

Abstract for “Educational opportunities in the Brazilian upper secondary education”

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After a decade of slow social and economic growth, Brazil has shown significant economic stability and steep growth in the 2000's. Although inequality still remains high, particularly relative to other countries with the same *per capita* gross domestic product, the Gini coefficient has shown signs of declining inequality. At the same time, throughout the 1990's and 2000's, Brazil experienced an unprecedented expansion of its educational system, achieving universal enrollment in primary education and consistently higher enrollment levels in secondary education, but this level is still far from universalization.

This article analyzes changes in inequalities of educational opportunities (IEO) for people between 18 to 25 years old in the Brazilian upper secondary education during a period of more than 20 years (1986-2009), using national data (PNAD surveys). To assess the effects of social background on educational attainment, the methodology proposed by Robert Mare was utilized (conditional logit regression models). Such models were estimated for each educational transition studied (entrance and conclusion of upper secondary school) and compared to a previous transition (conclusion of the first four years of primary education). In addition, an analysis of the qualitative changes of the IEO was included in order to examine enrollment chances in private high schools, an important aspect of educational stratification in Brazil. In all models, we controlled for young people's sex, race, age, years of education completed by the household head, occupational status of the household head (measured by the international Socio-Economic Index - ISEI), number of siblings, existence of female household head, level of urbanization and region of residence.

Since primary education was universalized in Brazil in the beginning of the 90's, the inequality of educational opportunities at that level is expected to show a diminishing rate during the analyzed period due to the ceiling effect that happens after the saturation of the elite's demand for that educational level. On the other hand, the trends in inequality of educational opportunities related to entering and completing upper secondary education are expected to behave as predicted by the “Maximally Maintained Inequality” hypothesis, showing a persistency in the effects of social background variables during the period because the saturation of upper classes demand seems not to have been reached in that non-compulsory educational level. Finally, as predicted by the “Effective Maintained Inequality” (EMI) hypothesis, qualitative educational stratification should replace quantitative inequalities as school access becomes more democratic.

Findings are consistent with those hypotheses and corroborate the main results of previous studies. In 2009, each additional year of education of the household head increased by

18% the chances of young people successfully completing elementary education. This value was 35% in 1986, thus representing a significant reduction of this variable's effect and, hence, a trend of diminishing IEO for the elementary education. However, the effects of that same variable on the conditional chances of entering and completing upper secondary education were stable during the entire twenty-year period.

The analysis of the qualitative changes of the IEO indicted a significant increase, between 1982 and the 2000s, of the effects of variables that measure the cultural and economic capital of high school students on their chances of enrollment in private high schools (vs. public ones). There was a sixteen-percentage-point increase, between 1982 and the 2000s, of the household head education variable's impact. Similarly, the impact of the household head occupational status variable increased by nearly four times during the same period. Hence, the stratification between public and private high schools has been increasingly marked by inequality in the selection of their respective students, reinforcing the performance duality that characterizes those two school systems in Brazil, as predicted by the EMI hypothesis. In fact, the qualitative inequalities increase occurs even before the quantitative ones start to decrease, showing the strength of the IEO in Brazil.