POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS DE ALFABETIZAÇÃO INFANTIL NO BRASIL NO PERÍODO DE 2012 A 2021

PUBLIC POLICIES FOR CHILD LITERACY IN BRAZIL FROM 2012 TO 2021

POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS DE ALFABETIZACIÓN INFANTIL EN BRASIL DE 2012 A 2021

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RESUMO

Este artigo analisa as políticas públicas voltadas para a alfabetização infantil no Brasil entre 2012 e 2021, sob os aspectos de acesso, qualidade e infraestrutura, com foco no Pacto Nacional pela Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC) e na Política Nacional de Alfabetização (PNA). Destaca-se a alfabetização como etapa fundamental para o desenvolvimento educacional e social, enfrentando desafios como o analfabetismo funcional e desigualdades regionais. O PNAIC priorizou uma abordagem descentralizada e plural, integrando formação de professores e metodologias adaptadas a contextos diversos. Já a PNA centralizou suas diretrizes, adotando o método fônico como base científica, mas gerou debates sobre sua adequação em um país culturalmente diverso. O artigo utiliza revisão bibliográfica e análise documental de dados oficiais, como os resultados do Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica (SAEB), para avaliar o impacto das políticas no acesso e qualidade da alfabetização. Conclui-se que, embora ambas as

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políticas tenham avançado no combate ao analfabetismo, desafios estruturais e pedagógicos permanecem, demandando políticas mais inclusivas e adaptadas às realidades regionais.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Alfabetização Infantil. Políticas Públicas. Desigualdades Regionais.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes public policies aimed at early childhood literacy in Brazil between 2012 and 2021, focusing on access, quality, and infrastructure. It emphasizes two main initiatives: the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) and the National Literacy Policy (PNA). Literacy is considered a critical stage for educational and social development, especially in the face of challenges such as functional illiteracy and regional inequalities. The PNAIC adopted a decentralized and diverse approach, incorporating teacher training and methodologies tailored to various contexts. In contrast, the PNA introduced a centralized model based on the phonics method, grounded in scientific evidence, which sparked debates regarding its appropriateness in a culturally diverse country. The study employs bibliographic review and document analysis of official data, including Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB) results, to assess the impact of these policies on literacy access and quality. The findings suggest that, although both policies contributed to addressing illiteracy, structural and pedagogical challenges remain, requiring more inclusive and regionally adapted strategies.

Keywords: Education. Early Childhood Literacy. Public Policies. Regional Inequalities.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza las políticas públicas orientadas a la alfabetización infantil en Brasil entre los años 2012 y 2021, considerando aspectos como el acceso, la calidad y la infraestructura. Se destacan dos iniciativas principales: el Pacto Nacional por la Alfabetización en la Edad Adecuada (PNAIC) y la Política Nacional de Alfabetización (PNA). La alfabetización se presenta como una etapa fundamental para el desarrollo educativo y social, enfrentando desafíos como el analfabetismo funcional y las desigualdades regionales. El PNAIC priorizó un enfoque descentralizado y plural, integrando la formación docente y metodologías adaptadas a contextos diversos. Por su parte, la PNA adoptó un modelo centralizado basado en el método fónico como base científica, lo que generó debates sobre su adecuación en un país culturalmente diverso. El estudio se basa en una revisión bibliográfica y en el análisis documental de datos oficiales, como los resultados del Sistema de Evaluación de Educación Básica (SAEB), para evaluar el impacto de estas políticas en el acceso y la calidad de la alfabetización. Se concluye que, aunque ambas políticas han avanzado en la lucha contra el analfabetismo, persisten desafíos estructurales y pedagógicos que requieren políticas más inclusivas y adaptadas a las realidades regionales.

Palabras clave: Educación. Alfabetización Infantil. Políticas Públicas. Desigualdades Regionales.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literacy at the right age is a central issue for educational and social development, and it is critical to ensuring that children have the necessary skills to understand and interact with the world around them. Literacy in childhood is more than learning to read and write; it is about acquiring the essential tools for cognitive, social and emotional development, which will have an impact throughout life (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1999).

In Brazil, this issue is even more urgent, considering the scenario of social and regional inequalities that directly affect access to and quality of education, especially in the early school years (Soares, 2003). This theme is very relevant for public education policies in Brazil, given its importance as a basis for the cognitive development and full citizenship of children. The acquisition of early literacy skills is essential for children's holistic development, as it significantly influences their ability to progress within the educational framework, understand their surroundings, and engage in civic duties (Flores and Peroni, 2018).

However, the historical and structural challenges that permeate Brazilian education have hindered progress in literacy, especially with regard to literacy at the right age. Despite the progress made in legislation, early childhood education in Brazil continues to face considerable challenges in its implementation, specifically with regard to access, quality and infrastructure, which have a direct relationship with age-appropriate literacy outcomes (Luiz, Marchetti & Gomes, 2015).

Since the country's redemocratization, Brazil has undergone important educational reforms, many of which focused on eradicating illiteracy and improving elementary education. Among these policies, the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC), created in 2012, and the National Literacy Policy (PNA), instituted in 2019 and the National Literacy Child Commitment (CNCA), which came into force in 2023, stand out.

The PNAIC emerged with the objective of ensuring that all Brazilian children were literate by the end of the 3rd year of elementary school, seeking to reduce illiteracy rates and age-grade gaps. This program had as its central axis the continuing education of literacy teachers and the use of teaching methodologies based on literacy and literacy practices, which recognize the diversity of educational contexts and the importance of pedagogical strategies adapted to the needs of each student (Cossetin, 2021; Mortatti, 2019). However, its implementation was not without criticism, especially with regard to coordination between different levels of government and the guarantee of adequate

resources for teacher training and the implementation of policies in schools (Alves & Sedano, 2023).

The PNA, on the other hand, introduced a science-based approach, focusing on a single method of literacy, which marked a break with the PNAIC. This policy was justified based on the need to improve Brazil's educational indicators in international assessments, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), and to combat functional illiteracy, which still affects a significant portion of the population. The PNA seeks to consolidate a literacy methodology centered on the systematic learning of the alphabetic code, which generated debates among educators about the adequacy of a single approach for a country marked by such deep social and regional inequalities (Soares, 2020; Mortatti, 2021).

Although both programs emerged with the promise of advancing the fight against illiteracy, their different approaches reflect conflicting views on the best way to teach children to read and write in Brazil. The PNAIC advocates a plural approach, which recognizes the need for different teaching methods according to the context of students and teachers, while the PNA proposes a more centralized and standardized solution, based on neuroscientific evidence (Dehaene, 2012). This dispute reflects, to a large extent, the tension between more progressive pedagogical theories, focused on literacy, and more traditional approaches, focused on the systematic teaching of reading and writing.

Regarding the National Literate Child Commitment (CNCA), this policy will not be the subject of study in this article, given that it was only created in June 2023 and does not yet have a quantity of robust data for the analysis of its effectiveness. It is worth noting that the results of the SAEB (Basic Education Evaluation System) and IDEB (Basic Education Development Index) analyzed in this study go up to the year 2021.

Brazil has been facing, for decades, one of the greatest educational challenges in its history: ensuring that all children are literate at the right age. Despite the advances provided by the PNAIC, there are still significant problems related to the age-grade gap, the high rates of functional illiteracy and educational inequalities between the regions of the country.

In 2019, with the launch of the PNA, the government proposed a new path, but the adoption of a single literacy method generated debates about its effectiveness and applicability in such a diverse country. In view of this scenario, the following question arises: How have public policies for children's literacy in Brazil – PNAIC and PNA – contributed to literacy at the right age, and what are the main challenges faced in the implementation of these policies?

The general objective of this article is to analyze national public policies aimed at child literacy in the period from 2012 to 2021 and their implications in the Brazilian educational context. In addition, the following secondary objectives can be highlighted: a) To present the National Literacy Policy (PNA) and the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC); b) To analyze the relationship between public investment in education and children's literacy rate and performance in learning assessments in the period from 2012 to 2021.

The motivation of this study lies in the urgency of understanding and improving public policies aimed at child literacy in Brazil, considering the direct impact of this stage on citizenship formation and human development (Flores and Peroni, 2018). Literacy at the right age is one of the main global educational goals and has been widely recognized as essential for reducing social inequalities and strengthening social cohesion. In the Brazilian context, where educational inequalities are significant and public policies face implementation challenges, it is crucial to assess the performance and implications of national child literacy initiatives.

In recent decades, Brazil has presented policies with different approaches, such as the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) and the National Literacy Policy (PNA). While PNAIC focused on a plural and decentralized approach, PNA opted for a more standardized and centralized methodology. These differences reflect not only pedagogical issues, but also ideological disputes about the direction of education in the country. Analysis of the contributions and limitations of these policies, especially in the period from 2012 to 2021, is essential to understand how they have impacted children's literacy and what lessons can be learned for the future.

The theme of this article is relevant both to the academic field and to the formulation of public policies. In the academic sphere, it contributes to the deepening of the understanding of the impacts of educational policies in Brazil, especially with regard to literacy, which is the basis of lifelong learning. In the practical field, the study offers subsidies for the formulation of new strategies and public policies, providing a critical analysis of the approaches implemented.

In addition, children's literacy is one of the fundamental indicators to assess the quality and equity of an education system. Data from evaluations such as the Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveal that Brazil faces significant challenges in this area, which makes it urgent to reflect on the public policies implemented.

Education is a fundamental right expressly provided for in the Federal Constitution of 1988 and, in addition, children's literacy is a global educational priority. In Brazil, however, illiteracy rates and regional inequalities call into question the ability of the educational system to guarantee this right to all children. Policies such as the PNAIC and the PNA have been implemented to address this challenge, but the evaluation of their effectiveness is still limited, especially in a country of continental dimensions and with great socioeconomic and cultural diversity.

Thus, this work is justified because: it contributes to scientific advancement, as the research fills gaps in the literature by exploring the relationships between public policies and literacy indicators in Brazil; assist in the formulation of public policies, since with the analysis of the PNAIC and PNA approaches it can inform the creation of more effective policies adapted to regional realities; Strengthening democracy and citizenship, ensuring that all children have access to quality education is essential for strengthening citizenship and for the sustainable development of the country.

Thus, this work not only contributes to the understanding of public literacy policies, but also serves as a basis for future educational interventions that promote greater equity and quality in the Brazilian educational system.

This article is divided into five main sections. The first section deals with the introduction, in which the importance of the theme and the justification of the relevance of the research are contextualized. The second section presents the theoretical foundation, exposing the main theories and concepts that support the study. The third section describes the methodological procedures adopted, detailing the phases of the systematic review process, data collection, and the analysis techniques employed. The fourth section focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data, based on the selected studies. Finally, the fifth section covers the final considerations and recommendations for future research, summarizing the results achieved and proposing new directions for subsequent investigations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to present the main theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underlie the analysis of public policies for child literacy in Brazil, especially in the period between 2012 and 2021. Structural aspects of education in the country will be discussed, highlighting the historical and regional inequalities that still persist, as well as the challenges faced to guarantee the right to literacy at the right age. The specialized literature will be revisited with a focus on authors and studies that address the quality of education, the role

of literacy in human development, and the pedagogical foundations of the different approaches adopted in national public policies.

Next, four central axes will be explored in a specific way: the panorama of Brazilian education, the evolution of child literacy as a State policy, the conception and implementation of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC), and, finally, the formulation and foundations of the National Literacy Policy (PNA). Each of these topics will contribute to the understanding of the paths taken by Brazil in the fight against child illiteracy, revealing both the advances achieved and the limitations and tensions that exist between different pedagogical conceptions and different social contexts.

EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

Brazilian education is marked by deep historical and regional inequalities, which reflect the exclusion of significant layers of the population from access to quality education. From the colonial period, when education was limited to the elite, to the present day, the challenge of ensuring equitable and universal education remains latent. According to Gadotti (2020), the quality of education should be approached as a dynamic and integral concept, involving social, cultural, and economic aspects, in addition to the need for democratic management for its effective implementation.

In Brazil, public policies have sought to reverse this situation, being guided by international commitments, such as the Millennium Development Goals and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These agreements highlight children's literacy as the basis for sustainable human development and a fundamental right for all (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

Education in Brazil, historically, is marked by social and regional inequalities that directly impact access to quality education. Since the 1988 Constitution, there have been advances in the recognition of the universal right to education, but structural challenges still persist. Gadotti (2020) argues that quality in education should be understood in a systemic way, considering intra- and extra-school factors. According to the author, quality and quantity are complementary concepts; Educating with quality for a few is not effectively educating.

The Brazilian educational model faces the challenge of balancing enrollment expansion with the guarantee of quality education. The universalization of elementary education, for example, was not accompanied by proportional investments in infrastructure, teacher training and innovative pedagogical practices. This directly affects literacy rates,

which remain below the targets established in national assessments, such as SAEB, and international assessments, such as PISA (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

Understanding the structural and historical bases of Brazilian education is essential to analyze the current challenges of literacy. Next, the discussion on child literacy in Brazil will be deepened, highlighting its conceptual evolution and the main obstacles to its realization as a fundamental right.

CHILD LITERACY IN BRAZIL

Children's literacy in Brazil is a central theme in public educational policies, given its relevance to the social, economic, and cultural development of the country. Literacy is often defined as the ability to decode and understand written texts, while literacy is associated with the use of these skills in meaningful social practices (Soares, 2004). In the Brazilian context, both concepts are inseparable, and literacy is understood as a process that must be inserted in real and diverse social practices.

Since the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, children's literacy has been formally recognized as a fundamental right. However, more significant advances occurred from the 1990s onwards, with the implementation of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education and the Valorization of Teaching (FUNDEF), later replaced by FUNDEB. These initiatives have secured increased funding for basic education and expanded access to education (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

Despite these achievements, the quality of literacy remained a challenge. Data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) reveal that many students complete elementary school without basic reading and writing skills. This reality is aggravated by regional disparities and the lack of continuous teacher training (Mortatti, 2019).

The main challenge of literacy in Brazil is the inequality of access and quality. Students from less favored regions, especially in the North and Northeast, face additional barriers, such as lack of school infrastructure, absence of libraries, and scarcity of appropriate teaching materials (Flores & Peroni, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these inequalities, disrupting the learning of millions of children and widening existing gaps (Monteiro, 2019).

In addition, Brazil faces a high rate of functional illiteracy. Although many children are technically literate, they are unable to use these skills to understand and interpret texts in everyday contexts, which impacts their social inclusion and full citizenship (Gadotti, 2020).

Several programs have been implemented to address the challenges of children's literacy. The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC), created in 2012, was a direct response to the need to guarantee literacy up to the 3rd year of elementary school. It combined teacher training, learning monitoring, and distribution of pedagogical materials, but faced difficulties in its uniform implementation (Alferes & Mainardes, 2019).

In 2019, the National Literacy Policy (PNA) brought a more centralized approach, emphasizing methods based on scientific evidence, such as the phonic method. This policy sought to align Brazil with international education standards, but it generated debates about the applicability of a single approach in such a culturally and regionally diverse country (Monteiro, 2019; Mortatti, 2019).

Pedagogical practice plays a crucial role in literacy. Trained teachers can adopt strategies that integrate the technical teaching of reading and writing with literacy practices, involving the significant use of texts in varied cultural contexts (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020). Programs such as the ABC Course (Science-Based Literacy) were developed to offer continuing education to educators, standing out as an advance in strengthening the teaching role (ABC Course Manual, 2021).

However, the initial and continuing training of teachers still faces significant gaps. Many educators report difficulty in applying the methods proposed by national policies due to the lack of resources and practical guidance (Alferes & Mainardes, 2019).

To overcome the challenges of children's literacy in Brazil, it is essential to combine structural investments with inclusive pedagogical policies. Initiatives that consider regional and cultural diversities, in addition to strengthening the role of the teacher, are crucial. The development of diagnostic assessments that guide specific pedagogical interventions is also key to reducing educational disparities (Monteiro, 2019; Mortatti, 2019).

The integration between literacy and literacy should be central in the formulation of public policies, promoting the development of reading and writing skills in a meaningful way. Only in this way will it be possible to ensure that children not only read and write, but also use these skills to actively participate in society.

In view of the challenges identified in the process of children's literacy, several initiatives have been formulated over the last decades. Among them, the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) stands out, whose conception and implementation will be detailed in the following topic.

The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) was launched in 2012 by the Brazilian federal government as a structured public policy to address the historical challenges of child literacy in the country. Based on Goal 5 of the 2014-2024 National Education Plan (PNE), the program aimed to ensure that all children were literate by the end of the 3rd year of elementary school, with adequate reading, writing, and mathematics skills.

The main objective of PNAIC was to ensure full literacy for children up to eight years of age, recognizing that this stage is crucial for future educational success. The program was designed to address two major problems of the Brazilian educational system: functional illiteracy and age-grade distortion. To this end, PNAIC structured its actions in three main axes: continuing education of teachers; distribution of teaching materials; monitoring and evaluation.

PNAIC was dedicated to the intensive training of literacy teachers, offering courses and pedagogical materials based on contextualized literacy and literacy practices. The approach included holding periodic training meetings, led by regional trainers, which allowed for an integration between national policies and local needs (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

In addition, the program introduced the distribution of textbooks, games and other pedagogical resources through the National Textbook Program for Literacy at the Right Age (PNLD-PNAIC). These materials aimed to promote interactive and diversified pedagogical practices that met the demands of the different regions of Brazil (Brandão & Souza, 2017).

Regarding the third axis, the evaluation of children's performance was carried out through the National Literacy Assessment (ANA), which collected data on student progress and provided information for adjustments in public policies.

The methodological approach of PNAIC adopted a plural approach, combining concepts of literacy and literacy. According to Magda Soares (2004), literacy is understood as the acquisition of the writing system, while literacy involves the development of social practices that allow the competent use of reading and writing. This combination was seen as essential for the formation of full citizens in a graphocentric world.

In addition, the program recognized the need for methods adapted to regional realities, emphasizing the importance of integrating students' cultural and linguistic experiences into the pedagogical process.

The PNAIC brought significant advances in some areas. The expansion of access to continuing education was one of its main legacies, having benefited about 314 thousand

teachers in its first years of implementation (MEC, 2016). Initial assessments showed an improvement in children's reading and writing performance, especially in historically disadvantaged states in the Northeast (Menarbini & Tavares, 2019).

However, the impact of the program was not uniform. In regions with greater social inequality and less infrastructure, the results were below expectations. The lack of sufficient financial and human resources for the full implementation of PNAIC actions was often pointed out as one of the limiting factors (Brandão & Souza, 2017).

Although the PNAIC has been well received by the educational community, it has also been the target of criticism, such as: lack of integration between federative entities; regional inequality; sustainability difficulties.

The implementation of the program depended on an effective articulation between the Union, states and municipalities, which did not always occur satisfactorily. The decentralization of actions made it difficult to achieve uniformity in the application of guidelines and in the monitoring of results (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020). States with greater administrative capacity and educational infrastructure showed better results, while less developed states faced difficulties in following the program's schedule and objectives (Soares, 2021).

The continuity of the PNAIC was compromised from 2016 onwards, when budget cuts and political changes reduced the scope and effectiveness of the proposed actions. This resulted in the discontinuity of training and a reduction in the distribution of pedagogical materials (Brandão & Souza, 2017).

Despite the limitations, the PNAIC left an important legacy for public literacy policies in Brazil. It consolidated children's literacy as a national priority, introduced a formative approach centered on the teacher as a transforming agent and promoted a broader view of the literacy process, integrating it into the cultural and social context of the students.

According to Menarbini and Tavares (2020), the PNAIC was an innovative initiative that laid the foundations for future policies, such as the National Literacy Policy (PNA), although both have marked differences in their approaches. The success of the PNAIC demonstrated that, in order to achieve effective and equitable literacy, it is essential to combine continuous investments, quality training and planning sensitive to the regional specificities of Brazil.

The PNAIC experience generated important learning and criticism, which influenced the formulation of new public policies in the area. In 2019, the federal government instituted the National Literacy Policy (PNA), which proposes a different approach from that adopted

by the previous pact. In the following section, an analysis of this new guideline will be presented.

THE NATIONAL LITERACY POLICY (NAP) OF 2019

The National Literacy Policy (PNA), instituted by Decree No. 9,765/2019, represented a significant change in the Brazilian educational scenario. Developed from the perspective of implementing literacy practices based on scientific evidence, the PNA sought to address historical literacy problems in Brazil, including functional illiteracy and low student performance in national and international assessments, such as the Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The PNA presented innovative guidelines for literacy in Brazil, highlighting: the scientific focus, the centralization of guidelines, expansion of the evaluative role, teacher training, methodological approach by the phonic method.

This policy was based on scientific approaches, with emphasis on the phonic method, considered effective for initial literacy. This method prioritizes phonological awareness, the association between letters and sounds, and decoding as essential steps in the process of learning to read and write (Braga, Adão & Ambros, 2020).

According to the Literacy Secretariat of the Ministry of Education (SENAF), the PNA is anchored in neuroscience and cognitive psychology studies, which point to the importance of systematic and structured methods in the development of reading skills.

Furthermore, the PNA proposed a standardization in literacy teaching at the national level, unlike the PNAIC, which adopted a plural and contextualized approach. This change has sparked debates about the effectiveness and applicability of a unique method in a country as diverse as Brazil.

The policy emphasized the need for diagnostic and formative assessments to guide pedagogical practice and monitor student progress. The proposal was to ensure that evaluations were used to subsidize the improvement of teaching practices, rather than just measuring results (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

In this context, the program brought proposals for the initial and continuing training of literacy teachers, but faced criticism for not presenting a comprehensive and robust plan for the implementation of these trainings on a large scale (Braga, Adão & Ambros, 2020).

The adoption of the phonic method as the basis of the PNA was one of its most striking characteristics. According to Magda Soares (2004), the phonic method is effective in initial literacy because it focuses on the development of the ability to decode words.

However, the author warns of the risks of an exclusive application of this method, arguing that literacy should be integrated with literacy, allowing students to use reading and writing in meaningful social practices.

In addition, the PNA sought to align itself with international literacy trends, based on experiences in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where the phonic method is widely used. Although science supports its effectiveness, Brazilian educators have questioned the lack of adaptation of this model to the cultural and linguistic diversities of Brazil (Braga, Adão & Ambros, 2020).

Although it was launched with promises of advances in literacy, the PNA faced difficulties in its implementation. States and municipalities had autonomy to adhere to public policy, resulting in limited and unequal adherence in different regions of the country. Many education systems have chosen to maintain previous methodologies or adopt hybrid approaches (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

Teacher training was identified as a critical area. The lack of clarity in the guidelines and the absence of specific training to implement the phonic method weakened the policy's efforts (Soares, 2021). Preliminary data from the SAEB indicated modest advances in literacy rates. However, experts have pointed out that more time would be needed to assess the real impact of the PNA, considering the structural challenges of the Brazilian education system (Braga, Adão & Ambros, 2020).

The PNA has been the subject of significant criticism. Educators argued that the emphasis on the phonic method disregarded the need to integrate literacy practices into teaching, restricting literacy to a technical and decontextualized approach (Soares, 2021). The centralization in the phonic method was seen as inappropriate for regions with high cultural and linguistic diversity, such as indigenous and quilombola communities (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

Unlike the PNAIC, the PNA was criticized for not promoting a robust collaboration regime between the Union, states and municipalities. This gap made it difficult to implement the policy uniformly throughout the national territory (Braga, Adão & Ambros, 2020). Likewise, public policy did not sufficiently consider regional inequalities, which limited its reach in areas with precarious educational infrastructure (Menarbini & Tavares, 2020).

Despite the criticism, the PNA contributed to placing literacy at the center of the Brazilian educational debate, highlighting the importance of evidence-based practices. Her focus on the phonic method influenced discussions about literacy in the country and paved the way for greater alignment with international practices. However, the policy also

highlighted the need for more inclusive strategies, which combine scientific rigor with sensitivity to local and regional diversities.

SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and quantitative methodological approach, of an exploratory and descriptive nature, based on a literature review and documentary analysis, based on the analysis of secondary data to investigate the practices, challenges and advances related to child literacy at the right age in Brazil.

The documentary analysis will be carried out based on the legislation and official documents that instituted the PNAIC and the PNA, such as Ordinance No. 867/2012 and Decree No. 9,765/2019, respectively. In addition, evaluation reports, such as the results of the Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB), and studies that address the results and impacts of these public policies will be analyzed

Such an approach is essential to understand the impact of public policies such as the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) and the National Literacy Policy (PNA), considering the multiple social, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions involved (Braga, Adão, and Ambros, 2020).

Data collection was carried out exclusively from secondary sources, including official documents, such as: government reports and publications made available by agencies such as the Ministry of Education (MEC), the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) and the National Fund for the Development of Education (FNDE). These documents provide information on goals, indicators, and results of programs such as PNAIC and PNLD (National Textbook Program) (Brandão and Souza, 2017).

In addition, academic databases were consulted, scientific articles and theses related to the theme were collected from databases such as SciELO, Google Scholar and CAPES, aiming to complement the documentary analysis with critical and theoretical perspectives on literacy and educational public policies.

Finally, external evaluation reports were consulted, including: data from evaluation systems, such as the Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB) and the reports of INEP's goal indicators. The data collection period was between 2012 and 2021.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the data collected were triangulated between different sources. For example, the results presented in government reports were confronted with critical analyses of the academic literature and empirical evidence from external evaluations. This triangulation allowed for a broader and more integrated view of the challenges and advances in the literacy process at the right age.

Exclusive reliance on secondary data can limit the understanding of subjective and local aspects, such as the individual experiences of teachers and students. However, the richness and diversity of the sources consulted offer a robust basis for achieving the proposed objectives. As this was a study based exclusively on public and secondary data, there was no need for approval by research ethics committees, according to Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council.

This methodology is adequate to respond to the general and specific objectives of the study, enabling the critical analysis of public literacy policies, the identification of gaps and the proposition of strategies that improve access to quality education for all children.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The analysis of educational outcomes in Brazil, focusing on child literacy at the right age between the years 2012 and 2021, is essential to understand the advances and challenges faced in the period. This chapter examines the performance in the SAEB (Basic Education Evaluation System) and IDEB (Basic Education Development Index) indicators, as well as the achievement of the goals established by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), with emphasis on goals number 5, 7, 15, 16 and 20 of the National Education Plan (PNE).

SAEB

The SAEB, or Basic Education Evaluation System, is a set of assessments that measure the level of proficiency of Brazilian students in subjects such as Portuguese Language and Mathematics. The SAEB tests are applied at different stages of basic education and the results generate proficiency scales that allow analyzing the performance of students individually, by region, or even nationally.

The calculation of the SAEB is based on the item response theory (IRT) methodology, which considers not only the total number of correct answers, but also the level of difficulty of the questions answered correctly. This ensures greater accuracy in measuring the level of knowledge of students.

The importance of the SAEB lies in its ability to identify gaps in learning and guide the formulation of public policies. Between 2012 and 2021, the SAEB results showed a growth trend in the national averages, especially in the early years of elementary school (1st to 5th grade). These advances can be attributed to the implementation of programs such as the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) and the expansion of

access to early childhood education, although there are still significant regional disparities to be addressed.

However, regional disparities persist. The North and Northeast regions, historically with lower performance indexes, continue to present results below the national average. This inequality reflects the need for targeted public policies, as well as greater investment in school infrastructure, teacher training, and adequate teaching materials.

IDEB

The IDEB, or Basic Education Development Index, is an indicator created to measure the quality of basic education in Brazil. It is calculated from two main components: student performance in SAEB tests, which assess Portuguese language and mathematics skills, and school pass rates, which reflect the flow of students in the education system.

This index ranges from 0 to 10 and establishes biennial goals for the education networks at different stages, such as the initial and final years of elementary and high school. In addition, due to its ability to provide an integrated view of education, combining learning and school flow, the IDEB makes it possible to identify areas of advancement and weaknesses.

GOALS OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION PLAN (PNE)

The National Education Plan (PNE), sanctioned in 2014, establishes a set of 20 goals that guide Brazil's educational policies until 2024. These goals address aspects such as access, quality, inclusion and appreciation of education professionals. In this chapter, goals 5, 7, 15, 16 and 20 are highlighted, which are fundamental to understand the scenario of literacy and basic education in the period analyzed.

Goal 5: Literacy at the Right Age

Goal 5 seeks to ensure that all children are literate by the end of the 3rd year of elementary school. This goal is crucial to ensure the foundation of learning and avoid future lags. Between 2012 and 2021, there were significant advances, especially in the first years, with the support of programs such as PNAIC. However, the pandemic has brought setbacks, evidenced by literacy indicators that have stagnated or regressed in many regions of the country. Below is the table of results:

Table 1 – Percentage of students in the 2nd year of elementary school literate – Brazil and Major Regions – SAEB 2019 and 2021.

Brasil e Região	2019	2021
Norte	44,3%	34,0%
Nordeste	53,2%	37,9%
Sudeste	65,0%	48,1%
Sul	71,2%	48,2%
Centro-Oeste	60,8%	41,9%
Brasil	60,3%	43,6%

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from Saeb/Inep 2019 and 2021.

As shown in the table, there is a great disparity between the regions, especially in the North region, which had only 44.3% of children literate at the end of the second year of elementary school, while in the South region this number was 71.2%. In the Northeast, the value was 53.2%, while the Southeast scored 65.0%. It is worth remembering that the goal is to teach 100% of children to read and write by this period analyzed, as defined in the PNAIC.

In addition, it is important to highlight that in all regions there was a drop in the percentages in 2021. This fact is justified by the pandemic caused by COVID-19, which caused several children to stop attending school for almost 2 years, precisely in the period when they should be learning to read. In the table below are the indices by states:

Table 2 – Percentage of students in the 2nd year of elementary school literate – Federation Units and Region – Saeb 2019 and 2021.

Unidade da Federação e Região	2019	2021
Norte	44,3%	34,0%
Rondônia	49,3%	31,5%
Acre	54,8%	23,3%
Amazonas	47,8%	33,9%
Roraima	48,9%	31,4%
Pará	41,4%	39,9%
Amapá	29,2%	23,5%
Tocantins	44,0%	20,4%
Nordeste	53,2%	37,9%
Maranhão	39,8%	30,7%
Piauí	56,3%	43,6%
Ceará	73,4%	45,7%
Rio Grande do Norte	43,6%	29,5%
Paraíba	54,1%	46,7%
Pernambuco	54,5%	44,1%
Alagoas	47,1%	37,7%
Sergipe	44,9%	31,1%
Bahia	50,3%	31,7%
Sudeste	65,0%	48,1%
Minas Gerais	67,5%	48,2%
Espírito Santo	66,2%	50,0%
Rio de Janeiro	61,6%	44,3%
São Paulo	65,0%	49,2%
Sul	71,2%	48,2%
Paraná	70,7%	45,5%
Santa Catarina	72,6%	60,8%
Rio Grande do Sul	70,9%	42,0%
Centro-Oeste	60,8%	41,9%
Mato Grosso do Sul	45,5%	36,8%
Mato Grosso	56,4%	29,7%
Goiás	67,3%	47,0%
Distrito Federal	70,5%	51,9%

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from Saeb/Inep 2019 and 2021.

The disparity between Amapá in 2019, with only 29.2%, while Ceará was with 73.4%, is very noteworthy. This makes it clear how large Brazil is with many inequalities. Another fact that stands out is that during the pandemic the states had different behaviors and results. For example, Acre fell from 54.8% to 23.3%, which represents a relative drop of 57.4%. While Santa Catarina dropped from 72.6% to 60.8%, a relative drop of 16.3%. It is thus shown that the impact was smaller in SC. The national average went from 60.3% to 43.6%, a relative reduction of 27.7%.

Goal 7: Quality of Basic Education

Goal 7 aims to improve the quality of basic education at all stages, measured mainly by the IDEB. Despite advances in the early years of elementary school, the results of the final years and high school show that there is still much to be done to reach the expected levels. The goal reinforces the importance of integrated actions that include infrastructure, teacher training and pedagogical monitoring. Below is the table of results:

Table 3 – IDEB of the initial years of elementary school – Greater Region – Brazil 2007-2021.

Região	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021
Norte	3,4	3,8	4,2	4,3	4,7	4,9	5,0	5,0
Nordeste	3,5	3,8	4,2	4,3	4,8	5,1	5,4	5,3
Sudeste	4,8	5,3	5,6	5,9	6,1	6,4	6,5	6,1
Sul	4,8	5,1	5,5	5,8	6,0	6,2	6,3	6,2
Centro-Oeste	4,4	4,9	5,3	5,5	5,7	6,0	6,1	5,8
Brasil	4,2	4,6	5	5,2	5,5	5,8	5,9	5,8

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from Ideb/Inep (2007 to 2021).

As can be seen, the North and Northeast regions historically have lower scores in the IDEB. Although the scores of all regions have grown over the years, it is possible to see that the disparity between these two regions and the others still remains, although slightly smaller.

The approval rate of students in the early years of elementary school has also been growing in the historical series, as can be seen in the table below:

Table 4 – Pass rate of the initial years of elementary school – Brazil 2007-2021.

	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021
Taxa de aprovação	86,4%	88,8%	91,3%	92,8%	93,2%	94,0%	95,2%	97,7%

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from Ideb/Inep (2007 to 2021).

Goal 15: Teacher Training

Goal 15 establishes that all basic education teachers have specific training at a higher level. Between 2012 and 2021, advances were recorded, with more teachers achieving this qualification. However, challenges remain in regions such as the North and Northeast, where the offer of courses and working conditions are limited.

Graph 1 – Percentage of teachers in the initial years of elementary school with teachers whose higher education is adequate to the area of knowledge they teach – Major Regions – 2013 to 2023.
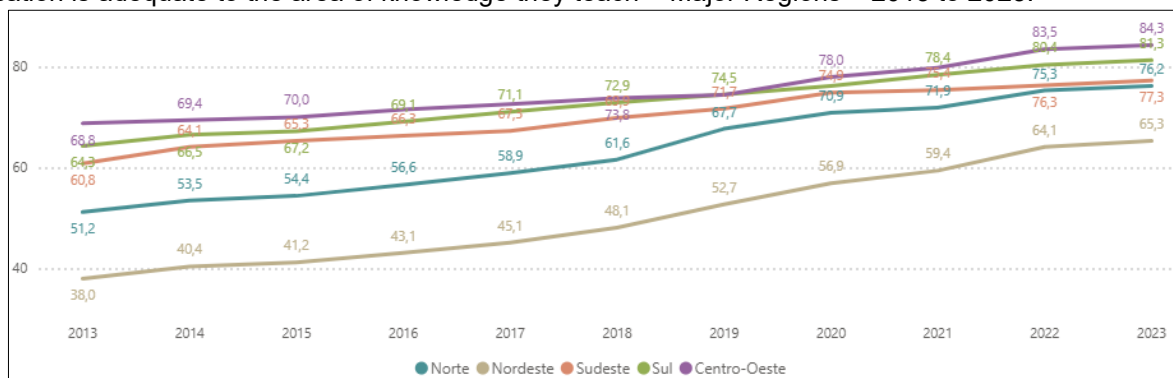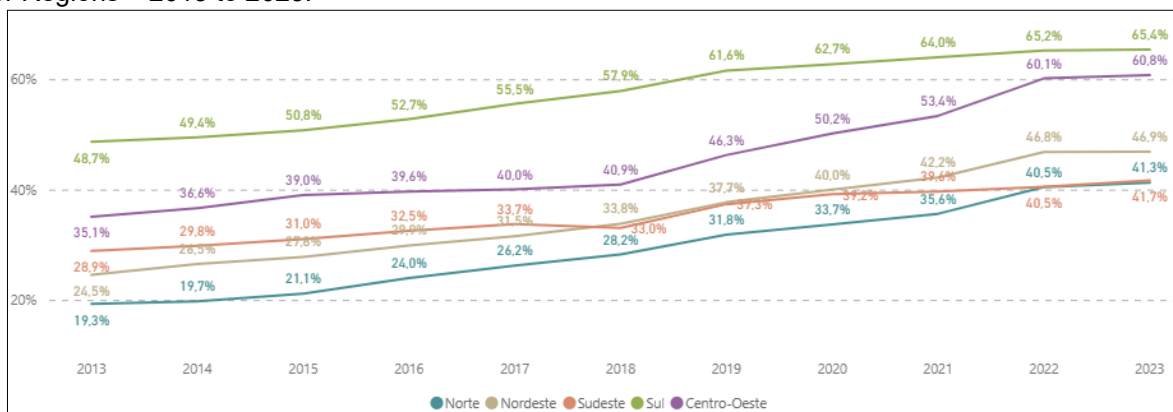

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on the Adequacy of Teacher Training/Indep (2013 to 2023).

In the result by regions, the highlight was the Central-West and South, which obtained the highest percentages. It is also noteworthy that the Northeast region had considerably lower percentages than the other regions in the time series. Below is the graph considering the national average.

Graph 2 – Percentage of teachers in the early years of elementary school with teachers whose higher education is adequate to the area of knowledge they teach – Brazil – 2013 to 2023.
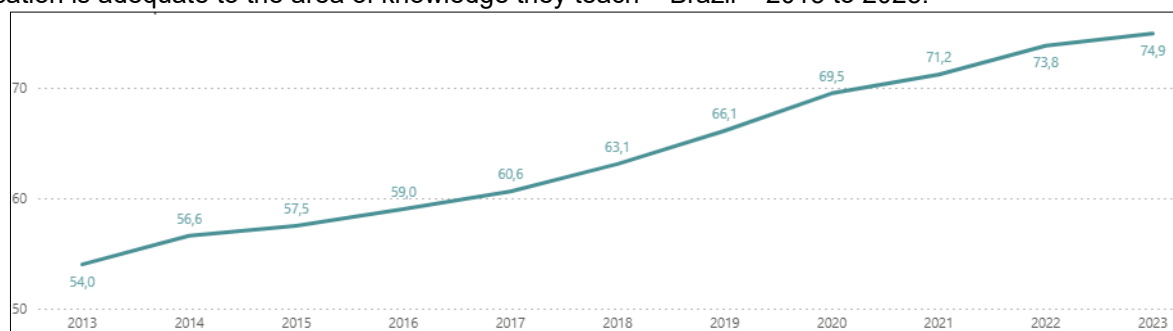
Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on the Adequacy of Teacher Training/Indep (2013 to 2023).

Goal 16: Continuing Education

Goal 16 proposes to ensure the continuing education of teachers, aiming at the constant updating and improvement of pedagogical practices. During the period analyzed, programs such as PNAIC contributed to training thousands of teachers. However, budgetary difficulties and lack of policy continuity negatively affected this goal. Below will be shown the graphs of teachers with postgraduate degrees and also of teachers who have taken a continuing education course.
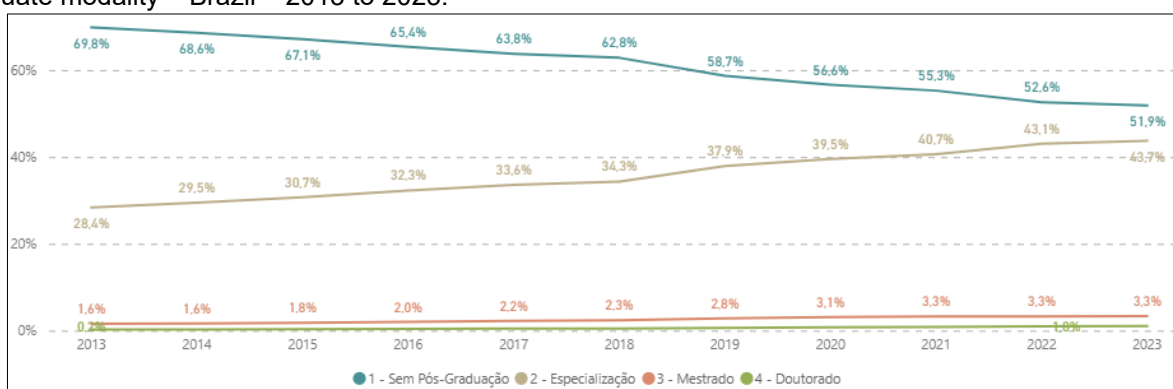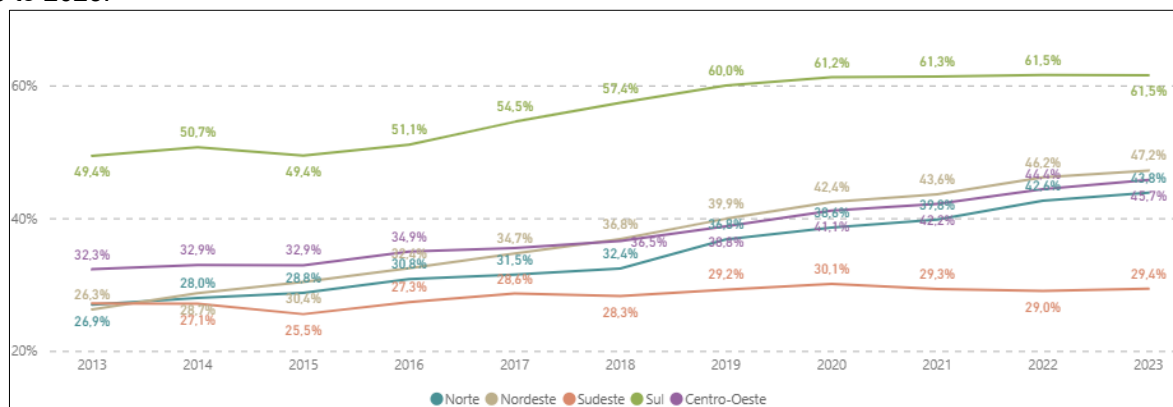
Graph 3 – Percentage of basic education teachers with *lato sensu* or *strictu sensu* postgraduate degrees – Major Regions – 2013 to 2023.

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from the Basic Education Census/Indep (2013 to 2023).

Once again, the South and Central-West regions were highlighted, while the North region had the lowest percentages. In the graph below it is possible to see the distribution by modalities of postgraduate studies of the professors. Over 10 years, the percentage of teachers with specialization almost doubled. This fact is quite relevant and brings evidence that can justify the increase in students' grades as well, indicating a possible correlation.

Graph 4 – Percentage of basic education teachers with *lato sensu* or *strictu sensu* graduate degrees, by graduate modality – Brazil – 2013 to 2023.

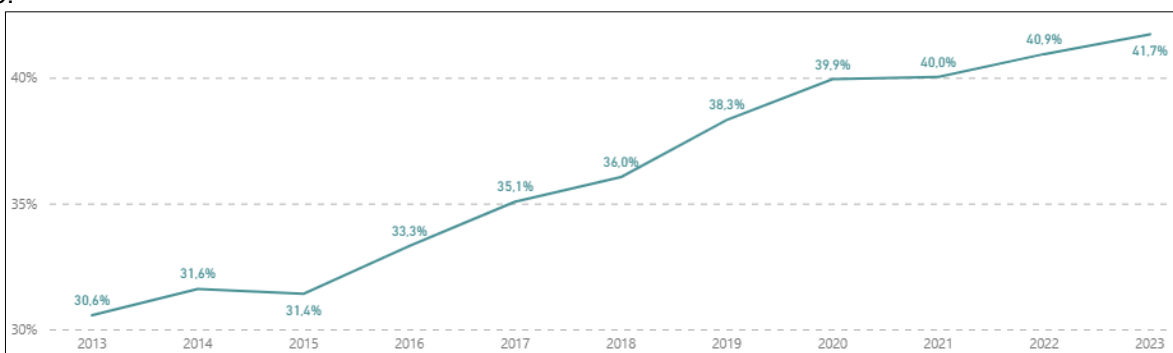Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from the Basic Education Census/Indep (2013 to 2023).

Regarding continuing education courses, it can be highlighted in the graphs below that almost all regions have evolved a lot. The surprise, in this case, is the Southeast region, the richest in the country, which, however, has been practically stagnant over the years studied.

Graph 5 – Percentage of basic education teachers who took continuing education courses – Major Regions – 2013 to 2023.

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from the Basic Education Census/Indep (2013 to 2023).

Graph 6 – Percentage of basic education teachers who took continuing education courses – Brazil – 2013 to 2023.
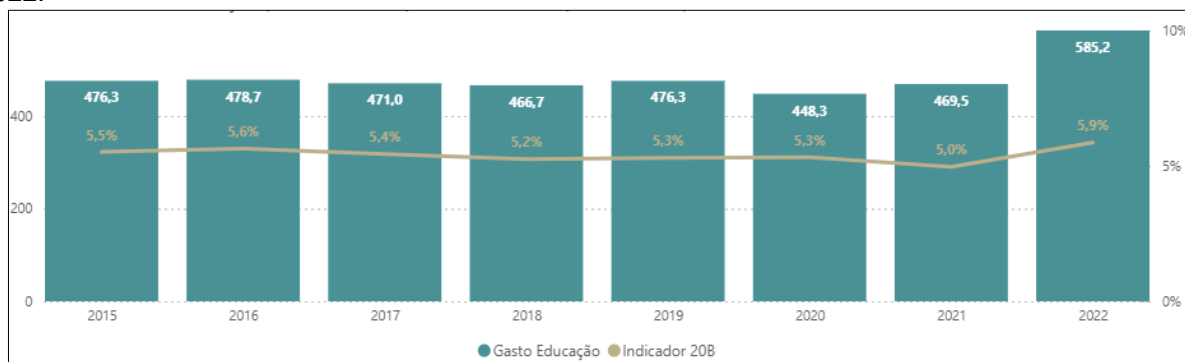

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from the Basic Education Census/Indep (2013 to 2023).

Target 20: Investment in Education

Finally, goal 20 establishes an increase in public investment in education, aiming to reach at least 10% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This goal is transversal, directly influencing the fulfillment of the others. Although some progress has been made, the period analyzed was marked by budget constraints that limited more significant advances.

Full compliance with the goals of the PNE requires not only the continuity of existing educational policies, but also greater equity, consistent investments, and a national commitment to quality education.

Graph 7 – Public Spending on Education (in R$ billions) and indicator 20B (in % of GDP) – Brazil, from 2015 to 2022.

Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from the Basic Education Census/Indep (2013 to 2023).

As can be seen in the chart above, the amount spent on education has changed little over the years, with the exception of 2021, which saw a sharp drop due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This fact becomes quite relevant, as it brings indications that even with investments remaining at the same level in relation to GDP, there was a good advance in child literacy rates and also in the performance of SEAB and IDEB.

In this context, it is clear that the increase or reduction in spending on education does not necessarily reflect in the same proportion on the performance and learning of students. Other indices analyzed were much more aligned with the improvement of exam results, such as the qualification of teachers in the specific area in which they work and continuing education programs.

This trend exposes the reality that investing more money does not always bring more results. It is necessary to invest better. Public policies must be formatted in a way that makes them more effective and efficient in the application of public resources.

In the graphs below, the expenditures made by federative entity will be shown. The highlight is the Municipal Governments, which are precisely the ones responsible for the education of the youngest children. It is noted that in recent years there has been an increase in investments, however, the proportion between entities has remained almost constant.

Graph 8 – Public Expenditure on Education (in R$ billion) by type of entity – Brazil, from 2015 to 2022.
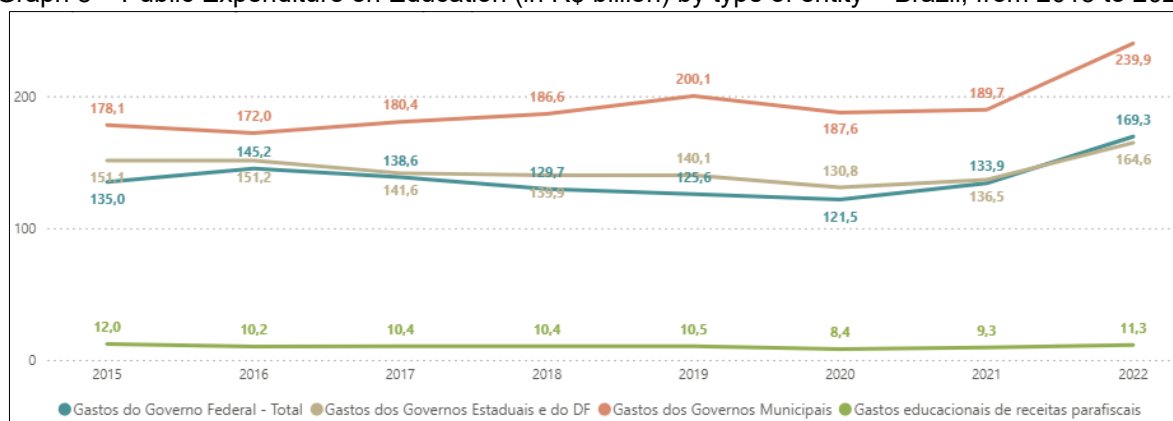
Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on data from the Basic Education Census/Indep (2013 to 2023).

Graph 9 – Participation of entities in Public Spending on Education (%) – Brazil – 2015 to 2022.
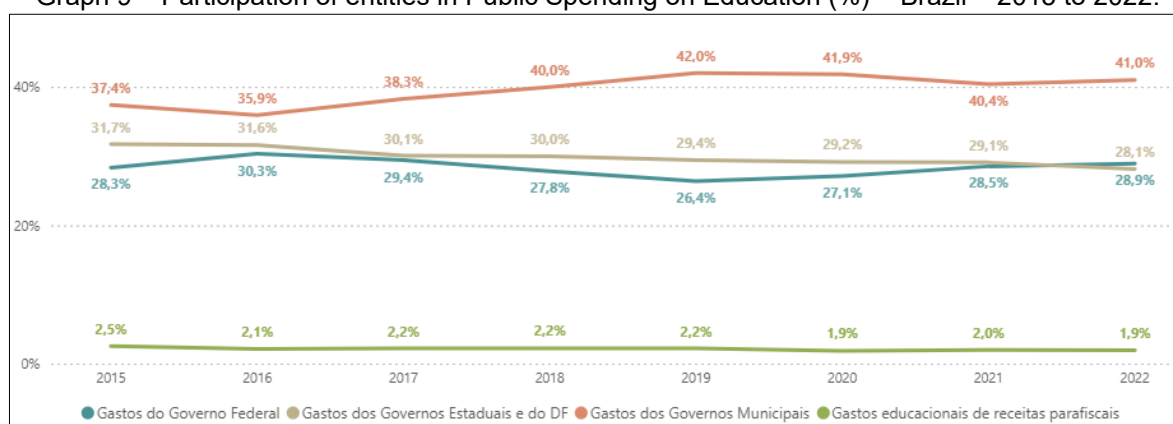
Source: Prepared by Dired/Inep based on SIAFI/National Treasury (Brasil STN) data.

DATA ANALYSED TOGETHER

The results of goals 5, 15 and 16 were placed in a single graph to analyze the behavior of these indicators together. The blue line represents Goal 5, which is the evolution of the IDEB scores. On the horizontal axis are represented the years and on the vertical axis on the left the notes. For goals 15 and 16, their Y values are represented on the right vertical axis.

For Goal 15, the value represents the percentage of teachers whose higher education is adequate to the area of knowledge they teach. Regarding Goal 16, the numbers on the axis of the ordinates reflect the percentage of basic education teachers with lato sensu or stricto sensu postgraduate degrees.

As can be seen, the growth of the 3 indicators together is notorious, giving indications that they may be correlated. It is always good to highlight that the IDEB score had a "forced" drop in 2021, largely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. If it weren't for this exceptional event, probably the 3 lines could be even more similar.

Graph 10 – Evolution of IDEB scores in goals 5, 15 and 16. – Brazil – 2013 to 2021.
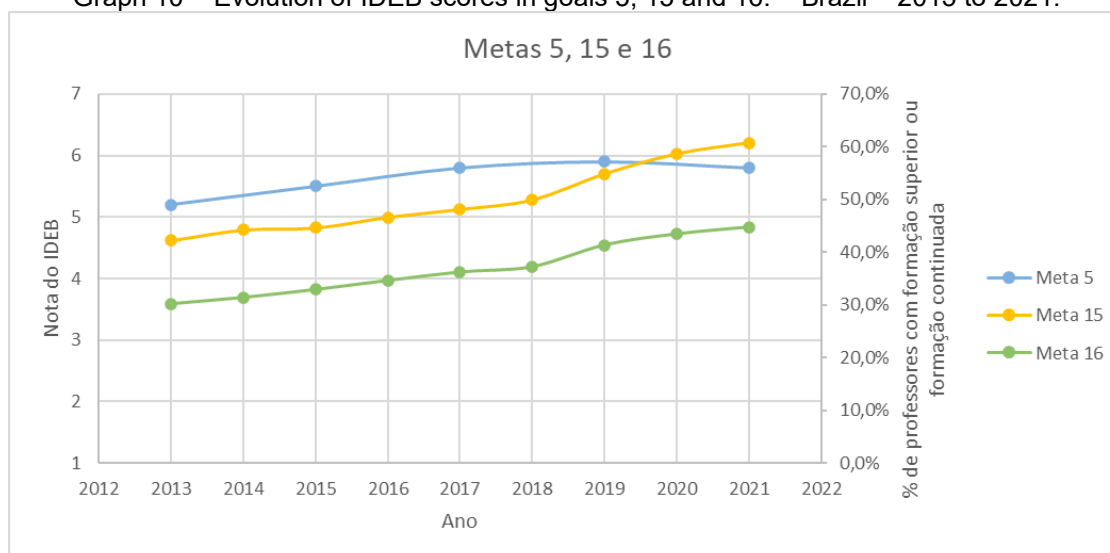
Source: The authors.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study analyzed public policies for children's literacy in Brazil, focusing on the period from 2012 to 2021, highlighting the initiatives of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) and the National Literacy Policy (PNA). The research showed significant advances in tackling child illiteracy, but also revealed structural and pedagogical challenges that limit the reach of these policies, especially in less favored regions.

Among the structural challenges, the lack of adequate infrastructure in schools, the scarcity of contextualized teaching materials, and the absence of a level playing field between states and municipalities stand out. In the pedagogical sphere, the deficient initial training of teachers, the fragmentation of continuing education and the difficulty of adapting unique methodologies to different sociocultural contexts are highlighted.

The implementation of the PNAIC, with its plural and decentralized approach, promoted important advances in teacher training and access to adequate teaching materials. However, the lack of effective coordination between the federative entities and regional inequalities compromised the uniformity of the results. On the other hand, the PNA, with its focus on the phonic method and the centralization of guidelines, brought to the fore the debate on the appropriateness of a single approach in such a culturally and socioeconomically diverse country.

The data analyzed show that there were advances in literacy indicators, such as the SAEB and the IDEB, but also showed setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased educational inequalities between regions and more vulnerable groups. In addition, the lack of sufficient investment in school infrastructure and in the continuing

education of teachers is still a major challenge to achieve consistent results in the long term.

In view of these findings, the need for more inclusive public policies adapted to regional realities becomes evident. It is recommended that future initiatives combine scientific rigor and cultural sensitivity, integrating literacy and literacy practices that value the local context of students. It is essential to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, ensuring that the data collected subsidize effective pedagogical actions.

Finally, the survey highlights the importance of an ongoing commitment to educational financing and cross-sectoral collaboration to overcome the historical inequalities that impact the Brazilian education system. The development of more equitable and effective public policies will be essential to ensure that all children have the opportunity to become literate at the right age, contributing to sustainable development and full citizenship in the country.

This research has as a limitation the fact that it is based exclusively on secondary data and on a documentary review, which restricts the analysis of subjective aspects and local experiences of teachers, managers and students directly involved in literacy programs. For future investigations, it is recommended to carry out field studies that include interviews, participant observation and the application of questionnaires, in order to capture in a more in-depth way the qualitative impacts of public policies. In addition, it will be relevant to examine the performance of the new guidelines established after 2021, such as the National Literate Child Commitment, and their articulations with previous programs.

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