

Desigualdades educacionais: discutindo o fracasso escolar de estudantes Black

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Resumo

O presente artigo teve por objetivo discutir acerca da desigualdade educacional como um fenômeno histórico e social, sob a ótica do fracasso escolar, tendo como objeto de estudo a análise da condição/situação de estudantes da escola pública, especialmente de estudantes Black(as). Para isso, analisou-se a desigualdade como um fenômeno histórico e social e discorreu-se acerca da produção do fracasso escolar de estudantes Black em meio ao sistema educacional brasileiro para, então, correlacioná-lo aos princípios dos discursos de igualdade e equidade. As discussões demonstraram que o racismo estrutural, como fenômeno histórico e social, ainda assola a escola, em especial, para a produção e a reprodução do fracasso escolar dos estudantes Black, condição evidenciada pelos índices escancarados de reprovação, evasão e permanência na escola. Ações afirmativas, que garantam a representatividade desse grupo nos diversos espaços, são necessárias, a fim de serem conquistados novos espaços democráticos.

Palavras-chave: Desigualdade. Equidade. Igualdade. Racismo.

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Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss about educational inequality as a historical and social phenomenon, from the perspective of school failure. It had as object of study the analysis of the condition/situation of public school students, especially the black ones. For this, inequality was analyzed as a historical and social phenomenon and the production of school failure of black students within the Brazilian educational system was discussed, in order to then correlate it with the principles of the discourses of equality and equity. The discussions showed that structural racism, as a historical and social phenomenon, still plagues schools, especially for the production and reproduction of school failure among black students, a condition evidenced by the wide-ranging rates of failure, evasion and permanence in school. Affirmative actions, which guarantee the representativeness of this group in different spaces, are necessary in order to conquer new democratic spaces.

Keywords: Inequality. Equity. Equality. Racism.

Desigualdades educativas: debate sobre el fracaso escolar de los alumnos Black

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Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir sobre la desigualdad educativa como fenómeno histórico y social, en la perspectiva del fracaso escolar, teniendo como objeto de estudio el análisis de la condición/situación de los estudiantes de escuelas públicas, especialmente de los estudiantes Black y negras. Para ello, analizamos la desigualdad como fenómeno histórico y social y discutimos la producción del fracaso escolar de los estudiantes Black en medio del sistema educativo brasileño y luego los correlacionamos con los principios de los discursos de igualdad y equidad. Las discusiones revelaron que el racismo estructural como fenómeno histórico y social todavía fustiga la escuela, especialmente por la producción y reproducción del fracaso escolar de los estudiantes Black, condición que evidencian las altas tasas de reprobación, evasión y permanencia en la escuela. Acciones afirmativas que garanticen la representación de este colectivo en los diferentes espacios son necesarias para conquistar nuevos espacios democráticos.

Palabras clave: Desigualdad. Equidad. Igualdad. Racismo.

Introdução

School failure is a significant issue affecting the Brazilian educational system, evidenced by high rates of repetition in the early and final years of Elementary School, insufficient literacy and reading skills, exclusion throughout the years, and unaddressed educational difficulties. This failure compromises the consolidation of students' studies (PEREIRA, 2019). Consequently, this failure results in high rates of dropout, age-grade distortion, abandonment, repetition, and failure, with a historically greater impact on Black boys. Outside of school, the marks of racism perpetuate socializations that condition this population to be the most incarcerated, with the least formal education, accessing precarious jobs, and having the lowest access to Higher Education (JESUS, 2018; PATTO, 1992, 2015).

Educational inequality in Brazil is a harsh reality experienced daily by many individuals across various educational levels, particularly the Black population, who face exclusion in different social spaces, including schools (NASCIMENTO, 2019). Although the country is predominantly inhabited by self-declared Black individuals, representing 56% of the population according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the social gap between Black and White individuals is undeniable. This gap is highlighted by high dropout rates among Black students, with 71.7% of students who leave school being from this group (IBGE, 2019).

Schools stand out as spaces where children, adolescents, and adults encounter various forms of existing societal inequalities (MACHADO; ALMEIDA; SARAIVA, 2009; NASCIMENTO, 2009). Experiences in exclusionary contexts create elements that shape subjectivity, which, in turn, permeate relationships of prejudice and racial discrimination and influence how victims understand and define themselves, impacting their academic trajectories (ZAMORA, 2012). This socially and historically established framework favors the production and reproduction of school failure, particularly affecting Black students (PATTO, 1992).

Discussing the effects of discriminatory acts, racial slurs, and racism on Black students' school lives is essential. Black children often face embarrassing situations in school environments where they are not welcomed or supported. The lack of intervention from teachers signals to the victim that they cannot rely on their educators for help. Conversely, this omission of support gives perpetrators the impression that there will be no consequences or even criticism of their behavior. Such attitudes reinforce and trivialize racial discrimination (CAVALLEIRO, 2001). The trivialization of racial

offenses and both explicit and subtle acts of racism within schools leads children to feel invisible, powerless, and oppressed, contributing to the perpetuation of school failure (RODRIGUES, 2018).

The Black population is more intensely affected by socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and race, which form a unified perspective regarding discussions on school failure among Black students. Therefore, this work aims to discuss educational inequality from the perspective of school failure as a subject of study and analysis of the condition/situation of public school students, particularly Black students. To achieve this, we will analyze inequality as a historical and social phenomenon and discuss the production of school failure among Black students within the Brazilian educational system. Subsequently, we will correlate this with the principles of equality and equity discourse.

Inequality as a historical and social phenomenon

The capitalist-industrial-bourgeois society was structured around two major events: the French Revolution, politically, and the Industrial Revolution, economically (HOBSBAWM, 2019; PATTO, 2015). The 'dual revolution' that took place between 1789-1848 marks the structuring of a new way of life in society, establishing the political, economic, and cultural framework. The foundations of this society required the establishment of national education systems aimed at guiding and forming the 'new citizen,' based on the principles of 'Equality,' 'Liberty,' and 'Fraternity.' In this sense, Hobsbawm (2019, p. 109, author's emphasis) highlights:

[...] the demands of the *bourgeoisie* were outlined in the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. This document is a manifesto against the hierarchical society of noble privileges, but not a manifesto in favor of a democratic and egalitarian society. 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights,' its first article stated; but it also anticipates the existence of social distinctions, albeit 'only in terms of common utility.' Private property was a natural, sacred, inalienable, and inviolable right. Men were equal before the law, and professions were equally open to talent; but, if the race began without handicaps, equality was understood as a foregone conclusion that the runners would not finish together.

In bourgeois discourse, there was a defense of an egalitarian and just society; however, the essence of the capitalist system involves a class antagonism, where one class owns the means of production (the capitalists), and the other group consists of proletarians who sell their labor on the market. With unequal foundations, this society produces and reproduces inequalities (CHAVES; ARCOVERDE, 2021). Meritocracy is a force that binds the ideals of bourgeois domination. There is no merit when there are asymmetries between individuals, especially among the working classes and the poor (WACHELKE *et al.*, 2020).

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

In the educational sphere, national education systems emerge to help structure this new citizen: the wage laborer. Due to a dual demand, schooling arises both from the struggles of the working class and from the need for the State and Industry to form their free citizens and workers. On one hand, inequalities characterize social disparities alongside market competition with meritocracy, and educational inequalities also follow this pattern, meaning that students (and teachers) become responsible for their success or failure. The individual, in this context, is the builder of their belonging in this society. Their economic-social position is posited as self-responsibility (RODRIGUES, 2019).

Equality is reflected in the tension between: equality-inequality. The bourgeois ideal, in its discourse, appears just; however, the materiality operates in a way that demonstrates the opposite. In discourse, everyone is equal, and society is egalitarian, but beyond appearances – in materiality – the relationships are unequal. As capitalism advances, workers are required to be qualified for work, i.e., formal schooling; and, since there are inequalities in this process, it occurs in unequal ways (FIGUEIREDO, 2015). Black individuals and the poor from the peripheries encounter daily obstacles organized by capitalist dictates, which are imposed by the very way class and domination relations are framed. The place of rights exclusion, marginalization, reproduction of poverty, and social and educational inequalities constitutes this mode of unequal production (ALVES, 2018).

Patto (1992), in a study discussing the relationship between poor families and public schools, indicates that around two-thirds of students aged 7 to 14 did not have access to public school slots in Brazil or had dropped out for some reason. A large number of children would be out of the classroom, particularly due to the high number of repeaters, which exacerbates school abandonment even before completing the first four years of what was then primary education, now known as Elementary School. According to the author: ' [...] we are not [...] facing a crisis of elementary public schools due to conjunctural reasons; rather, it is a chronic inability of these schools to guarantee the right to education to all [...] regardless of their color, sex, or social class' (PATTO, 1992, p. 107). The author reveals that in the 1920s, there were already high levels of repetition and dropout rates, and that access to public education was substantially expanded, and since then, schools have been facing challenges to teach their contents.

Patto (1992, p. 108) explains that, at the time of her study: ' [...] of every thousand children who enroll for the first time in the first grade of public school, only forty-five reach the eighth grade without any failures and only a hundred manage to finish primary education,' even with considerable difficulty along this trajectory, which is confirmed by many studies. A large number of children did

not achieve at least the minimum required years of schooling, as mandated by law. The author points out that this issue is a matter of exclusion, caused by capitalism, particularly observed in countries where the system is exclusionary. Studies have shown that this situation has persisted over the years, as this state of educational deprivation has been frequently depicted, mainly to attempt to explain the problem (SILVA FILHO; ARAÚJO, 2017).

Some studies throughout history have attempted to explain the school failure of children from lower socioeconomic classes, finding medical and racist reasons for it, i.e., seeking to identify pathological causes or a biological determination in the students. At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, the justifications were rooted in both medical and racist causes (PATTO, 1992). Between the 1930s and the 1970s, such explanations had a biopsychological tone, highlighting physical, intellectual, and emotional problems as responsible for these students' adjustment, which ultimately placed the blame for their failure on themselves (FARIA; INSFRAN, 2018).

In the 1970s, the theory of cultural deprivation gained prominence, originating in the United States in the previous decade, which sought to justify the failure of Latino and Black minorities. Gradually, this theory, influenced by Anthropology, underwent changes, evolving into the theory of cultural difference. The explanatory axis shifted, but the poor continued to be seen as bearing a 'subculture,' as they were embedded in a living context very different from that of the middle class (PATTO, 1992). Patto (1992, p. 109) states: '[...] children from so-called racial minorities would not perform well in school because their family and neighborhood environment would hinder or impede the development of the skills and abilities necessary for good academic performance.' In summary, all the justifications sought always blamed the students and their families for their school failure, as they are deprived of access to cultural diversity due to their living conditions (PATTO, 1997).

A shift in research indicates an understanding that conceptions of intelligence are not genetic but environmental. The racist theories that came from Europe around the 19th century through scientific psychology helped justify inequalities and social injustices. In this regard, Patto (1992, p. 109) questions: '[...] If the new social order born from the French Revolution was the realm of equality, liberty, and fraternity, in opposition to the feudal order, how can the existence of rich and poor, colonizers and colonized be explained?'

Over time, social differences, or rather inequalities, produced by the capitalist mode of production, were easily sustained, and answers from the sciences, which were supposed to be neutral, were demanded. It was in this context that the sciences produced explanations pointing to the

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

'inferiority' of poor children (COSTA, 2019). Patto (1992) reveals that Count Gobineau significantly contributed to scientific racism by classifying people into types; some ' [...] are born to think, dedicated to 'intellectual work,' and others are born to act, suited for 'manual labor,' supposedly lesser, which justified their lower exchange value in the labor market' (PATTO, 1992, p. 109-110, author's emphasis).

From the second half of the 20th century, psychometrics asserted the existence of ' [...] the innate intellectual superiority of whites over non-whites, of the civilized over the primitive, of the rich over the poor' (PATTO, 1992, p. 110). This 'psychometric crusade' was a landmark at the end of the 19th century in Europe and the United States, ' [...] aiming not only to identify, as early as possible, those 'educable,' but also to refine intelligence measurement tools' (PATTO, 1992, p. 110, author's emphasis). It was considered a neutral and innate science that served to 'prove' that prominent individuals in society, whether in politics, science, or the arts, belonged to a continuity of successions within the same family, an ideology that even reached Brazil (DIAS, 2007).

Patto (1992) highlights that in Brazil, the arrival of these scientific perspectives began to take shape from the latter part of the 19th century. With Gobineau, the ideas of scientific racism were disseminated and accepted by the country's elite. Intellectuals such as Silvio Romero, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, Oliveira Vianna, among others, adhered to this view, which was reflected in the production of scientific texts describing prejudiced conceptions. The author cites the work of Ofélia B. Cardoso (1949), stating that it is laden with prejudices, even attributing to the family the blame for the poor development of children, and inferring that school education becomes uninteresting as the environment in which students are placed values idleness and trickery.

This pejorative representation of the poor, generated from the social position of the dominant class and in alignment with its interests, was adopted by Psychology and can be found in the theory of cultural deprivation. This theory asserts that the family environment in poverty is lacking in sensory stimuli, verbal interactions, affective contact between parents and children, and adults' interest in the children's future, reflecting a clear ignorance of the complexity and nuances of life unfolding in the homes of poorer neighborhoods. (PATTO, 1992, p. 111)

Thus, prejudice falls not only on poor children but also on their families and the spaces in which they are socializing. Slums, peripheral neighborhoods, and urban settlements are, in a way, also responsible for the children's failure in school. These 'culturally poor' environments are not in alignment with the school's work, the regulations, the desires, and the expectations of teachers who operate according to the standards established for the middle class. Poor boys, especially black boys,

face greater difficulties in adapting to the bourgeois school model (PATTO, 2015). According to Patto (1992, p.112):

The assertion of the generalized pathology of poor children and the pathologization of their school difficulties has some consequences worth highlighting: it absolves the school of its responsibility; it leads to a simplistic view of the psychological apparatus of the poor, seen as less complex than that of other social classes.

Prejudice, discrimination, and pathologization of the poor occur due to the sociocultural domination of one class over another to reinforce their power (SCARIN; SOUZA, 2020). The relationships between teachers and students in the school environment often reproduce these behaviors and result in school failure (PAULA; TFOUNI, 2009). The inequalities experienced by children outside of school are also frequent within the classroom (PATTO, 2015). In this sense, Patto (1992, p. 112-113, author's emphasis) highlights:

Given the nature of the official discourse on the vicissitudes of the schooling of poor children, it is not surprising that a conception of 'human beings' in terms of 'fit' and 'unfit' structures the practice of teachers and school professionals. The prejudiced and negative way in which they refer to their students has been repeatedly documented by educational research [...] 'stupid,' 'lazy,' 'immature,' 'nervous,' 'troublemakers,' 'aggressive,' 'deficient,' 'unthinking,' 'slow,' 'apathetic' are expressions used by educators, who act as spokespersons within the school for the long-standing prejudices and stereotypes in Brazilian culture.

The author points out that research has been filled with value judgments and has perpetuated stereotypes that stigmatize and create justifications and explanations for the failure of poor children, and thus, Black children. She further emphasizes that this prejudice is not limited to the children but also affects their families, with parents frequently being labeled as 'irresponsible,' 'uninterested,' 'promiscuous,' 'violent,' 'drunk,' 'nomadic,' and 'northeasterners' (PATTO, 1992, p. 113, author's emphasis).

According to Yannoulas, Assis, and Ferreira (2012), instead of romanticizing and glorifying poverty, it is important to truly understand its reality, its deficiencies, and its potentialities to address the issues underlying school failure. Public schools are occupied by children from working-class backgrounds who arrive at the school environment already labeled. However, these children who are "[...]" labeled as 'problematic' by the school certainly include a segment that would benefit from specialized support outside of school, just as many wealthier children receive medical, psychological, and speech therapy support when needed" (PATTO, 1992, p. 113, author's emphasis). There is an evident expression of prejudice against impoverished classes. Patto (1992, p. 114) further argues that:

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

The case of malnutrition is illustrative: it has been cited for decades as the major cause of these indices. However, we now know that it needs to be relativized, not as an unacceptable fact affecting many Brazilian children, but as an obstacle to their schooling. Medical research has already proven that children severely affected by a lack of proteins and calories in their early years are not significantly represented within schools.

In 2022, in Brazil, with inequalities deepened by the Covid-19 pandemic (Sars-Cov-2), poverty is once again facing the challenge of hunger, as statistics show that around 33 million people are in food vulnerability, meaning six out of ten Brazilians are experiencing food insecurity. Explanations for this situation are likely to be sought to justify educational outcomes (SIPIONI et al., 2020). However, Patto (1992, p. 114) had already warned about the myth of malnutrition among poor children: "[...] as the main cause of school difficulties [...] and the attempt to counteract them through school meals, besides risking the identity of the school as an educational institution, did not [...] have the power to reduce the failure rates."

Undoubtedly, the provision of school meals is indisputable, but this public policy is meant to assist in the nutrition of children rather than as a response to school performance (SILVA; PERON, 2017). The author suggests that: "[...] The justification for maintaining school meals is the need to alleviate the immediate hunger of these children, increasingly present in the school population as the country sinks into recession and unemployment" (PATTO, 1992, p. 114). The context in which Patto (1992) made this statement aligns with the challenges present in Brazil in 2022, especially in confronting the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the school environment.

Isfran, Ladeira, and Faria (2020) emphasize that children, families, poverty, and even teachers should not be blamed, as public schools are affected by many issues that go beyond their capacities. Educational policies have not been sufficient to ensure quality education. Thus, "[...] The production of school failure is largely based on the insufficiency of funds allocated to public education and their mismanagement" (PATTO, 1992, p. 114).

School failure should not be seen as something biologizing, individual, and isolated from political, economic, and social aspects (ISFRAN; LADEIRA; FARIA, 2020). The mechanisms of Brazil function according to the dictates of capital, shaped by liberal ideals, and the desires of the dominant class orchestrate the functioning of the entire social structure. Therefore, education and schools are subjected to this external force that invades their structures (SILVA; LAMOSA, 2021).

For Patto (1992, p. 115), “[...] In a country like Brazil, it is increasingly evident that the state serves the interests of capital and invests in education only to the extent demanded by its interests.” There is a lack of incentives across the board, especially in the valuation of educators, who are typically underpaid and not recognized throughout their careers. This all impacts the low quality of education and the development of students. In summary, Brazil has historically struggled with numerous educational problems, which are rarely resolved due to what appears to be a lack of categorical interest from the political and economic elite in providing high-quality education, particularly for the working-class and Black students in public schools.

The Production of Academic Failure Among Black Students

The school, a privileged place of knowledge production, is also responsible for the reproduction of racial and educational inequality (Nascimento, 2019). According to Hasenbalg (1997, p. 65):

Teachers' stereotypes about the educability of Black and poor children function as self-fulfilling prophecies. These stereotypes are at the core of a system of messages that helps shape the self-esteem of the children. This seems to be the crucial area for intervention: if this bottleneck in the Brazilian educational system is not addressed, it will continue to operate as one of the main mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of racial inequalities.

Data from the Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD) indicate that, out of the ten million Brazilian students aged 14 to 29 who dropped out of school without completing basic education, 71.7% are Black or mixed-race. This situation is therefore extremely alarming. These data justify the need for work and the lack of interest in school, showing that Brazil has not succeeded in reducing educational inequality between Black and White students (IBGE, 2020). According to information published by IBGE (2020), Black youth have almost two years less of schooling (8.6 years) compared to White youth (10.4 years). Table 1 describes the main data regarding literacy rates between these two groups.

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

Table 1 – Illiteracy rates by age groups and population segments

Illiteracy by age group	Population groups	Percentage
Young people (14 to 29 years old)	Black ³	10%
	White	3,6%
Adults (60 years or older)	Black	27,1%
	White	9,5%

Source: IBGE (2020)

Analyzing Table 1, we can observe that illiteracy rates are higher among Black youth compared to White youth, data that remain directly proportional when looking at illiteracy rates for individuals over 60 years old. Once again, the data confirm the severity of the situation and highlight Brazil's failure to eradicate educational inequalities, especially for Black students.

Considering the levels of education in relation to White and Black students, as illustrated in Table 2, we see that in the early years of Elementary School, there is no discrepancy between the population groups regarding dropout rates. However, in the final years of Elementary School, High School, and Higher Education, the scenario is different.

³ Officially, according to IBGE, "negro"(Black)refers to both "pardos"(brown) and "pretos," encompassing a larger group that is the sum of "pretos" and "pardos.

Table 2 – Indices and school attendance by education level and population groups

Education Level	Population groups	School Attendance Rates
Early Years of Elementary School	Black	95%
	White	95%
Final Years of Elementary School	Black	85,8%
	White	90,4%
High School	Black	66,7%
	White	79,6%
Higher Education	Black	55,6%
	White	78,8%

Source: IBGE (2020)

In Table 2, school attendance rates indicate the percentage of Black and White students in the process of schooling across population groups. Educational inequalities between Black and White students begin in the final years of Elementary School and become more pronounced as these students advance through educational levels until they reach Higher Education. The indices expose racism, describing the influence of structural racism on schools, which, in turn, helps perpetuate it. Failing to recognize educational racism only contributes to the production and reproduction of these indices. The racial inequality in Brazil, within schools, is evident when comparing data related to the White/Black student population. As we mentioned earlier, only in the early years of Elementary School is there parity in attendance.

Jesus (2018, p. 2), in the text titled “Efficient Mechanisms in the Production of School Failure among Black Youth: Stereotypes, Silencing, and Invisibility,” considers that “[...] education is particularly important for social stratification.” The longevity of studies and school trajectories can reflect in students' future professions. The observation of 200 students of different racial classifications, divided into 23 focus groups, through a total of 51 interviews distributed among

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

individuals from the following cities: Belo Horizonte, Brasília, Belém, Fortaleza, and São Paulo, between 2012 and 2016, allowed the identification of a connection between race and individuals' socioeconomic conditions. The author found that poor schooling conditions and the duration of studies (educational longevity), combined with racial discrimination, are responsible for the negative performance indices of young, poor, and especially Black students, which ultimately results in higher dropout rates (JESUS, 2018).

To understand the processes of inequality in the education of Black and White individuals in Brazil and shed light on the discrimination experienced in daily school life, it is essential to comprehend the concept of race from a sociological perspective (DIEHL, 2017). Munanga (2004) and Silvério (2006), for example, offer a contemporary view on the understanding of social race, which should be considered a social, political, and cultural construct. It is important to consider these aspects to avoid stereotypes and biases that strengthen structural racism and further promote inequalities, especially in schools (RODRIGUES, 2018).

Jesus (2018, p. 3, author's emphasis) argues that the adoption of the concept of race should be approached with caution, as what ultimately exists is a social race. As biology shows, it is not possible to assert that there are different races among humans, but rather distinct phenotypic traits, meaning that “[...] there are not sufficient differences between a person with darker skin and a person with lighter skin to allow us to claim that they belong to ‘distinct races.’” He adds: “[...] Genetically, therefore, we all belong to the human race, and the phenotypic differences among human populations that can be observed today are the result of slow historical processes of climatic adaptations” (p. 3). However, race ends up being a term adopted to portray differences, particularly in terms of skin tone and hair texture, as well as the shape of the nose and mouth, for example (SCHUCMAN, 2010).

Race becomes a way to address these elements as part of a social and cultural construction. People with certain characteristics are exposed when identified with a specific group. The racial identity of an individual comes to denote and imprint a “social evaluation of individuals” (JESUS, 2018). Given the history of Brazil, with its population shaped under the aegis of slavery, the Black population faces exclusionary processes at different levels, including discrimination both in societal relations and in daily school life (CARVALHO, 2021).

Jesus (2018, p. 4) draws attention to the existence of a “Brazilian-style racism,” a type of racism embedded in institutions, which should be interpreted as “[...] a system of oppression and systematic production of discrimination and inequalities that, based on the belief in the existence of superior and

inferior races (intellectually, culturally, and socially), asymmetrically distributes privileges and disadvantages”.

However, on the other hand, one cannot overlook the advances achieved by the Black movement over the years, especially when compared to the racism that was once reinforced by scientific foundations from the late 19th century onward (CARVALHO, 2021). It is important to consider that:

[...] Black individuals are not only those who, with an accumulation of melanin in their skin, become primary targets of racist practices and racial discrimination, but also those who, possessing an accumulation of melanin or other phenotypic characteristics associated with a particular group, see and feel themselves as part of a collective identity: the Black race or population (JESUS, 2018, p. 4).

Jesus (2018) briefly presents the differences in schooling between White and Black individuals in Brazil by citing a study by Henriques (2001), which aimed to analyze the living conditions of Black people throughout the 1990s, using data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) from 2010 to 1999. He concludes that social inequalities in Brazil are made explicit, findings further reinforced by another study by Pastore and Valle Silva (2000, p. 5), which reveals that social inequality in Brazil is closely related to how racial discrimination manifests itself. In other words, Black individuals are subjected to deeper processes of inequality. He reminds us that: “[...] even with the increase in the availability of education in the Brazilian state throughout the 20th century, inequality in access to this resource has not been overcome.” In summary, Black individuals suffer even more from these inequalities, ranging from access to education to performance, which is ultimately hampered by their having had less time in school and fewer educational opportunities.

Studies conducted by Pastore and Silva (2000) and Hasenbalg (1997), using PNAD data, aimed to highlight the persistence of inequality processes driven by racial issues, noting the perpetuation of racial inequalities through stratification models based on formal schooling. Bastide and Fernandes (1959) identified in a study that, between 1940 and 1950, there was a difference both in racial and educational aspects among people who occupied certain job functions. According to them, this conduct, “typical of capitalist societies,” would tend to disappear over time, as “[...] macrostructural changes would lead to microstructural changes, affecting both the external representation of Black people and the self-image of Black Brazilians, even altering their aspirations and life projects” (JESUS, 2018, p. 6).

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

Literature from 1990 to 2000 revealed, regarding social stratification in Brazil, that: “The inertia that marks the dynamics of racial relations [...] set the tone for the repeated findings, while also demonstrating the residual importance of the past slavery period in analyses of the current inequality landscape” (JESUS, 2018, p. 6). The work of Valverde and Stocco (2009) indicates that around 2002, the inequality in education between White and Black individuals experienced a turning point. With PNAD identifying data related to color/race, it was possible to ascertain that the difference in schooling time was approximately 1.9 years greater for White individuals. This suggests that the educational policies implemented with the universalization of access to elementary education throughout the 1990s were beneficial in reducing the educational gap between Black and White individuals across Brazil.

Unicef (2012) points out that racial discrimination has been one of the barriers faced by young Brazilians in exercising their right to access formal education. Jesus (2018, p. 7) confirms this by stating: “[...] Of the total number of those excluded from school, the majority are black and brown. And discrimination is not only evident in the difficulty of access but also in the continuity of school life.” There is a difference when observing the average years of education between white and black individuals, which, according to the author, indicates that racial discrimination impacts the performance of students in Elementary and High School. According to findings by Dias (2011), the racial tensions experienced outside the school environment infiltrate its structures, causing problems in the trajectories of Black students.

Black students constantly experience processes and situations of prejudice, discrimination, and bullying, particularly verbal offenses. Often, those who are victims of these acts of violence may also become aggressors themselves (JESUS, 2018). Furthermore, the victims sometimes cannot rely on the help of their educators, who fail to assist and create a sense of impunity (CAVALLERO, 2001). This trivialization of racist behaviors and acts, whether explicit or subtle in schools, causes these children to lose their identity, feel invisible, powerless, and subjugated, directly contributing to the silent occurrence of their academic failure (RODRIGUES, 2018). According to Jesus (2018, p. 13):

[...] the repeated everyday situations in which we encounter stigmatized individuals verbally attacking other stigmatized individuals reinforce the perception that the social production of abnormality, particularly racism, functions as a system of oppression and systematic production of discrimination and inequalities. Even though these individuals, who are perceived as abnormal, may operate within this system, they do not become beneficiaries of it.

As schools remain silent and fail to address such instances of racism within their walls, they inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of racism. This omission is reflected in the development, retention, and difference in years of education between Black and White individuals, who, in addition to having very different educational trajectories, also face divergent occupational outcomes in adulthood. For Black individuals, vulnerabilities, violence, oppression, and even poverty are perpetuated.

Considering the discourses of equality and equity to minimize the academic failure of black students

Education and poverty are interconnected, as socioeconomic status reveals ways of life and access to consumption. They intersect and influence each other according to material conditions. Therefore, it is essential to understand the processes of (re)production of inequalities to identify the true state of affairs in both areas (ALVES, 2019). Educational inequalities cannot be understood without understanding social inequalities. Thus, to discuss this topic, it is crucial to comprehend the constitutive processes of the bourgeois industrial capitalist society. If society is driven by a mode of production that generates inequalities, education will inevitably be impacted by poverty and its associated inequalities (BECKER; RIBEIRO, 2019).

For Rufino (2019), poverty is produced by capital; that is, the economic regime of production generates inequality as a hegemonic class that owns the means of production dictates the division of gains, while the proletariat class, which for its survival has only the sale of its labor, is left with little. As pointed out by Miranda (2020) in her text “Social Inequality and Poverty: Multiple Faces in Relation to Education,” in the e-book Education, Poverty, and Social Inequality, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term equality. According to the author: “We are all equal because we belong to the same humanity. This idea of an essential equality among humans seems so obvious and natural to us that we forget that it is a historical construct” (MIRANDA, 2020, p. 14).

Throughout history, equality has been conceived through the lens of the bourgeois capitalist world. With the expansion of a global market, the defense of equality emerged because “The idea of equality arises from this sense of belonging to a whole” (MIRANDA, 2020, p. 15). Thus, it is necessary to understand the relationship between equality and capitalism. The concept of equality was born allied with individual freedom. In the liberal bourgeois capitalist mode of production, individuals need to be free to exercise their autonomous activities in the market.

Educational Inequalities: discussing school failure among black student

In the 18th century, the emerging bourgeois democracy, which opposed the feudal society, advocated for equality before the law and individual freedom. Men were to be equal as citizens of a society of equals before the law and the State. However, the right to property inevitably overshadowed the rights to freedom and equality. The citizen, this figure in bourgeois society, is the property owner, free and equal before the law to buy or sell all kinds of goods, particularly labor power. (MIRANDA, 2020, p. 15)

According to Alves (2019), the feudal model was almost static, with predetermined relationships defined by "castes," that is, distinct but hierarchically fixed segments of subjects. In contrast, the modern world began to demand that individuals be free and equal before the law, without distinguishing conditions of birth, social, or cultural origin. Thus, the bourgeois model presented itself as the antagonist of the feudal regime, possessing the prerogatives of equality before the law and individual freedom, and shaping the contours of the new way of life in society. The citizen would become equal in social relations, in freedom, rights, and obligations, and subject to equality before the law and the State.

According to Piana (2009), the rights to freedom and equality are, in the first instance, subordinated to the right to private property, with the latter prevailing over the others. Oliveira (2020) describes this bourgeois man, this new citizen, as the property owner who, within his limits, possesses freedom and equality, at least before the law, to buy and sell, consume, and work in the market. Thus, equality, freedom, and property form the foundation upon which the capitalist system of production is sustained.

Resende and Miranda (2016, p. 34) reiterate that "The principle of equality, as established by the entire apparatus of legal regulation, by the apparatus of state control [and] global control structures, by the rhetorical defense of principles, is fundamental to the forms of economic, social, and political organization of society [...]" Thus, the concepts of contract and property, as well as the concepts of equality and freedom, are complementary to each other. However, equality has not been transformed into reality, as it is possible to identify that "[...] The society that is structured on private property is, at its core, unequal" (RESENDE; MIRANDA, 2016, p. 34). In a society divided into antagonistic classes, the possibility of materializing equality does not exist.

Equality and freedom are liberal foundations that structure the bourgeois apparatus. An ideology emerges that converges on the false idea of flexibility of the individual, the market, and relationships without truly considering the complexities, limits, and contradictions. Equality, in this

bourgeois capitalist mode of organization, is proclaimed and expressed in discourse but cannot be realized. It is unfeasible because, within a system that reproduces inequalities, equality cannot exist under these conditions. First, there are no ways to achieve effective equality among people. The processes that each individual undergoes are unique, even if they originate from the same class.

Thus, Resende and Miranda (2016) reveal that there has been a shift to sustain and rearrange this discourse. Equality began to be addressed as equity—a term, a concept that changed to clarify the understanding of inequalities within this social organization. According to the authors, the concept of equity emerged around 1990 to explain and find a solution to this issue. It involves acknowledging that the capitalist world is unequal, but at the same time, it allows, through equity, the possibility of achieving some balance. The term emerged within a neoliberal context and is related to equality of opportunity.

According to the authors, as cited in the World Bank's World Development Report: "Equity means [...] that people should have equal opportunities to pursue the life they desire and be spared from extreme deprivation of outcomes" (WORLD BANK, 2006, as cited in RESENDE; MIRANDA, 2016, p. 26). They further elaborate:

Equity [...] does not mean equality in health status or any other specific outcome. On the contrary, it is the pursuit of a situation where opportunities are equal, meaning that personal effort, preferences, and initiative—rather than family background, caste, race, or gender—are responsible for the differences in people's economic achievements (BANCO MUNDIAL, 2006 *apud* RESENDE; MIRANDA, 2016, p. 26).

From the World Bank's perspective, equity involves processes that enable the reduction of inequalities. To reduce is to diminish, not to solve. It acknowledges that, since the capitalist mode of production is inherently unequal, it is necessary to manage new processes that, through equity policies, create safety nets for the vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized. In this view, equity is a strategy to facilitate access and ensure the rights of the most vulnerable. According to Miranda (2016, p. 99):

Those who claim that equality has not been realized in capitalist society as a political or economic principle are correct. After all, as we well know, a society that is founded on the formal principle of equality is essentially unequal. We are, therefore, confronted with an important contradiction: equality as an inherent principle of the capitalist world, and equality as a possibility also inherent in this society. As social inequalities deepen, arising from more complex production relations and more sophisticated forms of labor exploitation, the issue of equality becomes both the response and the basis for renewing the strategies that justify these inequalities.

According to Resende and Miranda (2016), societal relations may be configured through an egalitarian lens, even reinforced by discourse; however, the foundations of these structures remain unequal. Equality only has the appearance of being real. In material terms, it is different. True equality cannot exist in a society grounded in a political-economic model that is inherently unequal, divided between those who possess the means of production and those who do not. With this antagonism, rights are also accessed unequally. The unequal gradually become even more unequal among themselves.

Even in the face of so many inequalities present in the schooling process, it is undeniable to conceive of education as a path to addressing or mitigating the existing adversities in society. There must be greater investment in education, in the initial and ongoing training of teachers who need to be prepared to manage their school environments, making them increasingly healthy and conducive to learning for all (ARAÚJO, 2012). The school, in its liberating conception, must put into practice a pedagogical approach that meets the demands of its clientele, particularly those from less privileged groups. However, we know that the school is considered an ideological apparatus of the State, serving a dominant hegemonic class, and there is no interest from this group in ensuring that the less privileged classes have access to scientific knowledge and systematic learning (SAVIANI, 2008).

In this context, black people need more support from affirmative public policies aimed at reducing and eliminating racial inequalities. It is not about seeking answers as to why black students do not identify with the school, but rather how the school needs to be configured to identify with, embrace, and address their widespread academic failure, guided by the principles of equity (JAMES, 2014). Greater political participation in the Black Movement and other social movements in the fight against racism is important to build a democracy that upholds the right to diversity as a constituent of social rights, systematically addressing ethnic-racial diversity, equality, and equity (GOMES, 2012).

These social movements must contest narratives within the realms of science to deconstruct regimes of truth and naturalizations that do not contribute to promoting justice and racial equality. The representation of black people in various educational and non-educational spaces contributes to producing consistent strategies to combat the hatred and racism that have been architected and perpetuated for centuries. Furthermore, the academic failure associated with racial inequality transcends the boundaries of basic education and affects Black students, including those in Higher Education (NASCIMENTO, 2019).

Final considerations

The initial objectives of this research were fulfilled. It was possible to discuss educational inequality as a historical and social phenomenon through the lens of academic failure, focusing on the analysis of the condition/situation of public school students, particularly Black students. We discussed that the Black population has been historically exploited and continues to fight for its existence and representation. They compete unfairly in the job market and are discriminated against for expressing their culture and religion. They lack the necessary conditions to organize in groups to defend their rights. Their struggle is still for mere existence and survival. All of this is confirmed by statistical data from the IBGE. The social inequality indicators, with a racial focus in Brazil, as presented by the IBGE, reveal numbers that show the disparities between white and black individuals in terms of illiteracy rates, the length of schooling, and enrollment in the final years of Elementary School, High School, and Higher Education.

Addressing inequalities in Brazil is a challenge, especially educational inequalities affecting Black people. This study has shown that there is no equality, no harmony in the material reality of race and class relations. The debt from the slavery period has not been paid, and it continues to be a reproducing factor of inequalities, keeping the entire black population in a state of exploitation and oppression. There is no equality, nor citizenship for a community that is still fighting for its survival and existence, and equity is a neoliberal discourse attempting to rearrange the logic of the current phase of capitalism.

Inequality is a central axis in the discussion of academic failure. Black people constitute a group most affected by socioeconomic inequalities; poverty and race are almost indistinguishable in this perspective. The black population faces numerous in-school barriers in public schools, where dropout rates, repetition, and especially the dropout of boys are evident. Outside of school, the marks of racism shape socializations that condition this population to be the most incarcerated, to have the fewest years of formal schooling, to access the most precarious and informal sub-jobs, and to be the least likely to reach Higher Education. All of these issues were starkly exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, which ravaged the world. Future research could explore the correlation between racial inequality and academic failure concerning Higher Education.

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