



RACIAL QUOTAS, NEABS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS: IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACTS AT UEL¹

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Abstract

This article analyzes affirmative action policies in Brazilian higher education, with an emphasis on the State University of Londrina (UEL) and state universities in Paraná. Affirmative action policies, such as the quota system and Law 10.639/2003, have emerged as essential strategies for redressing historical inequalities and promoting racial and social equity. Based on theoretical frameworks and data on the implementation of these policies, the article discusses their relevance, the challenges faced, and their impact on the democratization of higher education. Although they have contributed to increasing black and indigenous representation in universities, difficulties related to student retention and social resistance still persist. The study reinforces the importance of expanding and strengthening these policies, as well as institutional commitment to promoting a more inclusive and anti-racist academic environment.

Keywords: Affirmative action; Racial quotas; Higher Education; Law 10.639/2003; State University of Londrina.

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COTAS RACIAIS, NEABS E AÇÕES AFIRMATIVAS: IMPLEMENTAÇÃO E IMPACTOS NA UEL

Resumo: Este artigo analisa as políticas de ações afirmativas no ensino superior brasileiro, com ênfase na Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL). As ações afirmativas, como o sistema de cotas e a Lei 10.639/2003, emergem como estratégias essenciais para reparar desigualdades históricas e promover a equidade racial e social. Com base em referenciais teóricos e dados sobre a implementação dessas políticas, discute-se sua relevância, os desafios enfrentados e os impactos na democratização do ensino superior. Embora tenham contribuído para o aumento da representatividade negra e indígena nas universidades, ainda persistem dificuldades relacionadas à permanência estudantil e à resistência social. O estudo reforça a importância da ampliação e do fortalecimento dessas políticas, bem como do compromisso institucional na promoção de um ambiente acadêmico mais inclusivo e antirracista.

Palavras-chave: Ações afirmativas; Cotas raciais; Ensino Superior; Lei 10.639/2003; Universidade Estadual de Londrina.

CUOTAS RACIALES, NEABS Y ACCIONES AFIRMATIVAS: IMPLEMENTACIÓN E IMPACTOS EN LA UEL

Resumen: Este artículo analiza las políticas de acción afirmativa en la educación superior brasileña, con énfasis en la Universidad Estadual de Londrina (UEL) y las universidades estatales de Paraná. Acciones afirmativas, como el sistema de cuotas y la Ley 10.639/2003, emergen como estrategias esenciales para reparar desigualdades históricas y promover la equidad racial y social. A partir de referentes teóricos y datos sobre la implementación de estas políticas, se discute su relevancia, los desafíos enfrentados y los impactos en la democratización de la educación superior. Aunque han contribuido a aumentar la representación negra e indígena en las universidades, aún persisten dificultades relacionadas con la retención de estudiantes y la resistencia social. El estudio refuerza la importancia de ampliar y fortalecer estas políticas, así como el compromiso institucional para promover un entorno académico más inclusivo y antirracista.

Palabras clave: Acciones afirmativas; Límites raciales; Educación Superior; Ley 10.639/2003; Universidad Estatal de Londrina.

Introduction

Affirmative action policies have been the subject of intense debate in Brazil, especially in higher education. These measures aim to minimize historical inequalities and promote greater inclusion of marginalized groups, such as the Black and Indigenous populations. Although the concept originated in the United States in the 1960s, its implementation varies according to the social and political context of each country. In Brazil, social movements, especially the Black Movement, were essential in the struggle for racial and social equity in education.

The insertion of the Black population in Brazil took place within an exploitative context, marked by slavery. After abolition, the absence of effective public policies kept this population on the margins of society and of structural racism. Only from the country's re-democratization in the 1980s did social movements begin to pressure the government for measures that would expand access to higher education. From the 1990s onward, international debates encouraged the adoption of affirmative policies, contributing to the recognition of the historical exclusion experienced by certain groups, which became more visible in the agendas of international organizations and grassroots movements (Moehlecke, 2002).

Today, education is widely recognized as a means of social mobility. For the Black population, however, it has always had an even deeper meaning: beyond providing opportunities, it has represented an instrument of identity affirmation. In this sense, reading and writing went beyond the simple interpretation of laws, becoming a form of resistance and cultural appreciation (Rosa, 2011).

The implementation of racial and social quotas in public universities reflects a process of transformation that faces challenges and resistance. In Paraná, state universities were pioneers in adopting these policies, adapting their models to regional realities. In addition to quotas, Law 10.639/2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture mandatory in schools, has also contributed to the appreciation of Black identity in education.

In this context, this text analyzes the trajectory of affirmative actions at the State University of Londrina (UEL), their theoretical and political foundations, as well as the challenges faced in their implementation. By understanding the importance of these policies in higher education, the aim is to highlight their relevance for the democratization of access and student retention, especially in state universities such as the State University of Londrina.

From Struggle to Implementation: The Path of Affirmative Actions in Higher Education

The expression “*affirmative action*” is challenging to define due to its variety of meanings, reflecting the debates and experiences in the countries where it has been implemented. However, it is possible to affirm that the term originated in the United States during the 1960s. At that time, the country was experiencing a vigorous movement of democratic demands for civil rights, aimed at expanding equal opportunities for all. Moehlecke (2002, p. 198) highlights that it was in this context that the idea of affirmative action developed, requiring the State, in addition to guaranteeing anti-segregationist laws, to adopt an active stance to improve the conditions of the Black population.

According to Guimarães (1997), affirmative action aims at promoting privileges of access to fundamental means, such as education and employment, mainly for ethnic minorities, social classes, or genders that are, in some way, totally or partially excluded. The author emphasizes that this approach represents a legal improvement in societies whose norms and values are guided by the principle of equal opportunities in the competition among free individuals. Moehlecke (2002, p. 233) emphasizes that:

Moreover, affirmative action would be linked to democratic societies, whose main values lie in individual merit and equality of opportunities. Thus, it arises as a legal improvement of a society whose norms and morals are guided by the principle of equality of opportunities in the competition among free individuals, justifying the inequality of treatment in access to goods and means only as a way of restoring such equality, and therefore, such action must be temporary in nature, within a restricted scope.

In Brazil, it is possible to state that affirmative action policies gained prominence in 1988, with the drafting of the current Constitution, which provided for the protection of the labor market for women and the reservation of a percentage of public positions and jobs for people with disabilities (Brazil, 1988). Guimarães (1997) also discusses that, until that moment, in Brazil, objections to affirmative actions had been articulated in three directions. First, for some, affirmative actions represent the recognition of ethnic and racial differences among Brazilians, contradicting the national belief that we form a single people, a single race. Second, there are those who interpret positive discrimination as a denial of the universalist and individualist principle of merit, which should be the main tool against particularism and

personalism that still influence Brazilian public life. Third, for others, the implementation of these policies in Brazil is seen as something without real and practical possibilities.

One of the first demands of the Black Movement during the implementation of the quota system was to include Black people, historically excluded from formal education in Brazil. However, during the debates and even at the time of implementation, quotas were also established for white students from public institutions. According to Silva (2019), today white students are the main beneficiaries of quotas, since few Black students complete high school, that is, the first nine years of basic education. Racism directly impacts the school trajectory of Black students, resulting in a significant gap in performance and permanence in the school environment.

Thus, affirmative action policies are related to the demands of social movements for the expansion of social policies; at the same time, they are linked to the action of the dominant class for the maintenance of the logic of capital, which produces all kinds of inequalities. Silva (2019) argues that the dominant elite has never had to share anything with those who have always served them—in this case, Black and Indigenous peoples throughout the history of this country. Many still cannot see Black and Indigenous people as citizens with equal rights. Even more than 130 years after abolition, this slaveholding and colonialist mentality still persists, despite the numerous attempts of the Black Movement and many others who struggle for the recognition of the humanity of all Brazilians.

On one hand, we observe the action of social movements, notably the Black social movement; on the other hand, we note the strategic discourse promoted by developed countries and international financial organizations regarding the need to minimize global poverty. The latter refers to the implementation of specific policies directed toward the most disadvantaged socioeconomic strata. In a broader context, the clash between the defense of universal social policies and targeted policies emerges. Faced with this scenario, it is worth questioning the role of legislation from the perspective of social transformation. It may contribute either to overcoming social inequalities in Brazil or, alternatively, to their maintenance.

Considering this perspective, it is crucial to understand that addressing these policies in a simplistic and careless manner is equivalent to denying the very historical flow. The actions of different social classes unfold within spaces and moments permeated by intrinsic contradictions.

Even immersed in ambiguities, the specific demands of the Black social movement, when articulated together with the State, possess significant transformative potential. In this complex context, it is essential to extend reflection beyond superficial analyses, considering the depth of interactions among the various elements that compose the scenario of affirmative action policies.

By addressing racial disparities, challenging the notion of racial democracy, and reclaiming history and identity, the Black social movement destabilizes the ideological foundations of Brazilian social structure. In seeking new rights, this movement mobilizes a significant contingent of workers, moving toward the conquest of additional rights and validating its agenda in the social sphere. According to Valente, the State remains the central target of action, even in the face of perceived difficulties, highlighting the importance of “historical patience” to promote transformations (Valente, 2003, p. 181).

When the transformation of the State is established as a goal, and with it the transformation/overcoming of capitalism, the problem lies in the belief that the process of building a counter-ideology can take place without contradictions, contrary to the historical movement (Valente, 2003, p. 181).

Despite the permeation of mercantile logic in the Brazilian State, it is undeniable that it remains a field of dispute among social classes. Therefore, when analyzing the subject in question, it is essential to explore the contradictions present in this context, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the new educational legislation, from a critical perspective of the current economic model, thus seeking to “touch with the hand the current of history” (Bosi, 2002, p. 249).

Several analyses, both from state representatives and from leaders of the Black social movement, identify Law 10.639/03 as a form of affirmative action. In general, affirmative policies encompass the implementation of temporary measures, public or private, aimed at repairing historical inequalities faced by socially disadvantaged groups. Hélio Santos et al. (1996) define affirmative actions as special and temporary measures to eliminate accumulated inequalities, aiming at equal opportunities and compensation for losses caused by discrimination.

Although definitions of affirmative policies highlight their temporary nature, the debate surrounding Law 10.639/03, which is considered an affirmative policy, reveals a distinct

characteristic. The Law is permanent and not restricted exclusively to the Black population, being directed at society as a whole. This distinction raises the need to classify it as a valuative action policy, according to the definition by Jaccoud and Beghin (2002), which aims to combat negative stereotypes and recognize the ethnic plurality of society. The authors define valuative action policies, prior to the publication of Law 10.639/2003, as follows:

Valuative actions, in turn, are here understood as those that aim to combat negative stereotypes, historically constructed and consolidated in the form of prejudice and racism. Such actions seek to recognize and value the ethnic plurality that characterizes Brazilian society and to value the Afro-Brazilian community, highlighting both its historical role and its contemporary contribution to national construction. In this sense, valuative policies and actions have a permanent and non-targeted character. Their objective is to reach not only the racially discriminated population—helping it to recognize itself in history and in the nation—but the entire population, enabling it to identify itself in its ethnic and cultural diversity. Information policies will also be identified here as valuative actions (Jaccoud & Beghin, 2002, p. 56)

The definition by Jaccoud and Beghin reinforces the idea that Law 10.639/03 is more appropriately categorized as a valuative action, considering its permanence and importance for the whole of society. However, the debate surrounding the Law has been conducted predominantly within the context of affirmative policies. The understanding that the Law must deconstruct the ideological mechanisms sustaining the myths of Black inferiority and racial democracy emerges as fundamental for the success of this legislation in transforming the structures of social and racial inequalities in the country.

Moehlecke (2002) discusses that the implementation of affirmative actions does not dispense with, but rather demands, a broader approach to equal opportunities to be applied simultaneously. This occurs because affirmative actions are specific and limited policies, being an exception used only in places where the access of a group is clearly inadequate. Thus, while universalization is essential for primary and secondary education, higher education requires measures that ensure the entry of systematically excluded groups, not due to merit or intellectual abilities, but based on racial and social criteria.

A second issue presented in her text, linked to this controversy, is the debate between the use of redistributive policies (of a social nature) or anti-discriminatory policies (of a racial nature), or even a combination of both. In Brazil, the idea persists that a policy directed toward the economically disadvantaged population would inevitably also benefit Black people, since

they predominate in this social stratum. However, there is disagreement with this perspective, arguing that it neglects the specificity of the racial problem, since social exclusion does not equate to racial discrimination. Analyzing the effectiveness of each of these policies, or even their interdependencies, requires monitoring their impacts and results in the medium and long term, which, at present, is a challenging task (Moehlecke, 2002).

In the case of Brazilian higher education, the issue of affirmative actions began to be addressed significantly only at the beginning of the 21st century, when the country committed itself to combating racial discrimination and developing strategies aimed at Black and Indigenous peoples, after the III World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. Before that, there were no ethno-racial policies for access to public universities, ignoring the evidence of the exclusion of Black and Indigenous peoples (Daflon; Feres Junior; Campos, 2013; Oliven, 2007; Sousa; Portes, 2011). This movement was essential for affirmative actions to gain strength, representing an important step toward the inclusion of the Black population in higher education.

The process of establishing and executing quotas in most Brazilian public universities began in 2002. This development occurred in response to the national movement in favor of the implementation of affirmative action policies, resulting in the need for many institutions to adopt such measures (Silva, 2019). This direction converged as a point of convergence among various Black Movement organizations. Gradually, these entities united, recognizing the urgency of implementing racial quotas as a form of affirmative action to correct racial inequalities in the short and medium terms, especially in higher education. This approach represents an effective response to the gaps identified in the educational model, with the perspective of promoting inclusion and equity (Gomes; Silva; Brito, 2021). We can highlight one of the first educational policies that resulted from the struggles of the Black Movement:

Law 10.639/2003 was the first to be sanctioned by the democratic and popular government that was beginning, as a response to decades of demands regarding the role and treatment of African and Afro-Brazilian participation in Brazilian and world history and culture as mandatory content in primary and secondary education. Soon after, the National Education Council approved Opinion 03/2004 and Resolution 01/2004, which extended to all educational stages and modalities and made explicit the foundations and paths through the National Curriculum Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations. The following year, 2004, the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, and Diversity (Secad) was created as a department in the Ministry of

Education, whose purpose was to implement a new agenda of diversity and social inclusion and to act transversally in other departments and educational policies. Over the years, its actions and effects on educational policies of social inclusion and specific racial equality policies were significant (Gomes; Silva; Brito, 2021, p. 6).

In the context addressed, state universities stood out as pioneers in implementing affirmative actions, adopting reserved vacancies for students from public schools and for the Black community. To this day, these institutions present diverse characteristics, influenced by university autonomy under the supervision of state governments. The variation occurs according to the commitment of the local community, especially the Black Movement in each region (Silva, 2019).

When analyzing the study “*Quotas for the Black population in Brazilian state universities: from precarious data to new challenges*” (Silva et al., 2024), it is observed that the authors present a technical report on the composition and distribution of quotas in Southern Brazil. However, in this work, we will focus exclusively on the state of Paraná and specifically on the State University of Londrina.

In Paraná, the white population is predominant, totaling 7,389,932 people (64.6%). The yellow population is composed of 100,244 individuals, representing 0.9% of the total population. The Indigenous population totals 28,000 people, corresponding to 0.2%. The Brown population amounts to 3,440,037 individuals (30.1%), while the Black population totals 485,781 inhabitants (4.2%). Thus, the group of Black people, formed by the sum of the Black and Brown populations, reaches 3,925,818 individuals, representing 34.3% of the state’s population (Silva et al., 2024).

The analysis of affirmative action policies highlights their importance in reducing racial and social inequalities in Brazil, especially in access to higher education. Over the last decades, these measures have been debated and improved, resulting in the implementation of quotas in several public universities. In the Paraná context, state universities play a fundamental role in adopting these policies, reflecting local dynamics and the efforts of social movements to ensure greater inclusion.

In light of this panorama, it is essential to deepen the understanding of how these policies were implemented in the state universities of Paraná, especially at UEL. In the following chapter, we will analyze the quota system adopted by the institution, considering its access

criteria, impacts, and challenges, in addition to reflecting on the role of the institution in promoting racial and social equity in higher education.

State University of Londrina (UEL): Affirmative Actions and the Role of the Afro-Brazilian Studies Center

According to Silva (2019), the first institutions to adopt quotas, resulting from specific state-level legislation, were the universities of the state of Rio de Janeiro in 2001. In southern Brazil, the State University of Londrina (UEL), located in the state of Paraná, became the first to administer entrance exams and admit Black students and students from public schools in 2004 (UEL, 2004), with effective admission in 2005. Despite the common belief that affirmative action policies for Black students are present in all public universities in Brazil, this is not the reality observed.

In the state of Paraná, there are seven state institutions of higher education (IEES), namely: the State University of Londrina (UEL), the State University of Maringá (UEM), the State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG), the State University of Northern Paraná (UENP), the State University of Western Paraná (Unioeste), and the State University of Central-West (Unicentro). All these institutions have adopted racial quota policies since 2002, with UEL as the pioneer in their respective admission processes. Despite discrepancies regarding the number of reserved seats, the institutions share similar affirmative action policies, which include quotas for students from public primary and secondary schools as well as quotas for Black students. In this research, however, we will focus exclusively on the State University of Londrina.

UEL was the first institution in the state of Paraná to adopt affirmative action policies. The implementation of the quota system at UEL unfolded as the first stage of a long process that lasted from 2002 to 2012. This stage, between 2002 and 2004, was marked by intense discussions involving both the internal and external community, culminating in the presentation of the proposal to the University Council and the approval of the measure (Silva, 2012).

According to Anchieta (2008), this process began with a meeting held in September 2002, with the participation of members of the Municipal Council of the Black Community of Londrina and representatives of the Office for Teaching and Undergraduate Affairs (CAE) of UEL. Based on information collected by the author, the meeting forwarded a proposal to reserve 20% of admission slots at UEL for people of African descent. This was the first initiative

regarding the demand for the inclusion of racial quotas at UEL. Vilma Yá Mukumby (in memoriam), an important religious and political leader in the city, played a crucial role in the debate on affirmative action at UEL from its early stages. Anchieta reports that this initial discussion was silenced until 2004, when the seminar “*The Black Population at the University: the Right to Inclusion*” took place, marking the continuation of the process initiated in 2002. This proposal was embraced by Rector Lygia Pupatto, in collaboration with the Palmares Cultural Foundation, the Municipal Department of Culture of Londrina, the local Black Movement, and UEL. It was part of a series of ten seminars held in other higher education institutions across the country. The central objective of this event was to explore the importance of the racial quota system, raising awareness in the academic community regarding the need for its implementation.

This seminar played a significant role in influencing the implementation of the quota system at UEL. In 2004, discussions on the subject gained momentum within the university’s higher councils, resulting in the adoption of Resolution CU No. 78/2004 by the University Council (UEL, 2004). This resolution established the quota system at UEL, reserving 40% of the slots in each undergraduate course for students from public schools, half of which were reserved for self-declared Black candidates. Moreover, the resolution established criteria for the effective implementation of the system (Anchieta, 2008).

The resolution also created a committee designated by the Council for Teaching, Research, and Extension (CEPE), responsible for verifying and validating the enrollment of self-declared Black candidates, thereby ensuring the effectiveness and legitimacy of the process.

However, this long process of implementing quotas and internal debates leads us to reflect on the concept of “Institutional Racism,” as discussed by Nilma Lino Gomes (2017), who highlights the structural difficulties of change even in the face of evident social demands. The initial resistance demonstrates how historically elitist higher education institutions tend to reproduce inequalities, requiring both external and internal pressure to adopt inclusive policies.

Professor and researcher Maria Nilza da Silva (2014) distinguishes two phases in the establishment and consolidation of racial quotas at UEL: the first from 2005 to 2012, and the second beginning in 2013. The defining milestone between them was the evaluation of the quota system, scheduled for seven years after its implementation as an affirmative policy. In the first phase, the proportion between the number of applicants and the reserved slots in competitive

courses limited access, resulting in an average of 7.2% quota students, below the initially intended 20%.

In 2011, the first evaluation led to changes in 2013, marking the second phase, characterized by Resolution CU No. 015/2012. The proportionality criterion was eliminated, establishing 40% of slots for the quota system, equally divided between public school graduates and self-declared Black candidates. The evaluation concluded that quotas did not compromise “academic excellence” and enabled greater inclusion of low-income students, better reflecting Londrina’s diversity in higher education.

With the introduction of the Unified Selection System (Sisu), a program of the Ministry of Education (MEC) that centralizes admissions in public higher education institutions through Enem exam scores, in 2016, and a new evaluation in 2017, Resolution CU No. 008/2017 (UEL, 2017) increased the reserved slots for quota students to 45%, with 20% for public school graduates, 20% for self-declared Black public school graduates, and 5% for self-declared Black students regardless of educational background. This made UEL the first state institution in Paraná to adopt quotas for Black students without educational or socioeconomic requirements. The new system took effect in 2018 (UEL, 2017). This model allowed that, in 2022 (Silva et al., 2024), 43% of students enrolled at UEL identified as Black (including both *pretos* and *pardos*), a percentage significantly higher than at UEM (21.6%) and UEPG (17%).

Although the reservation of slots has increased the enrollment of Black students, retention remains a challenge. Many face financial and academic difficulties, leading to high dropout rates. The number of quota students who complete their courses within the expected time frame is still lower than that of students admitted through the general competition, revealing the need for complementary policies to ensure not only access but also retention.

When comparing these data with Londrina’s racial demographics, challenges regarding the effectiveness of affirmative policies become evident. According to IBGE (2022), the city’s population is composed of 64% White, 6% Black, 27% *pardos*, 3% Asian, and 0.14% Indigenous. This means that approximately 33% of Londrina’s population identifies as Black (including *pretos* and *pardos*), while only 25% of UEL’s slots are reserved for Black candidates through the quota system. This discrepancy suggests that the number of Black quota students entering the university still does not fully reflect the city’s racial composition, reinforcing the need for adjustments in access policies.

The case of UEL underscores the importance of continuous evaluation and monitoring of affirmative actions to correct flaws and misallocations, preserving the purpose and objectives of the quota system. This policy is conceived as a reparatory measure, seeking inclusion in historically elitist and exclusionary Brazilian public universities. The analysis of results and impacts over the years demonstrates that Brazilian higher education benefits in both quality and inclusivity when it embraces a more diverse composition, reflecting the country's socio-racial and cultural plurality in its student and faculty bodies.

After discussing the affirmative policies implemented at UEL, it is essential to highlight how these policies created a favorable environment for the establishment of specialized centers promoting diversity and inclusion. A significant example of this dynamic is the Afro-Brazilian Studies Center (NEAB) at UEL.

NEAB was created on June 13, 1985, through Executive Act No. 764/85, initially under the name Center for Afro-Asian Studies. Its primary objective was to develop studies on Afro-Brazilian, African, and diaspora cultures, particularly through exchanges between UEL and other similar institutions. In 2014, through Executive Act No. 043/14, the center was renamed Afro-Brazilian Studies Center, maintaining its focus on Afro-related issues. Currently, NEAB is coordinated by Marleide Rodrigues da Silva Perrude (UEL, 2022).

NEAB's mission is clear: to promote racial equality, value Afro-Brazilian culture, and combat racism. Its objectives include raising awareness within the academic community about racial issues, promoting research on Afro-Brazilian history and culture, and implementing affirmative actions that contribute to social and academic inclusion. NEAB develops a wide range of activities and programs reflecting its mission. Among its main initiatives are the development of interdisciplinary research addressing socio-historical and pedagogical issues related to Afro-Brazilian and African studies in different societies; the offering of extension courses and the organization of conferences to deepen knowledge of Afro-Brazilian and African culture; the promotion of academic meetings and publications disseminating the center's research; and the maintenance of the Lélia Gonzalez Library, a specialized collection of documents and data on topics of interest to NEAB, fostering research and teaching (UEL, 2022).

The Afro-Brazilian Studies Center (NEAB) at UEL is a consolidated institutional body that ensures greater autonomy to coordinate strategic actions aimed at promoting racial equity in higher education. Its role has been essential in the implementation of Laws 10.639/2003 and

11.645/2008, which mandate the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian, African, and Indigenous history and culture in school curricula (Brazil, 2003, 2008). An example is the project “*Weaving Networks for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations*,” which trains teachers in anti-racist educational practices.

Furthermore, NEAB promotes permanent and strategic actions to confront and combat racism in a joint and coordinated manner within the university. Among its specific objectives are fostering dialogue with the university community (faculty, students, and staff), the Black Movement, and society at large on racism; denouncing different forms of racism; encouraging faculty and staff to promote and intensify anti-racist actions in their professional routines; valuing Black and Indigenous populations and cultures; and creating listening spaces in departments and centers to address manifestations of prejudice, discrimination, and racism at UEL.

Its areas of activity include recognizing racism in everyday life; giving visibility to actions that confront and overcome racism; fostering the formation of an anti-racist community; and denouncing racist attitudes while strengthening reporting channels, criminalization, protection, and support.

In August 2022, seeking to broaden dialogue with students, faculty, and staff, UEL began planning permanent actions to combat discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Considering the need to promote such actions collectively, the UEL rector established a commission to carry out a permanent campaign against racism, through Ordinance No. 4126/2022 (UEL, 2022), dated September 30, 2022. This commission, composed of members such as Maria de Fátima Beraldo, Wagner Roberto do Amaral, and Ângela Maria de Sousa Lima, among others, and coordinated by Prof. Dr. Marleide Rodrigues da Silva Perrude, developed a series of strategic activities (UEL, 2022).

The campaign’s actions include building a website with information on combating racism; drafting a strategic communication plan for social media and the press; disseminating the Racial Equality Statute; producing an anti-racist guide; organizing discussion circles with the university community; creating a permanent calendar of campaign activities; hosting traveling photography exhibitions; broadcasting radio programs featuring Black and Indigenous voices; promoting artistic and cultural initiatives; and training the university community on ethnic-racial issues.

In addition, in 2020, the campaign “*UEL in the Fight Against Racism*”⁴ was launched to integrate the Initiative for the Eradication of Racism in Higher Education, proposed by the UNESCO Chair for Higher Education, Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America. The campaign featured various activities, such as discussion circles and short videos, in collaboration with Afro-descendant and Indigenous students at the university. In 2022, UEL resumed planning anti-racism actions to expand dialogue and build a more welcoming, diverse, and engaged university in the fight against racism.

Nevertheless, the retention of these students remains a critical challenge. While access policies are fundamental, without adequate support many Black students face financial, academic, and psychosocial difficulties that affect their university trajectories. Although UEL presents greater Black representation compared to other state universities, the inclusion of ethnic-racial content in curricula remains partial, often limited to elective courses or isolated initiatives within specific programs.

It is possible to recognize that UEL has made progress regarding inclusion through affirmative actions; however, it still faces significant challenges concerning the retention of Black and Indigenous students, who encounter racism, social and racial inequalities, insufficient financial support, and inadequate retention policies, all of which impact their academic and professional success. Costa (2020) notes that most Black people are concentrated within the poorest sectors of society, whereas White people are more evenly distributed across social classes, a disparity also influenced by educational attainment. Consequently, Black students face greater challenges in remaining at university, as academic routines—class schedules, libraries, study groups, research activities, and extension programs—often do not align with their realities, particularly given that many need to work to support their families. This demand to reconcile study and work frequently delays graduation or leads to students abandoning their studies to enter the labor market.

Access to higher education must therefore be accompanied by retention policies. Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge the diverse realities of many Black students, who balance their studies with family and work responsibilities, as well as long commutes to higher education institutions, which also act as barriers to retention and academic success, as previously mentioned. Due to these economic and social pressures, many opt to abandon higher

⁴ See the campaign at: GT UEL – Confronting racism.

education altogether. While some eventually return to university, in many cases they never resume their studies. Without adequate institutional financial, academic, and psychosocial support policies, many encounter difficulties that compromise—or in some cases prevent—their academic trajectories.

The implementation of Law 10.639/2003 across all programs, together with the expansion of institutional support for quota students, is essential for consolidating a truly inclusive and anti-racist university environment. In this context, NEAB has played a crucial role in promoting diversity, valuing Afro-Brazilian culture, and addressing racial inequalities in higher education. However, the advances achieved do not eliminate the need for continuous debate on the effectiveness of such policies in promoting racial and social equity. UEL's experience demonstrates significant achievements but also highlights the urgency of more robust strategies to guarantee not only access but also the academic success of these students. Understanding the challenges and possibilities of including historically marginalized groups in the university is a crucial step toward building a higher education system that is more just, representative, and aligned with the principles of social justice and the democratization of knowledge.

Final Considerations

The analysis of affirmative action policies in Brazil reveals that, although these initiatives have been fundamental in reducing racial and social inequalities, the true transformation that is expected remains an ongoing process. The admission of Black and Indigenous students into public universities through quotas is an undeniable achievement, but the effective inclusion of these populations in the academic sphere goes far beyond mere entry into the institutions. What is at stake is permanence and academic success, areas in which historical barriers remain strong, demonstrating that simple access is not synonymous with equity.

Resistance to affirmative action policies, although often grounded in arguments such as the belief in meritocracy or the idea of racial democracy, goes beyond mere ideological disputes. It reflects a distorted view of the actual conditions of equality in Brazilian society. The defense of meritocracy, for example, disregards the fact that opportunities are not equally accessible to all. Black and Indigenous populations, historically marginalized, face profound structural

barriers that hinder access to quality education, employment, and other fundamental rights. On the other hand, the notion of racial democracy, which suggests that Brazil is a nation without racism, fails to recognize the persistent inequalities embedded in the social fabric, while also downplaying the historical resistance faced by these groups. Therefore, resistance to affirmative action is not merely a reaction to public policies, but rather a reflection of the difficulty in acknowledging that Brazil still needs to overcome the marks left by slavery and social exclusion.

Examples such as Law 10.639/2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture mandatory, illustrate the potential of affirmative policies that, although initially implemented to serve a specific audience, may have a lasting and structural character, contributing to the deconstruction of racism and the appreciation of cultural diversity in Brazil. However, their effectiveness is linked to the constant review and reinforcement of pedagogical practices that truly dismantle stereotypes and promote an anti-racist education.

Within the scope of the State University of Londrina, the implementation of affirmative actions reveals a complex scenario, in which achievements coexist with evident limitations. The adoption of these policies is, without a doubt, a positive step, but their consolidation depends on a continuous commitment to providing the necessary support for the permanence and success of Black and Indigenous students, as well as a careful attention to the structural difficulties that still persist. Ultimately, the struggle for racial equity in higher education is a continuous and unfinished journey, requiring the engagement of all sectors of society to create an educational environment that fosters social justice and equal opportunities.

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