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Social inequality and the possible impacts on Pará state High School offering in the city of Belém-PA

Desigualdade social e os possíveis impactos na oferta do Ensino Médio paraense na cidade de Belém-PA

Desigualdad social y los posibles impactos en la oferta de la Escuela Secundaria del Pará en la ciudad de Belém-PA

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the quality of High School being offered in Pará state, Brazil. In order to do so, the discussion was grounded on the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) and on some educational indexes regarding the city of Belém-PA, such as indexes related to flow, age-grade distortion, dropout rates, among others, with the intent of understanding which is the quality of public High School being offered within the State education network in the Pará-located Amazon. Thus, the study considers macrostructural factors, for instance social inequality, public policies, as well as microstructural factors, which include school infrastructure, age-grade distortion, student rates per class, pass rates, dropout rates, among other causes that interfere in students'

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learning processes. The research was carried out by adopting a qualitative approach, materialized through document analysis. It was observed that, even though education is one of the dimensions assessed by the SVI, education public policy in force does not seek to overcome any of the causes of problems that might affect this education stage, as it seems to be the case with the High School Reform, at a federal level, as well as with the programs "Bora Estudar" (Let's study), and "Escola que transforma" (School that transforms) by the Pará State Secretary for Education (SEDUC-PA). In other words, it is not enough to offer precarious education and to create public policies which do not align with goals that have guided education as a fundamental right and related to social quality. Based on that, the research could ponder that, as public policies keep on being dictated by multilateral organisms' guidelines, both the SVI and the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) results may be used to ground reforms for economic, social and political adjustment, as status quo maintenance is a capitalist project in a perpetual movement of self-renovation.

Keywords: Social Vulnerability Index. Brazilian Common Core Curriculum. New High School. Public High School in Belém-PA.

Resumo

Neste estudo, pretende-se compreender a qualidade da oferta do Ensino Médio público no estado do Pará. Para tanto utiliza-se do Indicador de Vulnerabilidade Social (IVS) e alguns indicadores educacionais do município de Belém-PA, tais como indicadores de fluxo, distorção idade-ano, abandono escolar, entre outros, com o intuito de compreender qual a qualidade da oferta do Ensino Médio Público da rede estadual da Amazônia paraense. Dessa forma, serão considerados os fatores macroestruturais, tais quais as desiguladades sociais e as políticas públicas, assim como os fatores microestruturais, que incluem a infraenstrura das escolas, distorção idade-ano, média de alunos por turma, taxa de aprovação, abandono escolar, entre outras causas que interferem no processo formativo dos estudantes. A pesquisa foi feita a partir de uma abordagem qualitativa, a qual foi materializada por meio do estudo documental. Observa-se que, embora a educação seja uma das dimensões avaliadas no IVS, as políticas públicas educativas existentes não buscam superar a causa dos problemas que podem afetar essa etapa de ensino, a exemplo do que ocorre na Reforma do Ensino Médio, em nível federal, bem como nos Programas "Bora Estudar" e "Escola que Transforma" da Secretaria de Estado de Educação do Pará (SEDUC-PA). Em outros termos, não basta ofertar uma educação de forma precária e criar políticas públicas que não dialogam com os objetivos que norteiam uma educação como um direito fundamental e de qualidade social. Com base nisso, pondera-se que, enquanto as políticas públicas forem alicerçadas nas orientações dos organismos multilaterais, os resultados do IVS e do Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB) serão utilizados para embasar a construção de reformas de ajustamento econômico, social e político, já que a manutenção do status quo é um projeto do capitalismo em constante movimento de autorrenovação.

Palavras-chave: Indicador de Vulnerabilidade Social. BNCC. Novo Ensino Médio. Ensino Médio Público em Belém-PA.

Resumen

Este estudio busca comprender la calidad de la escuela secundaria en el estado de Pará, Brasil. Para eso, se utiliza el Índice de Vulnerabilidad Social (IVS) y algunos indicadores educativos de la ciudad de Belém-PA, como los relacionados con el flujo, la distorsión de edad-grado, y la deserción escolar, entre otros, con el intuito de comprender la calidad de la oferta de la Escuela Secundaria pública en la red estadual de la Amazonia del Pará. Así, el estudio considera los factores macroestructurales, como la desigualdad social y las políticas públicas, así como factores microestructurales, como la infraestructura escolar, la distorsión de edad-grado, la media de alumnos por clase, las tasas de aprobación, la deserción escolar, entre otras causas que interfieren en el proceso formativo de los estudiantes. La investigación fue realizada a partir de la adopción de un enfoque cualitativo, materializado a través del análisis de documentos. Se observa que, aunque la educación sea una de las dimensiones evaluadas por el IVS, las políticas públicas educativas existentes no buscan superar ninguna de las causas de los problemas que puedan afectar esta etapa educativa, como en el ejemplo de la Reforma de la Escuela Secundaria, a nivel federal, así como los programas "Bora Estudar" (Estudiemos) y "Escola que transforma" (Escuela que transforma) de la Secretaría de Estado de Educación de Pará (SEDUC-PA). En otras palabras, no basta ofrecer educación precaria y crear políticas públicas que no se alineen con los objetivos que han nortean la educación como un derecho fundamental y de calidad social. Con base a eso, uno pondera que,

si las políticas públicas sigan dictadas por los lineamientos de los organismos multilaterales, tanto los resultados del IVS como del Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica (IDEB) pueden ser utilizados para la construcción de reformas de ajustes en los ámbitos económico, social y político, ya que el mantenimiento del statu quo es un proyecto del capitalismo en un constante movimiento de autorrenovación.

***Palabras clave**: Índice de Vulnerabilidad Social. Currículo Nacional Básico Brasileño. Nueva Escuela Secundaria. Escuela secundaria pública en Belém-PA.*

Introduction

This study's jumping-off point is a comprehension of social inequality and its impact on High School in Pará state, mainly in the city of Belém-PA. So, it analyzes the quality of public high school being offered in Pará, based on the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) and on educational indexes pertaining to Belém, such as flow, age-grade distortion, dropout rates, among others. Therefore, the aim is to understand public high school quality within the state education network in the Amazon located in Pará.

Gramsci (1999), in the 1930s, had already mentioned how social inequalities reproduced education inequality. This analysis allows one to see that most times this movement is intensified by curriculum reforms, which express capitalist propositions, as it is the case for the New High School policy (Novo Ensino Médio - NEM) and the Brazilian National Common Core Curriculum (Base Nacional Comum Curricular - BNCC). In that context, it is fundamental to discuss the social and economic reality face by High School students enrolled in public education. It is also relevant to consider teaching quality, so as to engage in a concise analysis of both the SVI and other indexes, to reveal if those instruments and their results are taken into account when public policies are designed.

According to the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea), the SVI is a synthetic index that encompasses three dimensions and sixteen variables. The *Urban infrastructure* [1] dimension is related to improper trash collection, commuting time from home to work, water scarcity and lack of basic sanitation. The second dimension, identified as *Human Capital*, consists of variables related to child mortality, illiteracy, school dropout, and family education background. The last dimension is named *Income and Work*[2], being related to joblessness, child labor, and per capita income.

Although this instrument had been created to measure economic development, through a statistical portrait of a certain reality, it also has various analytical categories, as education, health, and housing, which, if well-diagnosed, constitute a *sine qua non* to construct public policies truly oriented to overcome social inequality in Brazil.

So, it is only fair to consider how a social index may contribute to an analysis of social development in a given region, as, differently from economic indexes like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), "it is not directly measurable nor there is a consensus definition on their usage" (Siedenberg, 2003, p. 54). However, this same index might overcome the informative function related to the development status a region of a country has, that being done by a critical and assessment-oriented outlook regarding social inequality reduction and, consequently, education duality.

Paraphrasing Araujo (2019), educational duality within the capitalist system manifests itself through the offer of two education systems: one is focused on serving the bourgeoisie, and the other on serving the working class. So, it is unacceptable that, in relation to education access, such a disparity reproduces structural inequality as present in society.

In the face of that, to contribute with studies that discuss the relationship between High School offer in Pará and SVI, as well as other education indexes, this study is organized in three sections. In the first one, the paper discusses both SVI characterization and relevance as an instrument to measure the country's social development; the idea is to show simplified analyses to justify the precarious situations faced by the majority of the population, with consequences to education quality in Brazil and in Pará. Building upon that, the study deals with SVI contextualization and applicability in Brazil's and Pará's context. In the last section, the paper develops analyses on High School quality in Pará, expanded by the employment of SVI and other indexes to outline the real picture in this regard.

[1] Human Capital encompasses indicators like child morality, children out of school (0 to 5 years old, and 6 to 14 years old), lack of school participation (no job and low income), young mothers (10 to 17 years old), head of the family mothers with no Elementary School (with children younger than 15), illiteracy, and children living with people with finished Elementary School, according to IPEA.

[2] In the case of *Income and Work*, variables considered are income lower of equal to RS 255,00, low income and presence of elderly dependents, joblessness, child labor, and informal work with no Elementary School. Those dimensions and variables are part of a framework employed to assess social vulnerability in a given region, also according to IPEA.

Essays on social indexes as a measuring tool of economic development

According to Santagada (2007), social indexes had emerged officially in the United States during the 1960s, to present quantifiable data about a certain phenomenon related to the social reality. After World War II, the country was based on the regimen of economic accumulation structured by the interventionist Keynesian model[3], like the Welfare state, which was defined by a defense of social democracy. Although the model tried to hide the disparity existent in society through reflections which only deal with economic advancements, it does not clarify that manifestations by portions of society were related to unsatisfaction for not being fulfilled.

Also, some social scientists at the time presented generic justifications that social problems resulted from a modernization process, as if it was something inevitable. To those modernist theorists, even though the human being represented costs to the state, he/she also would represent more profitability to the capital, as it had a double function – one as commodity, due to selling labor force, and another of potential consumer, due to playing an important role in economic advancement and development in the country (Siedenberg, 2003; Santagada, 2007).

However, because of theoretical limitations regarding registers about the US socioeconomic situation, in 1996, US president Lindon Johnson "destined to the Ministry of Health, Education, and Social Action the mission to build new social statistics which would allow that organism to keep track of how the collective materializes the goals proposed" (Santagada, 2007, p. 119). Based on that, social indexes were employed as statistical data, i. e., mirrors of Americans' social and economic life, while they also gained world visibility as a model to be implemented in different nation's economic and political planning.

Nevertheless, in 1970, scientific discussions on the importance of social indexes had gained traction, and different international organizations started to focus on statistical data to assess various countries' economic development, like the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), andthe United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Siedenberg, 2003; Santagada, 2007).

In 1984, though a document named *Applicability of indicators of socio-economic change for development planning*, Unesco had brought guidelines about the need of applying the social indexes as a planning instrument for national development. As expressed in the document preface, the goal was to "strengthen national awareness and capacity in socio-economic analysis and planning" (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1984, p. 6).

According to such logic, the purpose was to incentivize the usage of socioeconomic data in order to verify country-level welfare development, since the GDP is not enough to capture those relevant data. To sum it up, on the one hand, Santagada (2007) highlights that state organizations and international ones aimed at amplifying social index usage in interface with a process of overcoming its employment only in economic analysis. In this regard, opposing evidence between economic growth and the precarious situations experienced by most of the population ended up being causing the need for measuring a country's socioeconomic status. On the other hand, Siedenberg (2003) points out the fact that interest in social index usage was actually related to the search for public policy control and increase in power.

As a result of it, this study dialogues with Siedenberg's critical analysis when paraphrasing Altaver's (2010) idea, for whom capitalism enters every field intrinsic to society's functioning. In other words, to benefit capital accumulation, capitalism interferes with social, political, economic and educational field, so much so it turns them into useful tool at its service.

So, even though social indexes may be an important instrument to think about public policy and assess several areas of social reality, one could presuppose its major function is to elaborate rankings to show

[3] It is a theory that defend state intervention, but with a "social and economic philosophy [that] has been always fundamentally individualistic" (Siqueira; Dotto, 2009, p. 35).

a country's, a state's or a region's socioeconomic position. Thus, it is validated by a competition system which aims at reaching the best position possible. In turn, this ends up resulting in palliative public policy implementation, that at first uses statistical data to mask the real-life conditions the population has.

In face of that scenario, the study discusses in the next section how VSI is utilized not only in the Brazilian context, but also in Pará state, so as to reveal the extent to which this instrument clarifies who social inequality interferes with the public education offer, and in consequence with High School quality. Not only that, but the research also emphasizes whether public policy creation aims the reducing social class division, a historical heritage in Brazil, and whether those policies have the goal reach the causes the get in the way of an effective materialization of that subtraction.

SVI contextualization in Brazil and Pará state

The study outlines the hypothesis that there is not only a single social reality in Brazil that has been fragilized by inequality, but also that this fact reverberates in the offer of quality public education, aligned with students' need and will. To do so, the research uses the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) as a fundamental element to develop a critical perspective, considering that "inequality maintenance in education is one of the factors to majorly determine a dynamic of exclusion and poverty perpetuation" (Campello et al., 2018, p. 58).

Nonetheless, it is still important to mention how social inequality in Brazil is marked by an continued attempts at keeping a selective social and economic basis, which in turn is rooted in a history of violating the people's access to basic rights, to culture and their practices. All of this is mostly carried out through colonizing and slavery-bound practices, which are updated to reaffirm the dominant class's hegemony.

Also, Frigotto (2017) reminds that, in the 21st century, inequalities to reach economic, social, educational, and cultural fields are all a result of the dominant class's dictatorship- and coup d'état-related logic, so they continue to seize privileges. Therefore, structural inequality results from a Brazilian historical heritage, one of which echoes partially in current social indexes. This type of data demonstrates social class division, while they also emphasize how a minor portion of the population concentrates most income, as revealed by Campello *et al.* (2018). In contrast to that, a great percentage of the population lives in a degrading state, without being able to access basic resources to survive.

So, one must consider how, when elaborating public policies, it is necessary to clarify the extent to which social inequality impacts public education offer. According to Duarte (2007), it is fundamental for the right to education, as laid out by the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, art. 3rd (Brasil, 1988), to be assured in consonance with a pedagogical proposition that offers dignified and emancipatory education to the socially vulnerable youth.

In such a perspective, Duarte (2007) reveals how social and regional disparity reduction is only to be reached if the core of this problem is tackled. In other words, it is not enough to offer precarious education or to create public policies that do not align with objectives that consider quality education as a fundamental right.

Due to that reason, it is necessary to highlight that vulnerability is measured on a scale from 0 (zero) to 1 (one), in which being closer to 0 means lower vulnerability, and being closer to 1 indicates a higher vulnerability. SVI measures all Brazilian states (also known as federative units), according to the table below:

Table 1 - Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) in the Brazilian federative units (2021)

Ord.	Federative unit name	SVI	SVI - Urban infrastructure	SVI - Human Capital6	SVI - Income and Work
1º	Acre	0.366	0.353	0.321	0.424
2º	Maranhão	0.359	0.259	0.322	0.495
3º	Pernambuco	0.351	0.294	0.297	0.461

Ord.	Federative unit name	SVI	SVI - Urban infrastructure	SVI - Human Capital6	SVI - Income and Work
4º	Amazonas	0.342	0.343	0.274	0.408
5º	Alagoas	0.334	0.196	0.354	0.452
6º	Paraíba	0.332	0.210	0.320	0.464
7º	Sergipe	0.316	0.163	0.300	0.484
8º	Pará	0.299	0.208	0.291	0.397
9º	Piauí	0.297	0.133	0.337	0.422
10º	Rio de Janeiro	0.297	0.403	0.176	0.311
11º	Bahia	0.294	0.148	0.281	0.452
12º	Rio Grande do Norte	0.289	0.207	0.271	0.389
13º	Roraima	0.280	0.235	0.272	0.331
14º	Ceará	0.277	0.174	0.290	0.368
15º	Distrito Federal	0.259	0.401	0.151	0.223
16º	Tocantins	0.254	0.184	0.233	0.347
17º	Goiás	0.249	0.273	0.203	0.270
18º	São Paulo	0.247	0.328	0.154	0.260
19º	Amapá	0.229	0.055	0.273	0.359
20º	Espírito Santo	0.225	0.181	0.208	0.287
21º	Mato Grosso	0.221	0.232	0.198	0.233
22º	Minas Gerais	0.210	0.132	0.197	0.300
23º	Rio Grande do Sul	0.203	0.239	0.155	0.216
24º	Mato Grosso do Sul	0.191	0.138	0.202	0.232
25º	Rondônia	0.189	0.061	0.229	0.276
26º	Paraná	0.182	0.163	0.169	0.215
27º	Santa Catarina	0.123	0.101	0.135	0.133

Source: Brasil (2023a).

It is quite relevant to remind that, based on IPEA's criteria, SVI encompasses dimensions of *Urban infrastructure, Human Capital,* and *Income and Work*. All three of them are fundamental to verify the state of poverty, and access do social rights, like health, housing, income, among other, in Brazil's different regions.

The table above points out that, in 2021, the federative unit to have the lower SVI was Santa Catarina state, with an index equal to 0,123, while the one to present the higher vulnerability was Acre state, with 0,366 index. Among the 10 (ten) federative units with higher SVI, 7 (seven) are from the Northeastern region, 2 (two) from the Northern region, with Pará state being in the 8th position, and 1 (one) is from the Southeastern region. It is essential to pinpoint the prevalence of Northeastern states among those with higher vulnerability indexes in Brazil.

When observing the *Urban infrastructure* dimension, the research could verify a major regional homogeneity occurring among the ten states with higher SVI, with states from all regions appearing in the ranking, but three Northern states being part of the list.

When it comes to the *Human Capital* dimension, there are ten states with higher SVI in the Northern and Northeastern regions – the latter has eight states figuring in the ranking. In relation to the *Income and Work* dimension, the presence of those ten states with higher SVI is similar to the previous dimension, therefore, seven states are from the Northeast and three are from the North.

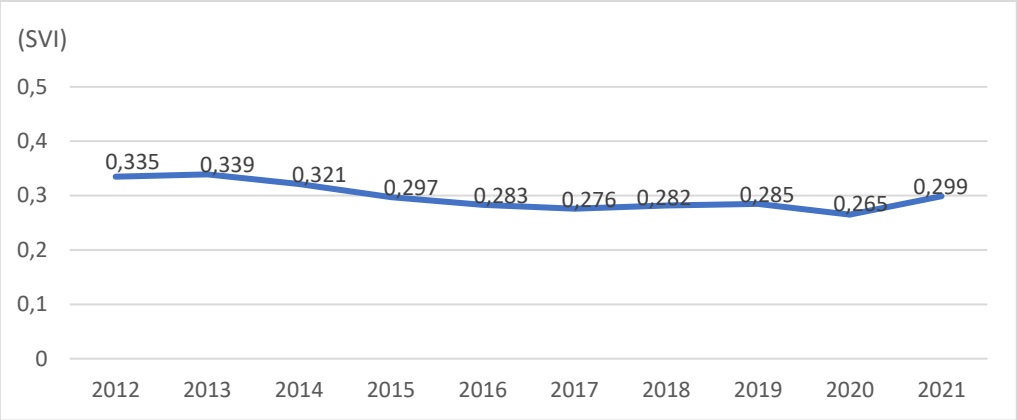
As a primary factor, archaic production methods in the Northeast and the North require less aggregate value, which in turn affects both teaching-learning processes, and income acquisition. Regarding urban infrastructure, unplanned city growth contributed to overpopulation in bigger cities, especially when

one considers the rural flight over the last decades. This phenomenon is mostly due to socioeconomic facts, such as higher employability and better education and training.

Despite that, there is a distance between the federative units from the North and Northeast when it comes to educational development and income generation, as revealed in the *Human Capital*, and *Income and Work* dimensions. There is also a higher concentration of lower SVI among states from those regions. In the context of Pará state, there has been a decrease in social vulnerability in the last ten years (Graph 1). However, the index improvement was not enough to delist that federative unit from the ten states with higher SVI.

In 2012, Pará was among the 5 (five) states with higher SVI, having a 0,335 index. In 2021, the state was positioned among the 8 (eight) with higher SVI, having a 0,229 index. In 2017 and 2020, it had the lowest score in the index, which made it a higher position among other federative units, occupying the 9th position (Graph 1).

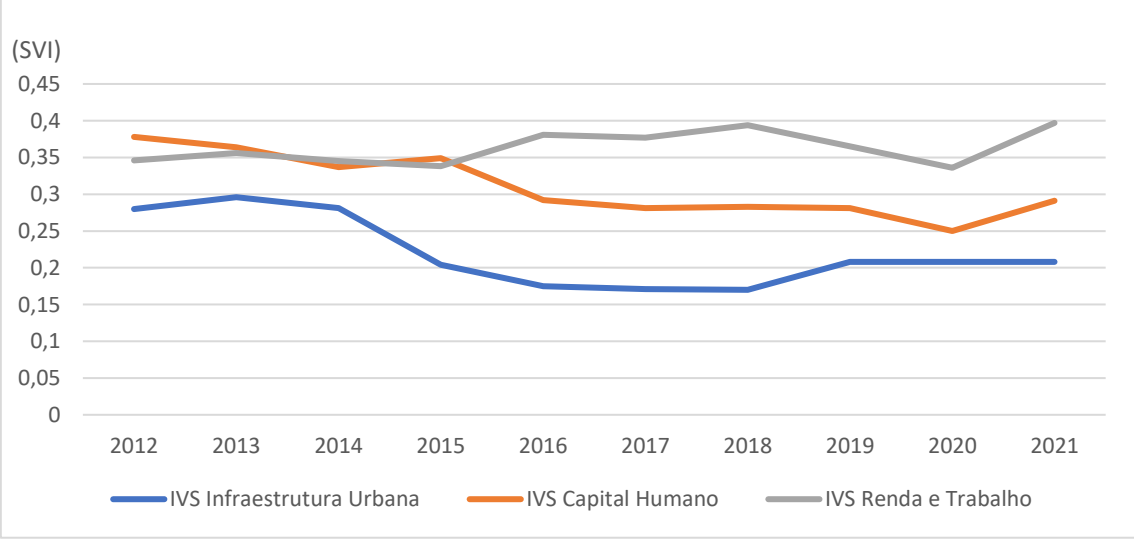
Graph 1 - Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) in Pará state (2012-2021)



Source: Brasil (2023a).

Thus, total SVI results for Pará state had been, in the Human Capital, the main reason for the index decrease over the last years, as shown in Graph 2:

Graph 2 - Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) in Pará state according to each dimension (2012-2021)



Source: Brasil (2023a).

As laid out by the graph above, a major reduction was attained by the variable "mother head of family, without Elementary Education and having children younger than 15 years old", which is part of the Human Capital dimension. The second variable with a major SVI decrease was "illiteracy rates". Those variables are some of the main vulnerability indicators with a direct impact on education, as well as on learning abilities, and income acquiring.

According to this logic, reducing the number of mothers who have not finished Elementary School allows for greater access to job opportunities, as well as to participate in their children's education process. That is important because, when there is a narrow cultural background, one is more likely to become an object in capitalist society. As indicated by Silva (2020):

> **The cultural capital passed down by the family core is directly associated with educational results,** benefitting the "inheritors" of knowledge, tastes, and "dominant" dispositions, which in turn fit perfectly in highly institutionalized education descriptions (Silva, 2020, p. 161).

It is of utmost need to mention that historically access to schooling is led by antagonistic objectives – one is to fulfill the elite's needs, and the other to be offered to the working class (Gramsci, 1999; Snyders, 1977; Nosella, 2010). Another factor to consider is families in which education levels are low, as accounted for in the *Human Capital* dimension. This situation tends to create an environment with less incentive for learning and an educational culture oriented towards quality. So, there are impacts on the younger generations. Therefore, as affirmed by Snyders:

> Only the materially and culturally dominant families have a heritage closer to a culture fomented by school – so they pass it down to their children as clear habit: for instance, travel with their children, get them gradually used to that with examples, observation [....] (Snyders, 1977, p. 24).

The author is transparent when expressing how a family's socioeconomic status influences a student's education process. So, it is necessary to elaborate measures and initiatives that act to end structures that support and perpetuate an existing state of vulnerability. To do so, public policies are fundamental to reaching a change in structures that may hinder social development.

Although a significant SVI increase in the Human Capital has been occurring in Pará for the last ten years – indicating an improvement in health and education –, this effect has not been transferred to the *Income and Work* IVS, meaning Pará state citizens' economic reality has not improved. On that note, that SVI had had an increasing effect, and not a decreasing one. In 2012, that index was 0,346, moving up to 0,397 in 2021, behavior that compromised a greater reduction in Pará's total SVI, especially because the conditions of unemployment, low income and inhumane work keeps not allowing for the people's quality of life.

Algebaile (2009), and Lara and Silva (2019) declare that the capitalism crisis in the 1970s is currently presented in a devastating way, because it is not limited to the world economy. Nevertheless, it also affected the social and cultural life, as a minority possesses wealth and tries to keep accumulating capital while subtracting social rights and exploiting nature. All these factors contribute to unbalanced income distribution, job insecurity, and an increase in unemployment.

According to such a logic, one must assume the bourgeois class strategy to expand their capital consists of having the working class at their disposal. This is accomplished by weakening social struggles, but also by implementing public policies aligned with neoliberal propositions. This happens because workers could be trained "to [adhere to] a regiment of oppressive management, which leads them to fulfill extreme production demands" (Chan; Pun; Selden, 2019, p. 39). That dynamic would occur, especially in the case of workers presenting the minimal competence required to develop their activities, or when they would not get accustomed to rules defined by a new market configuration, flexible and competitive. As a result of that, workers would be replaced by another workforce, in principle, more efficient.

Regarding *Urban infrastructure,* even though from 2012 to 2021 the VSI related to it had been reduced from 0,280 to 0,208, Pará state appears within the regions with the highest indicators. Despite that, before having a concise discussion about such a precarious situation, one must mention that talking about urban infrastructure means talking about a set of resources (sanitation, potable water, transportation, electricity etc.), all of which are essential to the maintenance of human dignity. Those are to be materialized through public policies that will fulfill social needs.

According to Lins (2020), public policies that tackle urban infrastructure in most Brazilian cities had not been well accepted by the population, as there is still a lack of sewage treatment, hybrid system, city cleaning and a lack of quality public transportation.

Santos and Carvalho (2021) sum up the disastrous scenario people from Belém-PA face when it comes to lack of access to basic sanitation, presenting the following account:

> [...] in Belém, capital of Pará state, portions of the working class have been struggling with a sanitation crisis well into the 21st century, which is demonstrated by the lower indicators regarding potable water access, with the lack of sewage and solid waste treatment, and vacuum of technical solutions for the constant floods (Santos; Carvalho, 2021, p. 2).

Noronha, Araujo, and Costa (2014), apart from adding to the ideas above, bring one more element to the discussion, as they make evident that the basic sanitation crisis has been happening for decades, impacting several High School establishments in Pará. They also highlight how alarming is sewage precariousness in the Northern region, especially in Pará, "since only 17% of schools (91 establishments) have this service available" (Noronha; Araujo; Costa, 2014, p. 215).

Based on this factor and on Pará's VSI, one might realize one the reasons why the state still figures among those with major infrastructural problems is the absence of public policies about regarding basic sanitation, remarkably those not carried out by a given government to mask the existence of problems. Thus, it is necessary to implement a state policy capable of creating a system for collecting and treating sewage, adopting trash collection to avoid environmental degradation and disease spreading, serving Pará's population and providing them with dignity,

Lins (2020) emphasizes the relevance of cities reviewing continuously their Municipal Basic Sanitation Plans. By doing that, they can seek out socioeconomic strategies, along with the country's government, to remedy problems that affect welfare. This is relevant as precarious urban infrastructure hinders the safeguard of fundamental rights held by the population, as lid out by the Brazilian Constitution, in art. 6th (Brasil, 1988). Thus, this study echoes the idea of access to education, health, and work being essential and irrevocable rights.

The following section discusses the New Brazilian High School Curriculum Policy, enacted by Law 13.415/2017, which has been presented as an innovative proposition to solve problems present at the High School level, supposedly by adopting an education that is more efficient, pragmatic and tailored to students' needs. However, this idea proposes that to solve public education precariousness, especially in High School, it is enough to rearrange the curriculum, omitting the students' socioeconomic reality.

Reflections upon Pará state High School quality: a necessary dialogue

Since the enactment of Law 13.415/2017 (Brasil, 2017), by President Michel Temer's administration, after the 2016 coup d'état, High School has gained a wider media visibility due to changes in its pedagogical and administrative structure. These changes have been justified by how the New Brazilian High School represented a landmark in innovative education, with the promise to be suited to students' needs. Despite that, the movement's goal was to convince society of how helpful those propositions would be to remedy problems that plague High School in Brazil.

According to Algebaile (2009), in the 1960s and 70s, there was the iteration of a modernist idea that education was undergoing an identity crisis for not being able to train and educate properly. With that in mind, it was necessary to offer a more efficient and productive education, grounded in a neoliberal concept to overcome backward steps.

Nevertheless, as asserted by Silva (2018), that was a "dusty discourse" that retrieves traditional notions of education, which, Saviani (2005) indicates, place teachers as mere repeaters of information provided by textbooks. Precisely those textbooks follow guidelines designed by the BNCC and NEM, leading pedagogical autonomy to be replaced by instructions on how to perform classes.

Still according to Silva (2018), there are traces that go back to New School and technicist[4] notions. In the New School case, students were proclaimed as protagonist in their education and, as consequence, the ones responsible for their "life project". In the second case, a human capital theory is brought back to make schools be "at the service of the ruling class's interests: when qualifying the workforce" (Saviani, 2005, p. 17), as stablished by market-driven principles under capitalism.

From this perspective, with the changes proposed by said law, public High School offer appears as a fundamental object for analysis to understand which adversities and outlooks configure current basic education, considering here socioeconomic contexts where Pará's students are a part of. Thus, it is necessary to assess not only deliberative norms presented by the legislation, but also how they manifest themselves in the reality of each school.

In face of that, one must question the extent to which those students who live where there in only one school – often to serve several territories – will be given education according to their needs; in this regard, one must precisely analyze each student's socioeconomic reality. However, due to insufficient data, the study reflects briefly upon education indicators related to High School and SVI.

Analyzing possible High School weaknesses requires the adoption of Basic Education indicators as reference, such as: student rates per class; age-grade distortion; and others, as pass rates, and dropout rates. Those indicators come from the statistical basis created by the Ministry of Education, through the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Research and Studies (INEP).

The analysis was carried out by having the city of Belém as its jumping-off point, in an attempt to gather enough information to validate or to refute the idea thar a structural fragility is part of education. The research showed that those indicators do not end the subject, but allow for a preliminary study about the topic. Thus, due to data gathering limitations, the studied period will range from 2017 to 2022, taking into account percentages regarding student rates per class, and age-grade distortion, while 2018, 2019, and 2021 will be analyzed when it comes to pass rates, and dropout rates.

Table 2 –Student rates per class in public High School (at city-, state-, and federal-level) in Belém-PA (2017-2022)

Year	Total	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	Ungraded
2017	**32,9**	34,3	32,7	31,9	15,6	14,5
2018	**34,4**	35,3	34,8	33,4	20,7	25,3
2019	**34,4**	36,3	34,3	32,9	22,4	21,5
2020	**34,0**	35,1	34,2	33,1	22,1	21,4
2021	**34,6**	35,1	34,8	34,4	21,7	--
2022	**31,6**	32,7	31,9	30,9	22,7	20,2

Source: Brasil (2023b).

[4] New School theory and practices were disseminated in several parts of the world, result of a general renewal that emphasized children's self-development and spontaneous activities. New School theory proposed that education was to be a catalyst for social change, at the same time as it would change itself because society was also changing (Gadotti, 1999, p. 142). According to Saviani (2008, p. 379), "based on the ideas of scientific neutrality and inspired in principles of rationality, efficiency, and productivity, the technicist pedagogy advocates for a reorganization in the education process, so as it becomes objective and operational. Similarly to what happened in factory work, the goal is to objectify the pedagogical work".

Discussing student rates per class is fundamental to understanding potential effects in the whole education provided to the youths, considering that a student overcrowd in the classroom may negatively impact teaching-learning processes.

The table above presents an average of student rates per class in public High School, at a city-, state-, and federal-level in Belém's reality, from 2017 to 2022. The time series to that indicator shows three as a reduction in this variable. In 2017, the average was 32,9 students per class in Belém public High School. In 2022, this number dropped to 31,6, after having stabilized in 34 during 2018 and 2021.

The increase in student per class rates happens on two occasions: an increase in student number, with the number of classes remaining the same; or a decrease in the number of classes, with the total number of students remaining the same. Anyways, it is evident the lack of improvement of that indicator, but also that the expansion caused by a greater number of students in a class compromises education, impacting teachers' pedagogical practices, and students' learning.

Pintoco (2017) highlights how reducing student number per class engenders better quality in teaching-learning processes. Not only it allows for more student engagement in activities develop ate school, it also leads teachers to do diverse work to fulfill the class's needs, and to strategic management of bad behavior in the classroom, since in larger classes "teachers spend more time keeping the order than teaching" (Pintoco, 2017, p. 72).

In relation to student learning, Pintoco (2017), and Annegues, Porto Júnior and Figueiredo (2020) emphasize that students enrolled in smaller classes perform better at assessments, while clarifying that an elevated amount of enrollments in a class is one of the factors to interfere with education quality – especially, because there are other variables, like socioeconomic situation, teacher training, and school infrastructure.

So, one must pay attention to structural limitations present in Belém's public High School buildings. Among those, it is worth mentioning the lack of fans and chairs, roof leaks and seepage in the classrooms, and bad electrical wiring, as commonly presented in the local media, all factors thar might become worse when there is overcrowding. There are also environmental problems, like constant rain and high temperatures, which must be considered when the priority is offering quality education.

Apart from those factors, other aspects are key to weakening public High School, for instance the greatest age-grade distortion of all Basic Education levels, as presented in the table below:

Table 3 - Age-grade distortion in public High School (at city-, state-, and federal-level) in Belém-PA (2017-2022)

Year	Total	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade
2017	**51,2**	52,5	50,0	50,9	36,0
2018	**50,8**	52,2	50,2	50,3	23,1
2019	**49,9**	51,2	50,5	48,0	19,8
2020	**47,7**	50,4	45,7	46,7	33,3
2021	**47,2**	43,8	50,2	48,2	30,2
2022	**41,9**	42,8	42,2	41,3	21,4

Source: Brasil (2023b).

Age-grade distortion in High School is a topic that points out to an additional challenge in correcting the students' grade, so they can be at the proper one according to their age. This indicator impacts directly a holistic human education, as well as reveals if the education project dialogues with concepts centered in the people.

Thus, the study presents age-grade distortion in public High School at a city-, state-, and federal-level in Belém, from 2017 to 2022, to reflect upon motives related to those numbers prevailing in public establishments. Although this indicator decreases every year, the proportion is still high, being above 40%

for the first three grades in 2022. On the other hand, 4th grade had the lowest age-grade distortion rates in every year, being below 40%. In 2012, this percentage was 36%, and in 2021 was 21,4%.

According to Portella, Bussmann and Oliveira (2017), one of the reasons behind age-grade distortion in the social vulnerability faced by several families. Most times tis leads students to work in order to help with the family income, especially when parents lack income and education, perpetuating a suboptimal school situation.

The authors register and increase in the likeability of age-grade distortion in the case of "male students, black or brown (*pardo*) students, and those with lower per capita income" (Portella; Bussmann; Oliveira, 2017, p. 483). This unbalanced relationship between age and grade is a result of socioeconomic struggles that youth go through. As expressed by Coleman (1966), it is a reality that goes beyond borders, and affects a person's development as a whole, mainly when it is powered by class duality.

So, it is essential to mention how harmful those reasons are for students, as they become also challenges to teachers, who must adjust activities in consonance with students' interests and singularities. This scenario also weakens the human development web grounded in education, because a society where an elevated number of young people experience learning lag is a society marked by backwardness in other areas, too.

Therefore, learning lag leads to setbacks in workers' level of instruction, with those being subjected to "labor force exploitation, due to low wages and extended workdays" (Antunes; Pochmann, 2008, p. 3), in process based on the dynamics of flexible jobs and depreciation policies.

By this logic, learning lag maintenance favors the perpetuation of family vulnerability and vicious cycles of poverty, as "higher jobs had long been reserved for the segments with the highest income" (Antunes; Pochmann, 2008, p. 7). This framework ends up reproducing social duality.

As a result of learning lag, there are also school dropout rates, as shown in the table below:

Table 4 – Dropout rates in public High School (at city-, state-, and federal-level) in Belém-PA (2018-2021)

Grade	2018		2019		2021	
	City results	State results	City results	State results	City results	State results
1ª	5,6	13,9	5,2	11,3	3,6	11,5
2ª	0,0	11,9	4,1	8,9	-	15,0
3ª	2,0	10,6	3,1	6,9	0,0	14,3
4ª	-	3,2	-	5,2	-	7,0

Source: Brasil (2023b).

In this case, high school statistics show a decrease in dropout rates over the last years for the 1st grade (2018-2022), going from 5,6% to 3,6% in Belém's municipal education network. When compared to the state dropout rates (11,5%), Belém's results were quite below it. For the following grades (2nd, 3rd and 4th), results are irregular, but have behaved positively for some years.

The data also show a decrease in dropout rates. However, it is relevant to contextualize that school dropout, as it is the case for age-grade distortion, it is part of indicators related to families' social vulnerability, which undermine the construction of a project based on the notion of a holistic human development.

Dubet (2003) clarifies that factors such as inequality and exclusion prevail over the simple reproduction of social inequality. So, one must consider school structural factors, institutional heterogeneity, and how most public schools are a type of mirror for social problems, all of which place students as social problem themselves, as:

> *Working class students have been replaced by the problematic students, with difficulties*, who are less defined by their situation of being dominated than of being excluded. Teachers changed their vocabulary:

> children of the people, for whom schools should make sure there are equal opportunities are replaced by students coming from "sensitive" regions, whom it is important to reintegrate into society. Where once a worker's child was seen, now a "social case" is seen (Dubet, 2003, p. 37).

There is also the need to contribute to the family income, accompanied by "improper pedagogical practices, lack of access, transportation and subpar nutrition, violence, drugs, prejudice, social inequalities, fewer job choices in the job market" (Fritsch; Vitelli, 2016, p. 10), as well as teenage pregnancy and a history of lower grades and detention.

In dialogue with Azevedo (2008) and Algebaile (2009), it is necessary to think about educational public policies that recognize the reasons why students face social vulnerability, so as to reduce school dropout and lack of interest for public schools. Those situations end up fragmenting scientific knowledge when the government implements curriculum disguises, as in BNCC and NEM, which deny the right to a critical and emancipatory education in favor of ideas from the capitalist market.

The precise way capitalism has been acting weakens social rights, increases unemployment, and reduces the state role by strengthening public-private partnerships, where companies enter public spaces to implement result-based management, meritocracy, and a focus on competences and skills, as defended by multilateral organizations. Within this context, this dynamic contributes to class division and concentration of wealth by a minority, as well as with an increase in poverty.

Social inequality reproduction is fomented in the school environment when the public education system defends the implementation of policies such as BNCC and NEM, that do not the into consideration the students' social reality. In Pará, the State Secretary for Education (SEDUC-PA) has been adopting this approach since 2017. The schools are oriented to incorporate to their organizational structure a type of management based on control and regulation policies, and on meritocracy, when the main educational goal is to increase the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), through the implementation of a result-oriented management.

This control-based system has been put in practice since 2023, with the creation of the project "School that transforms" (*Escola que transforma*)[5], aiming at elevating IDEB for the 5th and 9th grades of Elementary School, as well as for the 3rd grade of High School, pairing it with a bonus system. This project divulges the idea that it will reward, with money, those schools to perform better at IDEB. Santos e Vilarinho (2021, p. 1163) have already predicted that this movement would place educators and the school administration as the "center of education responsibility, through the employment of indicators and goals of service by schools, most times followed by the payment of a performance bonus".

This bonus proposal has as its slogan "Increasing it, Earning it" (Cresceu, Ganhou), as a way of leading education institutions and workers to buy the idea related to the model of market-driven organization being the solution to improve the measurable quality, even if it creates a culture of competition and contributes to union action weakening.

So, the latent causes for the Basic Education fragility, especially High school, are frequently neglected by actions engaged in guaranteeing school performance and not teaching-learning quality. Thus, VSI and other social indicators are utilized as instruments of economic, social and political adjustment.

Conclusion

The reflections presented in this study analyzed High School quality as it is offered in Pará state, focusing on the city of Belém-PA. Therefore, the research deals with the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) and other educational indicators, which impact students' development. Through the analyses carried out, it was

[5] The "Let's study" and "School that transforms" programs, created by governor Helder Barbalho, through SEDUC-PA, both aim at achieving better IDEB scores. Schools that had the best performances, as well as students, will be rewarded with resources. According to information provided by the very Secretary, the program bonuses will be distributed after IDEB score for each school are divulged, which is done through the Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb) (Pará, 2023).

possible to realize that education quality in Pará state public High School is affected by macro- and microstructural factors.

Social inequality and public policies are essential macrostructural elements to understand educational configurations. However, microstructural ones, like school infrastructure, age-grade distortion, student rates per class, pass rates, dropout rates, among other causes, make evident the problems faced daily by schools, teachers, and students, interfering with teaching-learning quality.

As an example of that, the data analyzed revealed that, even though dropout rates had decreased between 2012 and 2021, Pará still presents high indicators, point out to difficult regarding student access to and permanence in schools. In relation to urban infrastructure – i.e. access to potable water, basic sanitation, transportation, and electricity –, it is all precarious, making it hard to provide quality education that would allow for a holistic student development. Also, the families' socioeconomic situation, expressed in the social vulnerability, is one of the factors that echoes in the age-grade distortion, and dropout rates, as it leads the youth to engage earlier in labor activities, hindering education.

In this scenario, the student per class rates is a necessary indicator, once one considers the high number of students in a classroom, which affects teaching-learning quality. This situation is intensified by the age-grade distortion, again related to social vulnerability and lack of financial resources by the families, limiting the students to move forward in their studies and, as consequence, contributing to education discrepancies.

While public policies are grounded on guidelines given by multilateral organizations, IVS and IDEB results will be employed to foster a model that proposes reforms of economic, social, and political adjustment. Therefore, those results are far from transforming education, because they widen the scope when it comes to maintaining the status quo, with a project that serves capitalist interests, marked by their own self-renewal over time.

So much so, that analyzing social and education indicators revealed the urgency to promote public policies that do not mask structural social inequalities, mainly those reproduced in education. Such a situation is shown with the High School Reform implementation, as well as with programs like "Let's study" (*Bora Estudar*) and "School that transforms" by SEDUC-PA. To sum up the findings, it is paramount that the educational legislation caters to region and school diversity, guaranteeing a High School offer that prioritizes infrastructure, student rates per class, pedagogical material, valuing educators, among other factors, to contribute to building students' critical awareness.

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