

Race as an amplifier of educational inequalities in High School: an analysis of the 2022 demographic census and the 2023 IDEB^I

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Abstract

Educational performance indicators can highlight the harmful effects of structural racism on the Brazilian education system. This article aims to analyze racial inequalities in Brazilian secondary education using data from the 2022 Demographic Census and the 2023 Basic Education Development Index (IDEB). To this end, it draws on theoretical frameworks that demonstrate how Brazilian education has been constituted as a space of racial hierarchies, reproducing processes of exclusion. Next, data from the 2022 Demographic Census (IBGE) and the 2023 Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) (INEP) were collected and cross-referenced to verify whether structural racism can explain regional inequalities in IDEB scores. In summary, the research concludes that educational inequality in Brazil is not an isolated phenomenon, but a direct reflection of structural racism and the colonial legacy of nearly 400 years of enslavement.

Keywords: Educational inequality; High School; structural racism.

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Raça como amplificador de desigualdades educacionais no Ensino Médio: uma análise do censo demográfico 2022 e IDEB 2023

Resumo

Os indicadores de desempenho educacional podem evidenciar os efeitos deletérios do racismo estrutural no sistema educacional brasileiro. O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar as desigualdades raciais no ensino médio brasileiro por meio dos dados do Censo Demográfico de 2022 e do Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB) de 2023. Para tanto, utiliza-se referenciais teóricos que demonstram que a educação brasileira se constituiu como um espaço de hierarquias raciais, reproduzindo processos de exclusão. Em seguida, realizou-se um levantamento e o cruzamento de dados do Censo Demográfico de 2022 (IBGE) e do Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB) de 2023 (INEP), para verificar se o racismo estrutural pode explicar as desigualdades regionais nas notas referentes ao IDEB. Em suma, a pesquisa conclui que a desigualdade educacional no Brasil não é um fenômeno isolado, mas um reflexo direto do racismo estrutural e da herança colonial de quase 400 anos de escravidão.

Palavras-chave: Desigualdade educacional; Ensino Médio; racismo estrutural.



Raza como amplificador de desigualdades educativas en la Educación Secundaria: un análisis del censo demográfico 2022 y del IDEB 2023

Resumen

Los indicadores de rendimiento educativo pueden poner de manifiesto los efectos perjudiciales del racismo estructural en el sistema educativo brasileño. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar las desigualdades raciales en la educación secundaria brasileña mediante los datos del Censo Demográfico de 2022 y del Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica (IDEB) de 2023. Para ello, se utilizan marcos teóricos que demuestran que la educación brasileña se constituyó como un espacio de jerarquías raciales, reproduciendo procesos de exclusión. Posteriormente, se realizó un levantamiento y cruce de datos del Censo Demográfico de 2022 (IBGE) y del Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica (IDEB) de 2023 (INEP), con el fin de verificar si el racismo estructural puede explicar las desigualdades regionales en las calificaciones correspondientes al IDEB. En resumen, la investigación concluye que la desigualdad educativa en Brasil no es un fenómeno aislado, sino un reflejo directo del racismo estructural y de la herencia colonial de casi 400 años de esclavización.

Palabras clave: Desigualdad educativa; Educación Secundaria; racismo structural.



Introduction

Educational inequality in Brazil is rooted in the historical and social structures that have shaped the country and cannot be dissociated from the legacy of nearly 400 years of colonization and enslavement. Accordingly, this article aims to analyze racial inequalities in Brazilian upper secondary education (High School) based on data from the 2022 Demographic Census and the 2023 Basic Education Development Index (IDEB). This study corroborates the discussions by Figueiredo and Grosfoguel (2009), who point out that, although socioeconomic conditions are relevant, it is also fundamental to highlight the role of race as an amplifier of inequalities in countries where racism serves as a structural vector of all social relations. The hypothesis stemmed from the understanding that race acts as an amplifier of educational inequalities, conditioning students' access, retention, and performance across the country's regions.

It is important to highlight that over the last two decades, several affirmative action policies have been implemented through the pressure of the Black movement aimed at addressing these inequalities. However, the debate on racial equity is currently experiencing a period of setback, marked by systematic attacks on affirmative action policies in the Southern region of the country. Examples include recent legislative movements, such as Santa Catarina's Law No. 19,722/2026 and Paraná's Bill No. 12/2026, which seek to prohibit the racial quota system for admission to state public universities and private institutions receiving public funds from the state, under arguments defending meritocracy and fairer competition.

Such offensives reinforce that when the privileges of whiteness in Brazil are challenged through quota policies, a rearrangement of the pact of whiteness is produced. This highlights a reactionary and conservative offensive in states with a predominantly self-declared white population, supported politically and ideologically by far-right sectors that deny the presence of structural racism



in Brazilian society and advocate for the existence of a racial democracy that conceals the centuries-old privileges of whiteness in Brazilian territory.

Thus, statistical data were interpreted from a critical anti-racist and decolonial perspective, grounded in the contributions of Quijano (2005) on the coloniality of power and Figueiredo and Grosfoguel (2009), who analyze how racial and colonial hierarchies structure institutions and the production of inequalities in Latin America. Concurrently, the study dialogues with the anti-racist perspective of Munanga (2006) and Almeida (2019), who problematize the social construction of race and racism in Brazil, contributing to the understanding of educational inequality as a historical process. Thereby, the observed disparities reveal the permanence of marginalization mechanisms that reproduce themselves within school institutions and public policies.

Finally, in the concluding remarks, the study reviews the main findings, reaffirming that Brazilian educational inequality cannot be understood apart from structural racism, and highlights the need to formulate and expand anti-racist public policies to address these ongoing forms of persistence and challenges, in order to ensure social justice throughout the national territory.

Through this study, we hope to contribute to a critical reflection on how Brazilian educational inequality is inseparable from the social markers of class and race. Beyond presenting indicators, this work seeks to demonstrate that the data reveal the continuation of a power project that has historically guaranteed privileges for whiteness, in which the future of Black youth remains conditioned by the persistent barriers of colonialism and structural racism.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach with a bibliographic and documentary nature. Initially, a theoretical survey was conducted on the Brazilian educational system, structural racism, and racial hierarchies that contribute to understanding race as a producer of inequalities in the educational field. Subsequently, an empirical analysis was



performed using secondary data from the 2022 Demographic Census by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the 2023 Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) provided by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Surveys (INEP). The indicators were organized comparatively across Brazilian regions to identify territorial patterns of economic and racial inequalities in Brazilian upper secondary education (High School).

Data from the 2022 Demographic Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) formed the empirical basis of this study, providing a sociodemographic and educational overview of the population. By covering the entire national territory, this census approach enables the identification and understanding of the distribution of inequalities across different Brazilian regions. Based on the regional breakdown of this database, indicators such as race or color composition, literacy rates, and school attendance rates were analyzed, alongside levels of education (uneducated individuals, those with incomplete primary education, and those with completed higher education) and the population's average years of schooling.

The selection of these variables allowed for the capturing of current educational and socioeconomic asymmetries, aiming to demonstrate how the racial marker articulates with other structural factors in producing the inequalities observed across the national territory. Subsequently, these indicators were comparatively analyzed among the country's five macro-regions and cross-referenced with the results of the 2023 Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), seeking to identify spatial correlations between the distribution of social indicators and the patterns of educational performance observed in High School.

It is worth noting that the calculation of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) is based on the combination of two factors: learning and school flow. The first component refers to student performance on standardized tests, measured through the Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb). The



Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Surveys (Inep) administers Portuguese Language and Mathematics assessments to students in the final year of each educational stage, such as the 5th and 9th grades of Elementary and Middle School, and the 3rd grade of High School. The final performance score for each school or education system is derived from the simple average of the standardized scores in these two subject areas. The second pillar, regarding school flow, is expressed through the student pass rate, calculated from the percentage of students passing the academic year. These data are collected annually by Inep via the School Census, which records student progression, retention due to grade failure, and school dropout throughout the school year. The final IDEB index, ranging on a scale from zero to ten, results from multiplying these two factors.

For the selection of IDEB indicators, we utilized the 2023 results, as they represented the most recent release available at the time of this research. The analysis focused on the High School stage, encompassing both public and private networks, broken down by Federative Unit (UF). This delimitation enabled the comparison of educational performance rates among states and, subsequently, among the five major regions of the country, facilitating the identification of territorial patterns associated with educational disparities.

Thus, the scope focused on identifying convergences and asymmetries among the indices observed across the different macro-regions, in order to understand the spatial manifestation of these inequalities. In this sense, the reflections developed do not intend to attribute educational deficits to race in isolation. The objective is to understand how the racial marker intersects with historical, social, and territorial factors, revealing structural patterns interpreted in light of the anti-racist perspective adopted in this study.



Race: Social Marker of Amplification of Educational Inequalities in Brazil

The concept of race must be understood as a social and historical construction, as taught by Munanga (2006), having been used primarily in Zoology and Botany to classify animal and plant species. In the sixteenth century, the concept was scientifically forged by Europeans and came to explain the alleged inequalities among different races.

Subsequently, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the idea of the existence of races was transferred from Botany and Zoology to human society in order to privilege and legitimize enslavement and all relationships of domination, without this biological difference ever being empirically proven.

According to Quijano (2005), the idea of race shaped social relations in the Americas in such a way that identities and phenotypic traits became associated with hierarchies and projects of domination, based on the premise of a social classification of the population responsible for the manifestation of racism. For Santos and Pereira (2022), racism is an ideology through which specific groups, based on biological and cultural characteristics, are perceived as an inferior race or ethnic group.

Racism is not limited to a single form of manifestation; it expresses itself in multiple dimensions and, throughout history, has shaped social relations, producing inequalities worldwide. For racism to structure itself as an ideology in Brazil, it is important to remember that, beginning in the nineteenth century, the dissemination of what came to be known as scientific racism, based on Social Darwinism, took hold. According to Miranda (2009), biological, political, and social doctrines emerged that utilized concepts from Social Darwinism to justify liberalism and European domination over other continents. These ideas advocated a process of natural selection applied to society, wherein the disadvantaged would be excluded or prevented from multiplying, projecting an idealized world in which reproduction would only be accepted for those racial groups deemed superior according to scientific criteria.



In Almeida's (2019) view, structural racism operates as a mechanism that continuously reproduces itself through institutions and social practices, being present in a naturalized manner in spaces such as education and the labor market. The author also points out that the invisibility of racial inequalities is one of the hallmarks of structural racism, which reinforces its foundations, as the problem is frequently reduced to individual or moral aspects. This perspective further highlights the need to include the complexity of inequalities in the educational field within discussions. Due to the historical process of over 300 years of enslavement and only 137 years since formal abolition—without any form of reparative policy—the Black population continues to face structural disadvantages that have not been remediated by the Brazilian State. This legacy manifests in the difficulty of accessing quality education. Thus, structural racism is not confined to individual discriminatory practices, but constitutes an ingrained logic that organizes Brazilian society and perpetuates racial inequalities across the territory.

In light of this, the Black movement has challenged Brazilian society and the State for decades to create legal mechanisms to combat the manifestation of racism in education. Consequently, in 2003, Law No. 10,639/2003 was institutionalized—subsequently amended by Law No. 11,645/2008—making the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture mandatory in primary, middle, and high school educational institutions. Therefore, this law mandates that education must actively combat racial discrimination and promote the valuation of Black and Indigenous identities, not as isolated content, but as a continuous pedagogical practice.

Furthermore, the Statute of Racial Equality (Law No. 12,288/2010) was enacted, consolidating the country's commitment to implementing affirmative action policies and recognizing the right to education as a tool to correct inequalities. However, the gap between legislative articles and everyday practice demonstrates that structural racism must still be confronted by the school community. According to Caballeiro (2012), the omission and unpreparedness



of teaching staff when facing racial tensions in daily school routine constitute a pedagogical silence. For the author, this stance is far from neutral: when educators choose to avoid discussions regarding the recognition and valuation of Black identity in school, the educational system ultimately acquiesces to processes of exclusion that compromise the development and self-esteem of Black students, while simultaneously reinforcing an imaginary of superiority among white students.

Impact of Racial Inequalities on Performance and Educational Opportunities in High School

Therefore, this present study, through the analysis of the 2022 Demographic Census combined with test scores from INEP (National Institute for Educational Studies and Surveys Anísio Teixeira) regarding high school evaluations in 2023, problematizes how race directly impacts performance and educational opportunities. From these data, it becomes possible to gain a deeper understanding of the inequalities that structure the Brazilian educational system, revealing not only contrasts in access and retention, but also the unequal conditions that mark the trajectories of Black students compared to white students.

The analysis of the spatial distribution of students enrolled in High School in Brazil, based on data from the most recent 2024 School Census, reveals evident territorial segmentation along racial and color lines. While the North, Northeast, and Midwest regions present a predominance of enrollments among self-identified Black students (including both *pretos* [Black] and *pardos* [multiracial]), the South and Southeast regions stand out for their predominance of white students. This geographic configuration is not merely demographic; rather, it reflects structural inequalities.

The Southeast and South regions, where white students predominate, historically concentrate the highest levels of average household income in the country, according to data from the 2022 Demographic Census. This regional



configuration is embedded in a historical pattern of uneven development in Brazil, characterized by the concentration of the most dynamic economic activities in the South and Southeast. As indicated by studies by Araújo and Morais (2014), this produced profound disparities in living conditions and, particularly, in income compared to other regions of the country. This greater regional economic capacity directly impacts basic education financing, as states and municipalities with higher local tax revenues can complement federal funding more significantly, thereby influencing the quality of education provided.

In this context, the empirical analysis of educational inequalities in Brazil is grounded in data produced by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Surveys Anísio Teixeira (INEP), with particular emphasis on the results of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB)—one of the primary indicators of Brazilian education used to assess the quality of elementary, middle, and high school education nationwide. IDEB combines student performance on standardized assessments—specifically the Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB) in Portuguese Language and Mathematics—with school flow metrics, such as pass and failure rates measured through the School Census.

In this manner, the index allows for assessing whether students are acquiring expected learning outcomes for their educational stage and whether they progress regularly along their educational paths. Examining these results reveals that educational performance is not homogeneously distributed across the national territory. Instead, it reflects historical inequalities associated with race/color, income, and the structural conditions of school systems, among other factors, which materialize unevenly across Brazil's different territories.



The most recent available IDEB data stem from 2023, underpinning the regional analyses presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - IDEB Score by State (2023).

BRASIL - IDEB POR ESTADO 2023	
ESTADO	IDEB
Alagoas	4,1
Amapá	3,8
Amazonas	3,8
Bahia	3,9
Ceará	4,3
Distrito Federal	4,2
Espírito Santo	4,8
Goiás	4,8
Maranhão	3,8
Mato Grosso	4,4
Mato Grosso do Sul	4
Minas Gerais	4,2
Pará	4,4
Paraíba	4
Paraná	4,9
Pernambuco	4,5
Piauí	4,5
Rio de Janeiro	3,7
Rio Grande do Norte	3,7
Rio Grande do Sul	4,2
Rondônia	4,2
Roraima	3,5
Santa Catarina	4,2
São Paulo	4,5
Sergipe	4
Tocantins	4,2

Source: INEP, 2023

In the Southeast region, this relationship between race/color and education materializes not only in superior school infrastructure conditions,



but also in relatively more favorable educational indicators compared to other regions of the country. Data from IDEB 2023 demonstrate that the states of Espírito Santo (4.8) and São Paulo (4.5) rank among the top performers in High School, both exceeding the national average of 4.3, while Minas Gerais achieved 4.2. Although close to the national average, this latter result interacts with other educational indicators in the state. According to the 2022 Demographic Census, Minas Gerais presents lower literacy rates, lower school attendance, and one of the lowest higher-education completion rates within its regional context, highlighting structural limitations in educational access and continuity.

These factors offer insights into IDEB outcomes; however, student race/color appears to serve as an amplifier of inequalities, given that, in the 2022 Census, the illiteracy rate among Black individuals over 15 years old is more than double that recorded for the white population. While the proportion of Black (*pretos*) and multiracial (*pardos*) individuals unable to read and write stands at 10.1% and 8.8%, respectively, the percentage among white individuals is 4.3%. Conversely, Rio de Janeiro registered an even lower score of 3.7—below the national average—facing ongoing challenges regarding school flow, dropout rates, and territorial inequalities that reproduce themselves within the state's educational metrics.

Proceeding from the premise that race amplifies inequality, Rio de Janeiro also stands out in the Southeast region for holding the highest proportion of self-identified Black (*preta*) individuals in the 2022 Demographic Census (16.16% of the total population). This makes it even more urgent to understand how racial inequalities operate as key explanatory factors behind low academic performance and restricted educational opportunities in that state. Collectively, these factors disproportionately benefit white students, reinforcing historically constructed racial inequalities within an uneven model of regional development, as noted by Araújo and Morais (2014).

Meanwhile, in the South region, although it shares similar indicators with the Southeast regarding income and structural conditions of the educational



system, there is an even higher concentration of white students in school spaces. Coincidentally, these students display educational performance scores above the national average. High school data from IDEB 2023 illustrate this scenario: the South region maintains an average above the national benchmark of 4.3. Paraná remains prominent on the national stage, achieving a score of 4.9. According to the 2022 Demographic Census, 64.57% of the state's population self-identifies as white.

For analytical rigor, it is necessary to critically examine the notion of the “best education in Brazil” attributed to Paraná, as these results are not without controversy. As analyzed by Junior (2025), in late 2019, the State Secretariat of Education (SEED) implemented the program “*Se liga, é tempo de aprender mais*” (“Get ready, it’s time to learn more”), mandating that state schools conduct mandatory remedial processes at the end of the academic year. According to the author, this measure compromised educational legislation principles and institutional autonomy by requiring all students with academic difficulties to undergo extra remedial tracks to guarantee school progression.

Thus, when analyzing Table 2—which presents the last three IDEB scores from 2019, 2021, and 2023—it becomes evident that the only metric exhibiting continuous growth across all years was the pass rate. Consequently, it can be argued that from 2019 to 2023, students were not learning more because Paraná offers superior education, but rather because the state was passing a higher volume of students.

Table 2 - IDEB Paraná: High School (2019–2023)

IDEB PARANÁ: ENSINO MÉDIO (2019-2023)					
Ano	Indicador de rendimento (Taxa de Aprovação)	Desempenho em Matemática (Nota)	Desempenho em Língua Portuguesa (Nota)	Média padronizada (Nota)	Ideb
2019	0,91	293,3	290,85	5,16	4,7
2021	0,96	287,32	288,28	5,04	4,8
2023	0,97	283,89	288,8	5	4,9

Source: INEP, 2024b



Data from the 2022 Demographic Census demonstrate that racial inequalities deepen at higher levels of education. Nationally, while 25.8% of the white population aged 25 or older holds a completed higher education degree, this percentage drops to only 11.7% among the Black (*preta*) population and 12.3% among the multiracial (*parda*) population. These figures reveal that, despite general progress in recent years, the Black population continues to encounter structural barriers to accessing and completing higher education, directly impacting their professional integration. In the labor market, this inequality manifests clearly: Black individuals hold only 29.5% of managerial positions, whereas white individuals occupy roughly 69%, underscoring how educational and racial exclusion exert enduring effects on societal opportunities and status. From this analytical standpoint, critical decolonial theory and anti-racist perspectives help challenge modern power and domination structures, questioning hierarchies inherited from colonialism.

Still regarding the South region, while Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina both recorded a score of 4.2 on the IDEB, both states remain among the top 15 highest-scoring states, very close to the national average. These results reflect superior school infrastructure conditions and the two highest literacy rates in Brazil, according to 2022 Census data. Coincidentally, they also possess the two highest percentages of white population in the country: 76.28% in Santa Catarina and 78.42% in Rio Grande do Sul. Thus, higher educational indicators in the South cannot be understood solely as the product of administrative efficiency or isolated pedagogical performance; they must be interpreted through the lens of structural racial inequalities intersecting the Brazilian territory. The overlap between higher IDEB scores, higher literacy rates, and white demographic predominance highlights that historical access to favorable educational conditions is not neutrally distributed, but aligns with racial hierarchies consolidated since the colonial period.

It is crucial to emphasize that, although the South and Southeast regions present the highest overall academic performance indices, they do



not constitute homogeneous spaces. Within municipalities, certain territories are marked by a predominance of low-income populations—composed mostly of Black residents—frequently situated in impoverished peripheral areas far from major urban centers. In these spaces, educational provisions tend to present more precarious conditions compared to schools located in central, higher-value areas. Negri (2008) highlights that living in low-income peripheral neighborhoods entails experiencing unequal social, economic, educational, cultural, and income opportunities, thereby limiting possibilities for social mobility and contributing, in most cases, to the reproduction of labor power available to capital.

In the Midwest region, IDEB 2023 high school data reveal a performance level matching the national average (both at 4.3), indicating intermediate results within the Brazilian landscape. Among its states, Goiás stands out with 4.8—the second-highest score in the country. Notably, when considering public schools exclusively, Goiás achieved the highest score nationally at 4.8, ahead of Paraná (4.7). In the context of Goiás, several public schools achieved national prominence, such as *Colégio Estadual Professora Aurelice Gomes da Fonseca*, located in a rural area in the municipality of Formosa, which reached a 7.4 IDEB score—ranking among the top five high schools in the country in 2023. However, these results require critical contextualization: because IDEB combines test performance with school flow metrics, it does not directly reflect the racial and territorial inequalities that structure educational access. Despite its high score, Goiás records the lowest proportion of higher-education graduates in the Midwest according to 2022 Census data, with Black (*pretos*) and multiracial (*pardos*) individuals being the most adversely affected regarding higher education attainment.

Mato Grosso reached 4.4, positioning itself slightly above average, although it records the lowest literacy rate in the Midwest region. This reinforces the persistence of educational inequalities even in states considered to offer



top-tier education in Brazil. Meanwhile, the Federal District (4.2) and Mato Grosso do Sul (4.0) recorded results below the national average.

In the North region, IDEB 2023 high school data reveal performance well below all aforementioned regions, with a regional average of 3.9, signaling significant challenges in the teaching-learning process compared to the South, Southeast, and Midwest. Among its states, Pará (4.4) was the only one above the national average. The remaining six states scored below: Tocantins (4.2), Rondônia (4.2), Acre (4.0), Amapá (3.8), Amazonas (3.8), and Roraima, which registered the lowest IDEB score in 2023 (3.5).

Considering educational inequality and its racial dynamics, these figures are not accidental. According to 2022 Demographic Census data, Roraima is the only Brazilian state where the Indigenous population exceeds 10% (standing at 14.12%). Indigenous peoples, along with the Black population, have historically been disproportionately harmed by the detrimental effects of structural racism across economic, political, and social spheres, as demonstrated by research cited throughout this text. Only four states in Brazil have Indigenous populations exceeding 3%, three of which are located in the North region. Combining the Black and Indigenous populations in the North yields 79.08% of its total population. Thus, is it a mere coincidence that this region holds the second-lowest literacy rate in Brazil, the second-lowest rate of completed higher education, and the lowest gross school attendance rate in the country?

Therefore, the low educational outcomes in the North region cannot be interpreted simply as “academic failure” or isolated administrative deficiency, but rather as part of a historical project of racial and territorial exclusion in Brazil. Given that the majority of the population in these states consists of Indigenous, Black (*pretos*), and multiracial (*pardos*) people—and that these geographic areas concentrate the lowest literacy rates, poorest higher education access, and weakest school retention indicators—it is impossible to maintain a neutral reading of these data.



The Northeast region exhibited patterns similar to the North, with a regional average of 4.0 on the IDEB 2023 for High School, remaining below the national average (4.3). The states of Piauí and Pernambuco registered 4.5—above the national average and among the six highest scores in the country. Notably, in Pernambuco, the *Escola de Aplicação do Recife* (EAR), affiliated with UPE, obtained a 7.5 score on the IDEB 2023, ranking among the top three public high schools in Brazil, while Ceará reached 4.3, matching the national average. Other states such as Alagoas (4.1), Sergipe (4.0), Paraíba (4.0), Bahia (3.9), Maranhão (3.8), and Rio Grande do Norte (3.7) registered performances below the national average, with the latter recording the second-lowest performance in the country. When examining state public schools exclusively, the scenario becomes even more severe: Rio Grande do Norte ranks last nationally with a score of only 3.2, concentrating some of the lowest IDEB scores in 2023.

These figures can be critically analyzed through the category of race, considering that the Northeast leads the country in the proportion of Black (*preta*) population at 13.04%. When adding the multiracial (*parda*) population, the Black population represents 72.61% of the total population in the Northeast; coincidentally, the five lowest literacy rates in the country are located in this region. In reality, these data reveal the continuity of a historical project of exclusion, wherein educational inequality is racially structured across Brazilian territory.

The analysis of data from the 2022 Demographic Census and IDEB 2023 reveals that this historical legacy manifests critically for self-identified Black and Indigenous peoples. According to data from the 2022 National Continuous Household Sample Survey (PNAD), 70.3% of people living in poverty in Brazil were Black, demonstrating that educational exclusion and economic vulnerability are inseparable. The data reinforce that the majority of individuals who lacked access to high school education belong to the Black population; regarding high school completion, white individuals reach 80.5%, compared to 71.5% among Black individuals. It is observed that the South and Southeast regions, with



a white demographic predominance, concentrate the highest educational indicators, whereas the North and Northeast—where Black population forms the majority and Indigenous presence is significant—face the highest illiteracy rates and lowest IDEB scores. The study demonstrates that the illiteracy rate among Black individuals is more than double that recorded among white individuals, confirming that structural racism remains a self-perpetuating mechanism within educational institutions.

Concluding Remarks

This article argues that educational inequality in Brazil is not an isolated phenomenon to be analyzed solely through the lens of social class, but rather a direct reflection of structural racism and the historical roots of nearly 400 years of enslavement and colonization, grounded in the theoretical framework presented in this research. The statistical data analyzed demonstrate that race operates as an amplifier of inequalities, conditioning students' access, retention, and academic performance according to their race/color. Therefore, the formal abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888 did not signal the overcoming of racism or structural inequalities, as Almeida (2019) previously noted; instead, it generated new mechanisms of exploitation and marginalization targeting the Black population, resulting in distinct manifestations of oppression.

In conclusion, it is vital to understand that the analyzed data do not merely reflect regional disparities or administrative variations in educational performance, but rather the uneven spatial distribution of opportunities across the Brazilian territory itself. High School constitutes a decisive stage for the future of young people, as it conditions access to universities, higher-skilled employment, broader opportunities, and positions of greater social prestige. Thus, this study reaffirms that Brazilian educational inequality is inseparable from racial and territorial dimensions.

As long as the country fails to confront the colonial and racist roots that structure its institutions, the school system will continue to reproduce



historical hierarchies rather than ensure equity. In light of this, overcoming these inequalities clearly demands more than acknowledging empirical data; it requires the implementation of public affirmative action policies, such as racial quotas, student retention programs, prioritized investments in vulnerable territories, and the promotion of an education strictly committed to Law No. 10,639/03. Such measures are essential to breaking the reproduction of racial hierarchies within the school system. Consequently, building a truly democratic education in Brazil will only be achievable through the effective execution of affirmative actions coupled with a broader project of social justice.

In summary, this study highlights the necessity of future investigations that interconnect the social markers of gender, race, and class, in order to elucidate the deep intersectionality of educational inequalities on the national stage. To this end, we suggest adopting the critical framework of intersectionality theory, thereby imparting greater theoretical density and robustness to future empirical findings.

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- 1 Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence – Gemini, an artificial intelligence tool developed by Google, was used to assist in translating this article into English. The translated version was fully reviewed and adjusted by the editorial team to ensure fidelity to the original text, terminological accuracy, and compliance with the journal’s editorial standards. The tool was not used to generate the article’s arguments, analyses, or academic content.





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