract

While there are rapidly increasing enrolments worldwide, higher education systems are still characterized by continuing inequalities in access. Brazil is a case in point in this regard, with highly restricted admissions for those from low-income families, African descendants, and those with low parental level of education, despite the system tripling in size between 2000 and 2018. This study analyses trends in access and completion in higher education in Brazil in this period, assessing variation between federal and for-profit sectors, face-to-face and distance modes, and different degree courses, drawing on three national datasets (Higher Education Census, *Enade* and National Household Sample Survey). The data is analysed using the frame of *availability* (number and distribution of places), *accessibility* (ability of prospective students to take up opportunities) and *horizontality* (non-stratified system, avoiding hierarchies of prestige and quality). Brazil shows evidence of a rapid increase in availability of places since the late 1990s, as well as some improvements in accessibility on account of quota policies in federal universities and loan and grant policies for private universities. Yet there are major challenges to horizontality on account of the preponderance of disadvantaged students in lower quality for-profit institutions, in degree courses with lower value on the employment market and in distance education. Finally, implications are drawn out for higher education policy in Brazil and beyond.

Keywords

Access to higher education; affirmative action; Brazil; inequalities; stratification; widening participation

Bios

Tristan McCowan is Professor of International Education at the Institute of Education, University College London. His work focuses on higher education and international development, particularly in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. His latest book is *Higher Education For and Beyond the Sustainable Development Goals* (2019, Palgrave Macmillan).

Julio Bertolin is Professor in the Graduate Programme on Education at the University of Passo Fundo, Brazil. He has published widely, on topics including evaluation and quality in higher education, and he has worked as consultant for the federal government of Brazil, the government of Chile, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Katja Hujo and Maggie Carter for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this report, and Fábio Roberto Barão for assistance with the Enade results tables.

Introduction

For the countries of the Global South forming new nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries, higher education was seen to have a pivotal role. It acted simultaneously as a repository for national culture, language and identity; a means of training the civil service and professional classes; and a symbol of national independence and status. With the rise of human capital theory in the second half of the 20th century, universities also began to be seen as an important spur to national economies, particularly in the context of the knowledge economy, the decline of heavy industry and the rise of information and high-tech sectors.

For individuals, families and communities, higher education has also exercised an increasing pull through this period. It has gone from being the privilege of a tiny intellectual and administrative elite, to being almost an obligation for the middle classes and anyone who aspires to a non-routine job. In almost all societies—whether leaning towards the free market, the social democrat or the socialist points in the spectrum—higher education is the social mobility mechanism *par excellence*, holding the promise of catapulting any bright and dedicated young person into the lofty echelons of professional success.

The reality has been somewhat different. Despite the extraordinary expansion of the global higher education system, now absorbing more than a third of the global cohort into some kind of post-school provision, up from 20 percent at the turn of the millennium, many continue to be excluded. While some upper middle-income countries have joined the OECD countries in what Trow (1974) categorizes as universal provision (above 50 percent net enrolment ratio), many are languishing behind. The average gross enrolment ratio (GER) in low-income countries is as low as 9 percent, and much lower in some countries—only 2 percent in Eritrea for example (UIS 2018). Furthermore, it has not been plain sailing, even for those lucky enough to enter the higher education system. With the expansion of access at all levels of education, there is greater availability of candidates for existing employment opportunities, leading to a form of qualifications inflation in which higher education diplomas are required for jobs that previously would have accepted secondary or even primary leavers.

There have also been challenges to the quality of provision in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the context of rapid expansion. In some cases, government efforts to respond rapidly to demand for higher education has led to intolerable strains on the carrying capacity of public universities. In others, governments have opted for liberalizing the sector for private institutions, leading to a mushrooming of for-profit universities with dubious quality standards. As will be explored in greater detail below, students from disadvantaged groups have disproportionately found themselves in these more precarious circumstances.

Nevertheless, these processes are not automatic, and vary considerably between countries depending on the social configurations and policy options. For this reason, it is essential that we deepen our knowledge of the mechanisms through which inequalities are reproduced, exacerbated or ameliorated by higher education systems. In this spirit, this study provides an analysis of the current situation in Brazil, in order to understand the opportunities available to different social groups within and through HEIs, and the impact on social justice more broadly.

The specific objectives of the study are twofold: first, to examine the trends in higher education enrolments and completions from the turn of the millennium until 2018 (the date for which the latest figures are available). This time period covers the administration of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) government elected under the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in which a number of new policies for higher education were developed. The aim is to observe patterns in access and completion for relevant social groups, specifically: through income groups (measured in Brazil primarily through family income in multiples of minimum salaries), racial/ethnic groups (self-identification based on census categories), family educational background (using 5th grade or higher level of education of mother as a proxy) and those coming from public or private secondary schools. Higher education is used here according to Brazilian criteria to include traditional academic courses, along with technical and vocational education at the higher level, and short cycle courses.

The second main objective is to draw out implications of these configurations in the higher education system for social justice more broadly, given the positional role of higher education and significant relationship between educational inequalities and socio-economic inequalities. The analysis will be carried out through the lens of the theoretical framework of availability, accessibility and horizontality (McCowan 2016), in particular focusing on the relationship between indicators of access/completion and markers of privilege and future opportunities, residing in the institution attended (its recognition and academic quality), the course studied (its economic and professional status) and mode of study (face-to-face or distance).

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_20677

