

## Distance higher education in Brazil: A comparative analysis in the public policy scenario



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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present a comparative analysis between the reality and the existing processes of public policy, based on the implementation of Distance Higher Education in Brazil (EAD Superior) as a teaching modality. Although established by Law No. 9394/96 of the

Ministry of Education (MEC), this modality was only regulated by Decree No. 2,494 of 1998, which in turn was repealed by Decree No. 5,622 of 2005, rescinded by Decree No. 9,057 of 2017, currently in force. However, it is only from Decree No. 5,622 of 2005, in its Article 2, that the scope for all levels and programs is evident, including Higher Education, which has reached much broader proportions of extension than the face-to-face offer. Thus, this study is a bibliographic and documentary research, through several sources, which served as support for the construction of this work. Among the documents on which it was based, it is worth noting, in addition to those mentioned above, the reports of the 2008 and 2019 Higher Education Censuses, among other materials that contributed in an enriching way to the understanding of the arguments raised during the exploratory integrative bibliographic review. The results of the research allowed us to conclude that this modality of education has been providing, in a significant way, the expansion of the supply of vacancies in higher education and, consequently, the democratization of access, especially in private institutions, aiming to fulfill the purpose as a public policy.

**Keywords:** Distance Education, Public Policy, Democratisation.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In a country with continental dimensions such as Brazil, rich in ethnic, natural, cultural and religious diversity, it is not consolidated to be surprised by the complexity present at the heart of issues related to these themes. As a result of this diversity and the relationships that are established, situations emerge characterized by the dissatisfaction of one or more groups in society, which need to be addressed for the common good; and they can be called social problems. From this perspective, for a problem to be considered social, it is essential to understand it as a disturbance to the life of society and, consequently, to insert it in the government's agenda in order to provide a solution to it through improvement instruments called public policies. (MARTINS; SOUZA, 2009).



In this sense, public policies consist of actions planned by governments aimed at solving society's problems; Thus, the latter constitute the central object of these actions. Once the problem is constituted as a public matter, some steps must be fulfilled, constituting the so-called public policy cycle, which in the Brazilian model, is based on the following phases: formulation, execution, evaluation and reprogramming. Between formulation and execution, it is worth noting the existence of the decision-making process, in which it is decided to take a course of action to address a problem. (WU et al., 2014).

Thus, decision-making in Brazilian public policy is the theme of this work, whose objective is to comparatively analyze the reality and existing processes of public policy, based on the implementation of Distance Higher Education in Brazil as a teaching modality. Since education is the central theme of all discussions involving the development of societies and especially social movements, it is from it that the positions, objectives and intentions of those who fight for a better society extend, primarily because education has a transformative potential for people's lives.

## **2 PROBLEMS**

In order for a social problem to be identified as likely to become a public policy, it must demand social, economic, political, environmental or cultural pressures. In this sense, Distance Higher Education (EAD Superior) in Brazil emerged in the context of Public Policies in education arising from the need to democratize access to Higher Education as a possibility of expanding the number of vacancies, since it presents, among other advantages, the flexibility of place, day and time to dedicate oneself to studies; work-study and autonomy. (RUE; ARRUDA, 2015).

However, it is not enough for a public policy to be implemented for the problem to be solved, it is essential that the monitoring process takes place in order to observe its efficiency. In addition, as a later stage and final phase of this cycle, it is extremely important to evaluate the effectiveness of your results. (WU et al., 2014).

Thus, based on this assumption, the present work seeks to achieve its purpose of analyzing the reality and existing processes of the public policy of Distance Higher Education in Brazil, guided by the following question: How does the comparative analysis of the evolution of Distance Higher Education in Brazil help in its evaluation as a public policy?

## **3 DATA ANALYSIS**

The present work is presented as a bibliographic and documentary research with a mixed focus (quantitative and qualitative). In the case of a bibliographic and documentary research, we seek to investigate the object of study based on information from graphic, sound and computerized material (BARROS; LEHFELD, 2014). About the mixed approach, there is an interlocution between the



method that analyzes the theoretical-philosophical bases of the problems and the one that quantifies them, giving them an exploratory character.

As for the comparative approach as a method, it means the use of a control method – comparison – in the empirical corroboration of hypotheses, generalizations or theories. "This moment is where the comparative method makes the 'bridge' between concepts and concrete reality" (BORSOTTI, 2007 *apud* BULCOURF; CARDOZO, 2008, p. 10). Ultimately, it is a procedure of empirical confrontation of concepts. Comparison as a method is, therefore, a contribution to the empirical controllability of political phenomena (BULCOURF; CARDOZO, 2008, p. 9).

Therefore, this research work is constituted by scientific knowledge, given its intention to seek beyond the phenomenon itself, an investigation of methods and systems that lead to an investigation of the causes of the facts in question, as well as the laws that govern it.

#### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the investigation carried out, it was possible to collect the data presented below, based on the documents and literature used for this purpose. Thus, considering that in order to evaluate a public policy it is necessary to monitor it from its implementation, some relevant aspects are highlighted below because they are more in line with the purpose of the work in question.

Distance Education (EAD) has been growing and acquiring recognition as an education modality to achieve public policy goals. In Brazil it is no different, because due to the fact that it has a large territorial area with geographical dispersion of students, there is a considerable difficulty for face-to-face teaching. In this way, the need for distance learning arises, as it makes it possible to reach this public that does not have the possibility of attending face-to-face classes.

Based on this assumption, in Brazil Law No. 9,394 – Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN) – of December 20, 1996, in its Art. 80 establishes the guidelines for the development and broadcasting of distance learning programs by emphasizing: "The government shall encourage the development and dissemination of distance learning programs, at all levels and modalities of education, and continuing education." However, it was only on February 10, 1998, with Decree No. 2,494, that this article was regulated, so that it brought in its Article 1 the definition of Distance Education (EAD) as being

[...] a form of teaching that enables self-learning, with the mediation of systematically organized didactic resources, presented in different information supports, used alone or combined, and disseminated by the various means of communication (BRASIL, 1998).

Next, the sole paragraph deals with the organization of distance learning courses in terms of admission, schedule and duration, ensuring that there are no prejudices regarding the objectives and guidelines established nationally; Article 2, in turn, discusses the institutions that may issue certificates



or diplomas for the completion of elementary school for young people and adults, high school, professional education and graduation. Regarding the offer of master's and doctoral programs in this modality, paragraph 1 determines that it will be subject to specific regulations.

On December 19, 2005, Decree No. 5,622 entered into force, and the previous one was revoked. In this document, they are stated in detail, in six chapters: the general provisions evidencing a description of the characteristics of distance education as an educational modality, the regulations on the accreditation of institutions, the offer of youth and adult education, special education and professional education, in Basic Education, the offer of higher education courses, the offer of courses and graduate programs and, in the last chapter the final provisions. It is worth noting that in Article 1 of the same decree, distance education is characterized as:

[...] An educational modality in which didactic-pedagogical mediation in the teaching and learning processes occurs with the use of communication and information means and technologies, with students and teachers developing educational activities in different places or times (BRASIL, 2005).

The student is not configured as self-taught, but as a co-participant in the teaching-learning process together with the teacher and other students. It also establishes the use of information and communication technologies as tools so that students and teachers can carry out their activities in places and times that favor them to perform better in their pedagogical tasks. In addition, paragraph 1 of the Article provides, for the methodology to be used, the obligation of face-to-face moments, among which are assessments, mandatory internships, presentation of course completion papers and laboratory activities.

Regarding the levels and modalities of education, this Decree, in Article 2, regulates that distance education may be offered in basic education, youth and adult education, special education, professional education, covering the following levels and programs: technical, secondary level; technological, higher-level education; Higher education, covering the following levels and programs: sequential, undergraduate, specialization, master's and doctoral degrees. With the regulation of this decree, specifically for people who aspired to take a higher education course, it represents an opportunity to enter the university and be able to fulfill the dream of becoming a competent and quality professional.

However, after 12 years in force, on May 25, 2017, Decree No. 5,622 is revoked, giving way to Decree No. 9,057, consisting of four chapters organized as follows: general provisions, the offer of distance learning courses in Basic Education, the offer of distance learning courses in Higher Education, final and transitional provisions. On the other hand, Article 1 presents a complement to the characterization of distance education, evidencing qualified personnel, access policies, adequate monitoring and evaluation.



For the purposes of this Decree, distance education is considered to be the educational modality in which didactic-pedagogical mediation in the teaching and learning processes occurs with the use of information and communication means and technologies, with qualified personnel, with access policies, with compatible monitoring and evaluation, among others, and develops educational activities by students and education professionals who are in different places and times (BRASIL, 2017).

Therefore, since the creation of Decree No. 5,622 shows a significant increase in the number of vacancies for access to Distance Higher Education, as shown in the following table. According to the 2008 Higher Education Census (MEC/INEP), the number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) jumped from 25 in 2002 to 115 in 2008; there are 90 more HEIs compared to those registered in 2002, representing a significant increase of 360%. And the supply of vacancies went from 24,389 to 1,699,489, that is, 1,675,100 new vacancies were created in this period. Another aspect to be observed is the ratio between applicants and vacancies, while in 2002 there were 1.22 candidates for each vacancy, in 2008, this ratio was 0.42; In other words, more vacancies, less competition, more opportunities for admission to higher education courses.

Table 27. Evolution of the Number of HEIs, Courses, Vacancies and Enrolments in Distance Education Brazil - 2002-2008

**Tabela 27. Evolução do Número de IES, Cursos, Vagas e Inscritos na Educação a Distância Brasil - 2002-2008**

Ano	IES	%Δ	Cursos	%Δ	Vagas	%Δ	Inscritos	%Δ
2002	25	–	46	–	24.389	–	29.702	–
2003	37	48,0	52	13,0	24.025	-1,5	21.873	-26,4
2004	45	21,6	107	105,8	113.079	370,7	50.706	131,8
2005	61	35,6	189	76,6	423.411	274,4	233.626	360,7
2006	77	26,2	349	84,7	813.550	92,1	430.229	84,2
2007	97	26,0	408	16,9	1.541.070	89,4	537.959	25,0
2008	115	18,6	647	58,6	1.699.489	10,3	708.784	31,8

Fonte: MEC/INEP/DEED

Source: MEC/INEP/DEED

Compared to 2002, the total number of new entrants increased by 135% compared to 2008. With regard to the total number of enrollments, there was an increase over the years analyzed, reaching the mark of 727,961 in 2008. Another factor to be considered is the number of graduates, which in 2002 was 1,712, while in 2008 there were 70,068, making a percentage of approximately 41% more individuals who were successful in completing their courses, as evidenced in the table below.



Table 28. Evolution of the Number of Admissions, Enrolments and Graduates in Distance Education - Brazil - 2002-2008

**Tabela 28. Evolução do Número de Ingressos, Matrículas e Concluintes na Educação a Distância - Brasil - 2002-2008**

Ano	Ingressos	%Δ	Matrículas	%Δ	Concluintes	%Δ
2002	20.685	—	40.714	—	1.712	—
2003	14.233	-31,2	49.911	22,6	4.005	133,9
2004	25.006	75,7	59.611	19,4	6.746	68,4
2005	127.014	407,9	114.642	92,3	12.626	87,2
2006	212.246	67,1	207.206	80,7	25.804	104,4
2007	302.525	42,5	369.766	78,5	29.812	15,5
2008	430.259	42,2	727.961	96,9	70.068	135,0

Fonte: MEC/INEP/DEED

Source: MEC/INEP/DEED

Still in the wake of the presentation and discussion of the results obtained, the following will be evidenced more recent information extracted from the 2019 Higher Education Census (MEC/INEP) released in 2020.

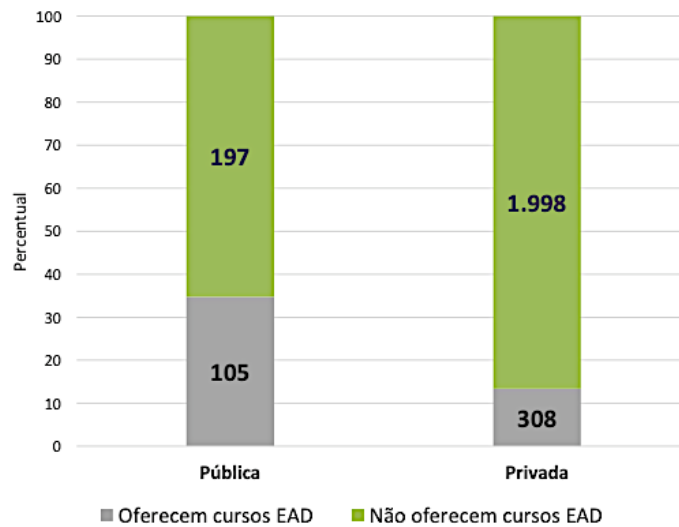
The chart below shows the HEIs, by type of course offerings, according to the administrative category (public or private). The data reveal that, in 2019, 105 public and 308 private HEIs offered distance learning courses, that is, a total of 413 HEIs that offer distance learning courses, while in 2008 this total was 115; a difference of 298, representing 260%. In addition, it is also possible to perceive a growth of a private nature in this modality, an intense presence of the private sector, which is materialized in the total number of vacancies offered and filled.

According to the In 2019,



Higher education institutions, by type of course offered, according to administrative category Brazil 2019

### Instituições de educação superior, por modalidade de oferta de cursos, segundo a categoria administrativa Brasil 2019



Fonte: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

5 IES privadas e 1 IES Estadual paulista ofertam somente cursos EaD

Source: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior  
5 private HEIs and 1 São Paulo State HEI offer only distance learning courses

Based on the assumption that a public policy must be evaluated in order to reformulate/reprogram through adjustments and corrections in order to get closer and closer to the established goals and objectives, it is noted that since the implementation of distance education until 2019, the expansion of vacancies has been on the rise, especially with regard to the private sector. This observation suggests that the proposal presented by the aforementioned decree may be revealing signs of its fulfillment.

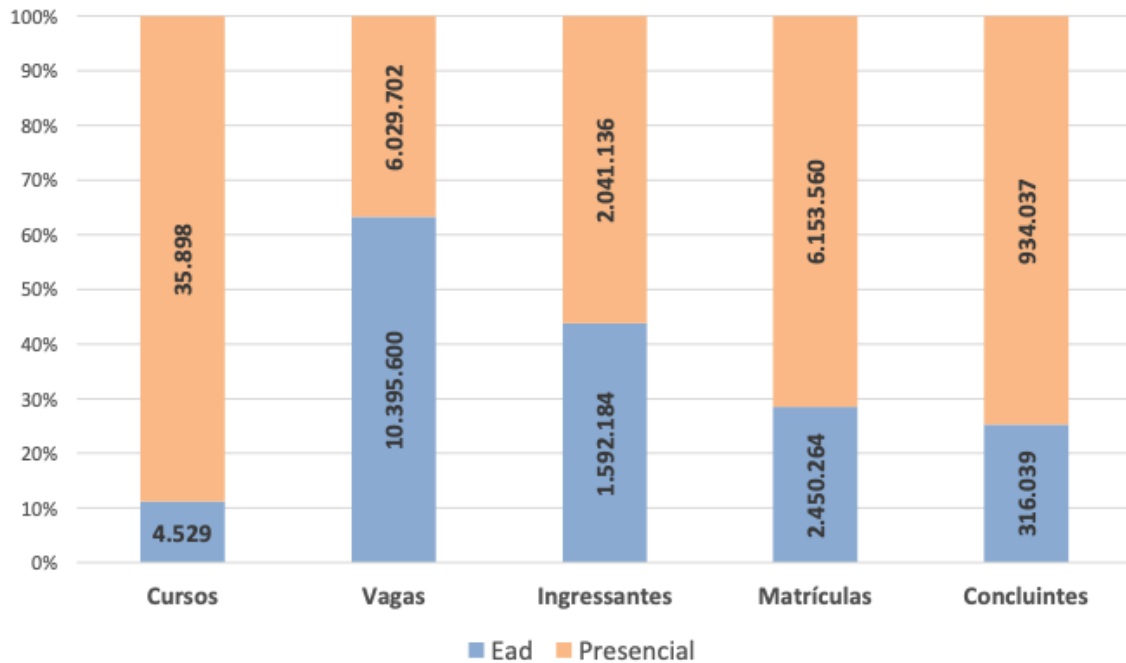
Regarding the courses implemented, in 2019 there was a number of 4,529, compared to 2008 with a total of 647. Thus, 3,882 new ones were created over the 11 years in question. The vacancies offered registered an exorbitant increase, jumping from 1,699,489 to 10,395,600, a difference of 8,696,111. In other factors, a significant growth in this observation period is also remarkable: in relation to the new entrants, 1,161,925 more were registered; enrollment increased from 727,961 to 2,450,264; and the number of graduates shows a percentage increase of 351%.





Higher education statistics by teaching mode - Brazil 2019

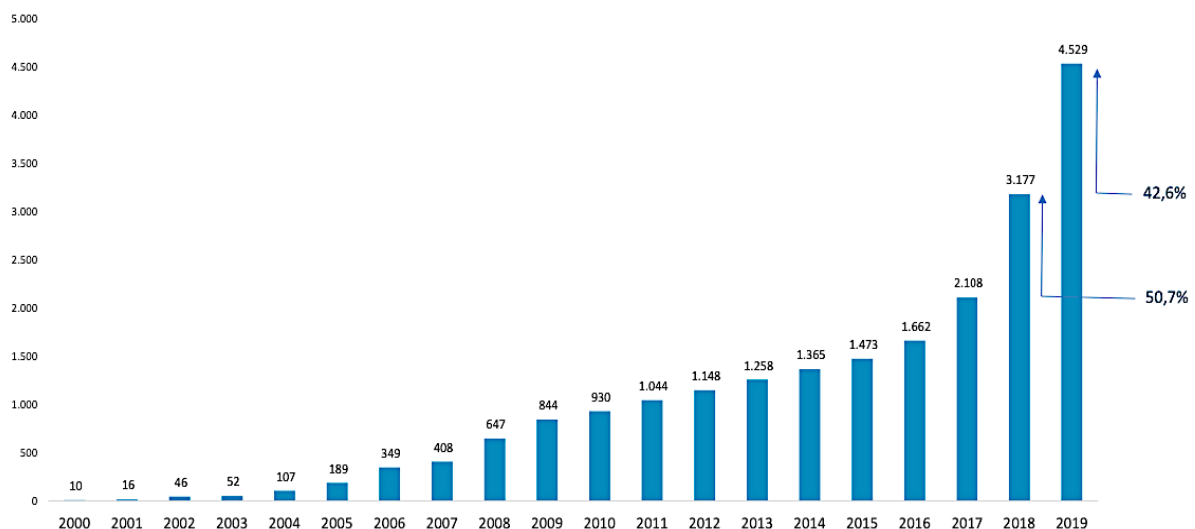
## Estatísticas da educação superior por modalidade de ensino - Brasil 2019



The data below show, in a more general way, the evolution of the number of distance learning undergraduate courses from 2000 to 2019, in a broader and more complete perspective of this period.

Evolution in the number of distance learning undergraduate courses - Brazil 2000-2019

### Evolução do número de cursos de graduação EaD - Brasil 2000-2019



Fonte: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

Source: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

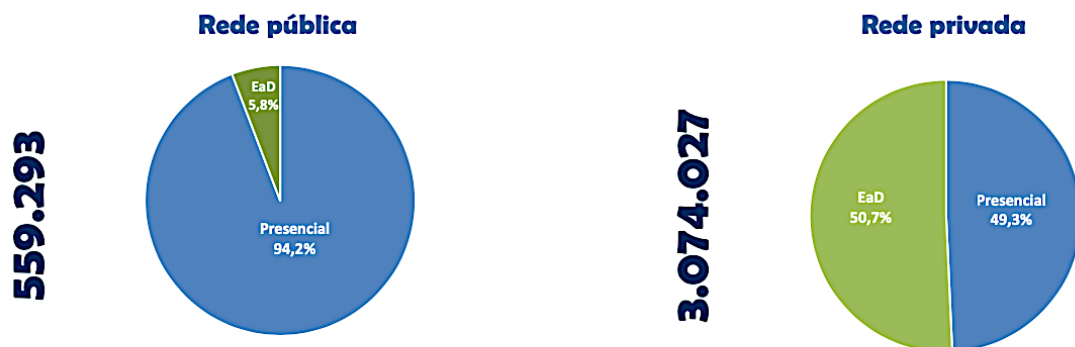




Another situation that deserves attention is the number of new entrants. Of the 559,293 admissions in the public network, only 5.8%, that is, approximately 32,439 are in the distance learning modality. On the other hand, this percentage reaches 50.7% of the 3,074,027 entrants when it comes to the private network.

Number of entrants by school system and type of education - Brazil 2019

**Número de ingressantes por rede e modalidade de ensino – Brasil 2019**



Fonte: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

Source: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

It is worth noting that the Census also presents, in descending order, the 20 largest higher education institutions, in number of enrollments in 2019. In first place is the Pitágoras UNOPAR University with a record of 363,584 enrollments, followed by the Leonardo Da Vinci University Center, with 281,712. Corroborating what was previously mentioned about the increase in the number of vacancies in the private network, it can be seen that in this list of HEIs, only one belongs to the public network, the Virtual University Foundation of the State of São Paulo, occupying the 14th place in this classification. Therefore, the possibility of distance education in Brazil has greatly expanded in terms of the preferences of the private education sector.



20 largest higher education institutions, in terms of enrollment, in undergraduate distance learning courses - Brazil – 2019

**20 maiores instituições de educação superior, em número de matrículas, em cursos de graduação a distância - Brasil - 2019**

NOME DA INSTITUIÇÃO	CATEGORIA ADMINISTRATIVA	ORGANIZAÇÃO ACADÊMICA	TOTAL DE MATRÍCULAS	FREQUÊNCIA %	FREQUÊNCIA ACUMULADA %
UNIVERSIDADE PITÁGORAS UNOPAR	Privada	Universidade	363.584	14,8	14,8
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO LEONARDO DA VINCI	Privada	Centro Universitário	281.712	11,5	26,3
UNIVERSIDADE PAULISTA	Privada	Universidade	234.103	9,6	35,9
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO INTERNACIONAL	Privada	Centro Universitário	180.740	7,4	43,3
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO DE MARINGÁ - UNICESUMAR	Privada	Centro Universitário	142.890	5,8	49,1
UNIVERSIDADE ANHANGUERA	Privada	Universidade	141.522	5,8	54,9
UNIVERSIDADE ESTÁCIO DE SÁ	Privada	Universidade	134.551	5,5	60,4
FACULDADE EDUCACIONAL DA LAPA	Privada	Faculdade	51.575	2,1	62,5
UNIVERSIDADE CRUZEIRO DO SUL	Privada	Universidade	51.287	2,1	64,6
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO ESTÁCIO DE RIBEIRÃO PRETO	Privada	Centro Universitário	49.855	2,0	66,6
UNIVERSIDADE NOVE DE JULHO	Privada	Universidade	49.326	2,0	68,6
UNIVERSIDADE CIDADE DE SÃO PAULO	Privada	Universidade	43.946	1,8	70,4
UNIVERSIDADE DE FRANCA	Privada	Universidade	42.211	1,7	72,1
Fundação Universidade Virtual do Estado de São Paulo	Estadual	Universidade	28.192	1,2	73,3
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO CLARETIANO	Privada	Centro Universitário	25.791	1,1	74,3
UNIVERSIDADE ANHEMBI MORUMBI	Privada	Universidade	25.572	1,0	75,4
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO PLANALTO DO DISTRITO FEDERAL - UNIPLAN	Privada	Centro Universitário	24.157	1,0	76,4
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO INTA	Privada	Centro Universitário	22.016	0,9	77,3
UNIVERSIDADE SANTO AMARO	Privada	Universidade	20.657	0,8	78,1
UNIVERSIDADE METROPOLITANA DE SANTOS	Privada	Universidade	19.533	0,8	78,9

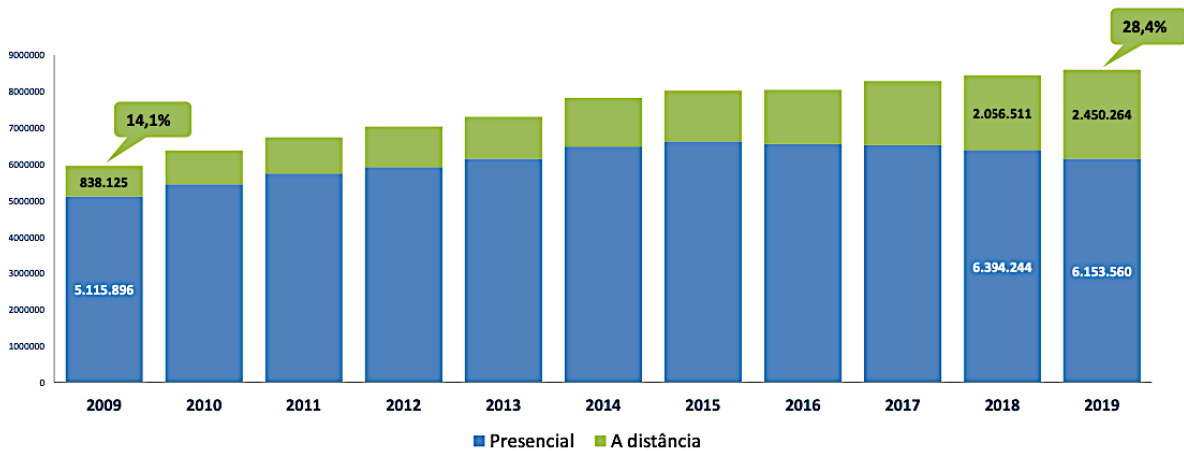
Fonte: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

Source: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

Finally, a last graph that shows the number of enrollments in undergraduate courses by teaching modality in the period from 2008 to 2018. Considering this period, in 2009, distance education represented 14.1% of undergraduate enrollments and in 2019, this percentage was 28.4%. It is worth noting that in 2018, distance learning surpassed the mark of 2 million students. And as you can see, since 2015, the number of enrollments in the face-to-face modality has been falling.

Number of enrollments in undergraduate courses by teaching modality - Brazil 2008 – 2018

**Número de matrículas em cursos de graduação por modalidade de ensino – Brasil 2008-2018**



Fonte: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior

Source: MEC/Inep; Censo da Educação Superior



Therefore, in view of the above, from the data presented resulting from this investigation, it is possible to infer that the reality of Distance Higher Education in Brazil has been in a process of evolution, especially in the context of new technologies, significantly driven by the pandemic scenario declared in February 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), in which severe restrictive measures were adopted by the authorities in order to block the spread of the virus COVID-19. Because of these decisions, Education in all its teaching modalities and administrative categories were impelled to make use of technological tools and digital platforms to continue the educational process, since educational institutions were closed in order to avoid approximation or even physical contact between people, emphatically ruling out the possibility of agglomeration.

Therefore, it can be seen that, although the quality of Higher Education is questionable for some authors, due to the emptying of content and commodification of teaching, it is undeniable that this modality of education as a public policy, whose proposal is the democratization of access to higher education, has been fulfilling its purpose to the extent that, With each census released, the numbers show the panorama that has been installed since its implementation to the present day.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The data of the research developed suggest that, as a public policy, Higher Education in Brazil has been fulfilling the purpose for which it is intended to expand access to higher education, more specifically increasing the number of vacancies and, consequently, the democratization of this modality of education.

With the recognition of distance education as a modality of education in Brazil, its regulation has brought benefits, since it provides opportunities for many people to take a higher education course and enter the job market as competent professionals, capable of performing their functions efficiently and effectively.

However, despite the recognition as a teaching modality, and presenting many advantages for the student, distance education still needs monitoring and evaluation of the results of implementation, because like any public policy, it is essential to be evaluated in order to obtain subsidies that allow it to be reformulated and constantly improved.

## 6 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reflections presented in this work aimed to analyze, in a comparative way, the evolution of Higher Education in Brazil from the decision-making that culminated in its implementation through Decree 2.494/1998 to the current reality, making a continuous and growing trajectory regarding the expansion of the number of vacancies offered.

Therefore, and without intending to exhaust the theme discussed here, since this work analyzes



(through the Census of Higher Education) only one of the aspects of Higher Education in Brazil as a public policy, it is suggested that some points that are beyond the purpose of this investigation be included in the list of future investigations, however they are considered relevant, and, therefore, essential to the construction and improvement of scientific knowledge, but also to society, namely:

- Rancidities and advances of Higher Education in Brazil;
- The acceptance/insertion of students from these courses in the labor market;
- Aspects related to the reduced number of graduating students to the detriment of the number of enrollees;
- Democratization vs. Massification: what you need to know.



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