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## BRAZIL AND AFRICA: A COMPARISON OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACROSS CONTINENTS

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### ABSTRACT

The article aims to analyze and compare the histories of higher education between Brazil and Africa, exploring the stimuli that shaped their educational systems. With a detailed focus on the policies, progress and challenges faced by each region, the analysis reveals notable disparities. Brazil, driven by a strong private sector presence and initiatives such as FIES, has witnessed a considerable expansion of higher education. In contrast, Africa, due to a later decolonization, faced slower progress in its education system. The disparity in tuition rates and the challenges faced, from the commodification of education in Brazil to the scarcity of funding and structure in Africa, highlight different areas of focus and urgent challenges in both educational settings.

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a topic of great relevance for the social and economic development of countries. However, there are significant differences between the educational realities of different regions of the world, especially between Brazil and Africa. In this article, we intend to compare the history of higher education in Brazil with that of Africa, in order to bring comparisons of Brazil, a country with a high demand for higher education and especially of the private sector in relation to Africa, whose countries faced a later decolonization. To this end, we will conduct a literature review on the main historical, political, cultural and economic aspects that influenced the development of higher education in both contexts. Next, we will comparatively analyze data from the World Bank that define the proportions of demand for education and the proportions of participation of the private sector in both regions. Finally, we will discuss the key similarities and differences between the two scenarios, as well as the challenges and prospects for the future of higher education in these regions. Thus, it will be of fundamental importance to elucidate the issues that this study intends to solve, comparing the Brazilian history with the entire African continent, in addition to defining the role of the private initiative, which has great relevance in the formation of the market of higher educational institutions in Brazil.

### BRAZIL

Brazil has a history in its higher education divided into two stages: the first, the years before the 60s, with a higher education formed by public higher education institutions (HEIs); and second, the post-

1960s period, marked by the implementation of the Law of Guidelines and Bases for Education, the LDB of 1961 and years later the University Reform of 1968, both interventions and movements that nationally allowed the existence and expansion of private higher education, which is the engine for the country's higher education market. During the 1960s, the scarcity of vacancies in Brazilian universities was a cause for concern. In 1960, about 29,000 students approved for higher education were unable to enroll due to lack of space. This situation worsened in the following decade, with the number of students without a place rising to 162,000 in 1969 (MARTINS, 2009). To meet this growing demand, the military government began exploring ways to offer higher education on a large scale. A significant milestone in this process was the Meira Mattos Report (EAPES, 1969), prepared by Professor Rudolph Atcon of the United States. This report was one of the first to introduce studies on a globalized market, where education became a valuable commodity, containing many of the pillars of what would later become the country's higher education. The 1961 Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education defined education as a right for all and established guidelines for Brazil's educational system, in addition to the creation of the Federal Council of Education, responsible for directing national education and regulating the creation of new educational institutions (BRASIL, 1961). One of the main impacts of the 1961 Law and the 1968 University Reform was to make room for private initiative in the higher education system. The 1961 Law allowed the emergence of private institutions, as long as they met criteria established by the Federal Council of Education. The Reform of 1968 introduced private universities, capable of offering a wide range of independent academic courses and programs (CORBUCCI *et al.*, 2016; DOURADO, 2008; MARTINS, 2009).

**Table 1. Evolution of enrollments in the public and private spheres of higher education between 1961 and 1970**

Year	Total Enrollment	Private Institution Enrollment	Public Institutions Enrollment	% of Public Enrollments over the total
1961	98.892	43.560	55.332	56%
1962	107.299	43.275	64.024	60%
1963	124.214	47.428	76.786	62%
1964	142.386	54.721	87.665	62%
1965	155.781	68.194	87.587	56%
1966	180.109	81.667	98.442	55%
1967	212.882	91.608	121.274	57%
1968	278.295	124.496	153.799	55%
1969	342.886	157.826	185.060	54%
1970	425.478	214.865	210.613	50%

Source: adapted from Levy (1986).

**Table 1 Evolution of enrollment in face-to-face undergraduate courses – Brazil (1960-2020)**

Year	Public	Private	Total	% Public	% Private
1960	59.624	47.067	106.691	56%	44%
1970	210.613	214.865	425.478	50%	50%
1980	492.232	885.054	1.377.286	36%	64%
1990	578.625	961.455	1.540.080	38%	62%
2000	887.026	1.807.219	2.694.245	33%	67%
2010	1.461.696	3.987.424	5.449.120	27%	73%
2020	1.956.352	6.724.002	8.680.354	23%	77%

Source: Author's elaboration based on INEP data (2022).

**Table 2. Direct impact of FIES on large groups of Brazilian HEIs (2010-2016)**

Year	Kroton		Estácio		SerEducational		Anima	
	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue	FIES Transfer	Net Revenue
2010	39,35	802,06	57,57	1.495,95	-	-	26,32	330,62
2011	192,01	833,21	14,36	1.540,55	-	-	71,85	366,91
2012	525,11	1.192,70	372,48	1.735,18	104,53	387,93	122,97	443,27
2013	926,63	1.534,53	765,78	2.231,98	210,48	588,95	245,63	538,58
2014	2.128,96	2.926,85	1.374,43	2.915,85	425,98	855	361,86	785,56
2015	2.928,73	4.151,80	1.558,46	2.824,85	532,64	1.148,32	419,24	925,82
2016	2.496,95	4.019,03	1.440,57	2.893,11	553,26	1.151,08	344,35	931,29

Source: Elaborated by the author based on the article by Braces; Saints; Kato (2020).

Above, we can see that already in 1970 public education began to suffer a substantial reduction of 4% of its enrollments in relation to the previous year. With this, an era was beginning that would be consolidated as a quasi-hegemony of the private sector in the country, in which the leadership of the public sector in market share would not be seen again. However, another relevant factor would be seen in the 90s, with reflections of the 80s, widely called "The Lost Decade". In the 1980s, Brazil had a negative variation of -4.25% of GDP, which was a worrying sign for the country's economy. Over the following years, the country faced a series of crises, such as rising inflation, high foreign debt, and a drop in industrial production, among other factors. These difficulties were reflected in the country's economic result in 1990, which registered a negative variation of -4.35% of GDP (BANCO CENTRAL, 2022). This worrisome scenario has generated significant impacts on the lives of the Brazilian population, affecting employment, income, and quality of life in general. During the 1990s, the World Bank defined strategies for directing state resources in strategic areas, in addition to linking neoliberal characteristics such as the opening of the market and especially the defense of privatizations and directing financing to the private sector (BANCO MUNDIAL, 1996; MOTA JUNIOR, 2019; SGUISSARDI, 2005). With these, in a way, interventions by the World Bank, the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso introduced in 1999 the FIES (Fund for the Financing of Higher Education Students). The program allowed students to finance their higher education at considerably low interest rates, which guaranteed the private sector a way of subsistence, in addition to the financing itself being designed to be self-financing (CORBUCCI *et al.*, 2016). Using FIES, the government had tools of great importance to align with the private sector the role of supplementing higher education, however, the effect was almost the opposite:

Above, we can see that private higher education is not only consolidated, but also has almost a hegemony in enrollments, reaching about 77% of total higher education enrollments in 2022.

In addition, in 2007 there is a big step for private HEIs that would dictate the entire higher education system in the country since then. During the year, the Anhanguera, Kroton and Estácio de Sá groups went public on the Brazilian Stock Exchange and began to operate through mergers and acquisitions of smaller HEIs throughout Brazil (FERREIRA; SINDEAUX, 2022; SARFATI; SHWARTZBAUM, 2013). For the growth and even, quite possibly, the process of going public of large private educational groups may have had in FIES a great factor to enable these market movements. Below, we can see that there is a certain degree of impact on the program's transfers to the net revenue of these large groups.

Thus, we can conclude that Brazilian higher education is mostly private, in addition to the fact that there was a considerable accumulation of capital by these HEIs, which made it possible even to go public and grow the resources of these companies at substantially high levels (see studies: FERREIRA; SINDEAUX, 2022).

## AFRICA

The history of universities in Africa reveals an emergence that is intertwined with the colonial legacy. During the period when various European nations were actively involved in the exploration and domination of the continent, higher educational structures as we know them today began to appear. These academic institutions manifested themselves at different times and contexts, reflecting the complex dynamics of colonialism across Africa (WOLHUTER; KANGUMU; MUNGONGI, 2014). In the far reaches of North Africa, in the context of the Saharan region, we saw the first signs of universities during the colonial era. An emblematic example was Egypt, where King Fouad I University emerged in 1906, marking a significant milestone in the quest for advanced educational institutions. This university, later renamed the Egyptian University and eventually renamed Cairo University in 1952, was one of the pioneers in the

region (HERRERA, 2006). Meanwhile, in the areas of sub-Saharan Africa that were home to sizable European settler populations, we witnessed the emergence of academic institutions roughly a decade before the independence of these countries. These universities, often shaped by colonial interests and influences, played a role in the development and training of local elites. But for much of Africa, universities only began to establish themselves in the first few years after independence. This post-independence period was marked by a movement towards higher education as a tool for building national identities, promoting development, and detaching from academic structures previously shaped by the colonial presence (HERRERA, 2006; WOLHUTER, 2009; WOLHUTER; KANGUMU; MUNGONGI, 2014).

After the end of World War I, a number of institutions of higher learning sprang up in Africa. Among them were Makerere University (1922) in Uganda, Egerton University (1939) in Kenya, the University of Ghana (1948), the University of Ibadan (1948) in Niagara, the University of Addis Ababa (1950) in Ethiopia, and the early University of Zimbabwe (1952) (DAMTEW, 2003). However, the creation of higher education institutions in Africa has been mainly concentrated in the northern countries of the continent and South Africa. In the late 1960s, for example, sub-Saharan Africa had only six universities for a population of 230 million (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVEN SPECK, 2013). In addition, some countries, such as Cape Verde, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Seychelles, and Sao Tome and Principe, did not even have universities (TEFERRA; ALTBACH, 2004). According to Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013), since the achievement of independence, there has been a huge expansion in the number of higher education institutions, both public and private, in Africa. In 2009, more than 250 higher education institutions were public in nature, while about 420 were private, as indicated by the World Bank (2009). However, access to higher education has remained substantially restricted compared to other regions of the globe. In 1989, for example, in sub-Saharan Africa, only 162 out of every 100,000 people were tertiary students, compared with 645 in Asia and 1,659 in Latin America (ibid). Higher education institutions have historically played roles defined by governments and societies. These roles are shaped by various agents over time and history, and undergo constant change (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVEN SPECK, 2013).

Prior to the colonization of the country, the functions performed by institutions of higher learning were delineated by African society itself, primarily directed to religious, philosophical, moral, medical and other areas to meet the demands of the local community (ABJAYI *et al.*, 1996). However, these indigenous knowledge systems and educational spaces in Africa were disturbed, some even destroyed, gradually disappearing from history, in part due to the wars related to the slave trade and the arrival of European powers as early as the fifteenth century on the African continent (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVEN SPECK, 2013). Consequently, educational development in Africa has become disconnected from its rich historical heritage. New external models of institutions, dissociated from African roots, were then imposed during the colonial period. During the colonial period, education took a different form than it does today. As a small group gained access to education, their presence in the colonial administration strengthened, elevating their position in society. This phenomenon has triggered a transformation in the class structure through education. Consequently, there was a growing desire for a European-style education, including at the tertiary level, seen as the primary path to ascending the socio-economic and political ladder (LULAT, 2003). More than just a means of personal advancement, education came to be perceived as an essential tool for achieving self-determination and influence. Regarding the role of higher education itself in the British colonial periods, higher education, instead of illuminating African societies, ended up becoming a tool to enable colonial administration. This scenario has resulted in extremely restricted access to higher education, reserved for a select group. According to Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) and data from the World Bank (2009) At the time of independence, less than a quarter of professional positions in

public administration were held by Africans. Only three percent of school-age youth in the British colonies received a secondary education at the same time. The numbers were equally bleak in terms of graduates: despite its wealth in copper, Zambia had only 100 university graduates and 1,000 with secondary education in 1961. The East African university, serving Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, graduated only 99 graduates in 1960, for a combined population of 23 million people. In the French colonies, the direction of both culture and education was one of alienation. According to Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) and Assie-Lumumba (2006), in the colonies, natives were considered French citizens as long as they adopted French culture and customs. Instead of establishing institutions of higher learning in their colonies, the French selected some Africans to study at French universities. This strategy aimed to integrate them more deeply into French culture and lifestyle. This policy left most Africans without formal education, while a select few were groomed as loyal defenders of French culture and colonial rule. Encouraged to complete their studies in France, many felt more at home in Paris than on African soil.

In summary, during the colonial period, higher education was used not as a way to solve socioeconomic problems on the African continent, but rather to ensure greater efficiency in the administrative functioning of the colonies (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVEN SPECK, 2013). After most African states gained their independence in the 1960s, African higher education took on new forms. Overall, African leaders have set the creation of a university as one of their top priorities. At the time of modernization theory and human capital theory, education was seen as the most important instrument for modernizing society and boosting national economic development (FÄGERLIND; SAHA, 1984). And this became the post-independence scenario of African states, a university for each country, and this model was maintained during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. According to Wolhuter, Kangumu and Mungongi (2014), it was only in the 1990s that another cycle of growth began, resulting in a proliferation of universities. This time, a significant number of the new institutions were private universities, now allowed as part of the embryonic stage of African countries. Previously, such private institutions of higher education were not authorized by governments in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. As an example, we can mention Angola, which has a total of 55 public institutions and 22 private institutions of higher education, with a faculty of 2,731 in private institutions and 2,590 in public institutions. The student body consists of 72,833 students in private institutions and 49,519 in public institutions (2011 data) (according to Wolhuter, Kangumu and Mungongi in 2014). By 2007, there were already 200 public universities and more than 100 (and still growing) private universities in Africa. It is important to note that enrollment in African higher education grew substantially during the years 1999 and 2008, following a worldwide pattern at the time, where the world saw a jump from 93.6 million enrollments to 158.7 million (UNESCO, 2013; WOLHUTER; KANGUMU; MUNGONGI, 2014).

**Table 3. Growth in higher education enrolment in Africa**

	2000	2011
Arab Countries	5.087.565	7.889.480
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.821.291	6.034.114

Source: adapted from Wolhuter, Kangumu and Mungongi (2014).

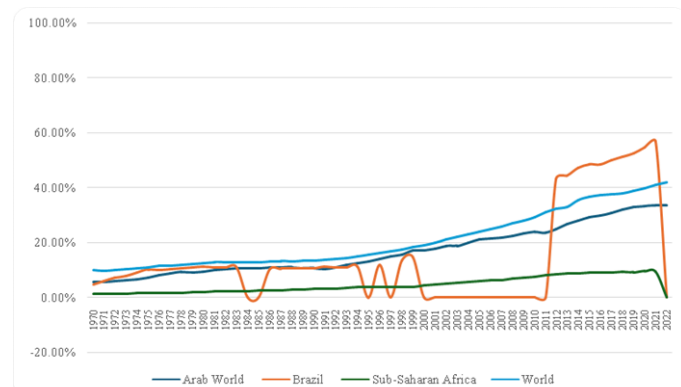
This evolution between the 1990s and 2010s was most likely formed by the role of international agents and the globalization of neoliberal policies, as seen in Brazil. In the 1980s, the emphasis was on primary and secondary education as having a higher social return than higher education, as Psacharopoulos pointed out (1985) and the World Bank reports (1998). However, starting in the 1990s, new findings indicated a higher return to higher education, boosting economic growth. Later studies stated that an increase in average tertiary education levels could raise annual GDP growth in sub-Saharan African countries by 0.39% and increase GDP per capita by 12% (BLOOM DAVID & CHAN, 2005). With the recognition of higher education as crucial to a knowledge-based economy, African institutions have redefined their

role as engines of economic growth. The World Bank changed its development policy to place more emphasis on higher education so that it would open up a market for private capital and financing (BANCO MUNDIAL, 1996; WORLD BANK, 1998), publishing consecutive reports in the years 1988, 1994, 1998 and 2002, highlighting its role in the knowledge economy. Increased public funding for higher education and reforms in this sector, covering finance, management, research and autonomy, have also become trends since the 1990s (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVENSPECK, 2013). To keep up with changes in the labor market, reforms in higher education began to meet the demands of stakeholders (state, students, employers) and aligned with the needs of the private sector. The booming private sector and pressure for global competitiveness have driven African universities to adapt their curricula to meet not only national, but also international and global market demands (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVENSPECK, 2013). Global competitiveness has come to exert pressure on higher education institutions not only to meet national demands but also to align with international market forces. African universities and governments have recognized that the skills required in the new growing global economies, as well as in the private sectors, are distinct from those demanded by traditional models. In response, after the 1990s, many African countries restructured their university curricula and training programs to meet market demands and adopt an entrepreneurial spirit (WORLD BANK, 2009). The traditional model of public universities, with its single-level program structure, proved to be expensive and not very relevant to the new demands of the African market. The current market predominantly demands graduates with diversified training, more practical than theoretical, and ready to quickly enter the workforce (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVENSPECK, 2013). To meet these demands, African higher education systems have shifted from single-level mono systems to diversified dual systems, incorporating both private and non-university institutions such as colleges, vocational institutions, and training centers. As a result, private higher education institutions, including universities and professional institutes, have been integrated into the process of expanding access, and their number has grown much faster than that of public institutions since the 1990s. In 1990, there were only about 20 private higher education institutions in Africa, but that number exploded to 468 in 2007, representing a 24 percent increase in regional enrollment (VARGHESE, 2009). Despite the fluctuating numbers due to government regulations and market competition, some African countries stand out for having a large number of private institutions: South Africa (79), Ethiopia (60), Senegal (41), Democratic Republic of Congo (39), Nigeria (24), Benin (27), Ghana (25), Uganda (23), Sudan (22) and Togo (22).

The introduction of the private sector has created a division of roles between public and private higher education institutions. While public institutions focused on science and technology, research and development, establishing more campuses in rural areas, and focusing on graduate programs, private institutions established themselves in urban areas, focusing more on humanities and social sciences and mostly undergraduate programs (VARGHESE, 2009). However, with the expansion of access, concerns about the equity and quality of higher education have become priorities in the African higher education landscape. While the introduction of the private sector has, in part, addressed some of these concerns – such as increasing female participation in private higher education institutions – persistent challenges regarding equity, access, and quality are still pressing issues for African governments. While efforts to expand access have intensified, especially with the creation of new public universities in rural areas, issues of quality and relevance of teaching programs have also emerged as central issues since the mid-1990s in Africa (WOLDEGIORGIS; DOEVENSPECK, 2013). The focus of private universities on urban areas and their attraction to students who can afford tuition has led African governments to direct their public investments more towards rural areas. However, even with these efforts, concerns persist about the equity and quality of higher education in Africa, which has now become a priority on the continent's education policy agenda (UNESCO, 2023).

## COMPARATIVE

With the analyses inferred throughout the study, we can see that the private initiative was disseminated both in Brazil and in African countries through the World Bank during the 90s, however, African countries use this market opening later than Brazil, which inserts private HEIs already during the 60s and after the 70s the market becomes the majority. African countries, even if late, do not have the same substantially high numbers of private HEIs, largely due to the low total number of higher education institutions on the continent. However, data on the exact number of private and public HEIs on the continent were not clear, and there are only a few studies used for comparisons in the following paragraphs.



Source: prepared by the authors based on data from the World Bank (2023).

**Figure 1. (%) Enrolment in Higher Education<sup>1</sup>**

Above, we can see that Brazil presents its peaks during the years after reformulations in government programs to encourage higher education (creation of FIES in 1999 and improvement of interest rates and expansion of the program in 2010). The country now has an excessively high enrollment rate in higher education, higher than the global average, quite possibly due to the disorder of the supply of funding on a scale and the process of commodification of Brazilian higher education (CHAVES; SANTOS; KATO, 2020; FERREIRA, 2023; FNDE, 2022). African countries, on the other hand, have an evolution from more than 1.38% of enrollments in higher education in 1970 to 9% in 2021, a figure that is still considerably low, especially when compared to Arab countries, which are around the same region, but with greater economic development.

Regarding the impact of private HEIs in the analyses inferred here, as evidenced, Brazil currently has a 73% participation of the private initiative (INEP, 2022). In relation to Africa, between 1990 and 2014, the growth of private universities in sub-Saharan Africa exceeded that of public universities, increasing from 30 to 1,000, while public institutions went from 100 to 500 (WORLD BANK, 2017). Private universities in sub-Saharan Africa rely heavily on student fees to maintain their operations and often lack government funding. In some cases, such as in Ghana, certain private institutions have faced difficulties paying the salaries of their staff due to unpaid student fees, a situation that has worsened during the pandemic (KOKUTSE, 2020). For example, Byumba University of Technology and Arts (UTAB) in Rwanda had to suspend about 40 staff members (MBONYINSHUTI, 2020). This financial pressure may lead some private universities to lay off staff or, worse, close due to a shortage of revenue. Such closures could profoundly impact the quality of higher education in the region, consequently affecting economic development as a whole.

Also, according to UNESCO (2023), in the context of tertiary education, Africa has a relatively low enrolment rate, estimated at around 9%, a figure that contrasts with the global average of 42%.

<sup>1</sup> Percentage of enrollments in relation to the total population of age for admission to higher education.

The demand for higher education is on the rise, however, educational institutions in the region are overwhelmed and struggle to provide a suitable learning environment, including for higher technical education. Funding for higher education in the region is insufficient. This includes investment in research and development, which currently accounts for an average of 0.38% of GDP, compared to 2.25% in Europe and North America. In addition, UNESCO mentions that, it is highlighted by several academics the high rate of unemployment among young people in Africa and the need for a better match between the skills acquired by graduates and the demands of the labor market. Currently, it is estimated that between 20 and 50% of graduates are unable to find employment after completing their studies.

**Final thoughts:** In general, the study showed that Brazil and the African continent suffered external stimuli from the World Bank throughout the 1990s. However, Brazil, which already had a strong representation of private education, implemented FIES in 1999, which was a possible tool for the subsequent IPO of large educational groups in the country. The African continent, on the other hand, presented a late evolution of its higher education system due to a late decolonization. The private sector in Brazil was a possible driver to ensure 56% enrollment rate in higher education in 2021, compared to only 9.40% in sub-Saharan Africa. Brazil still had an enrollment rate higher than the world rate of 41% in the period. As challenges, while Brazil struggles against a process of commodification of its higher education, the African continent lacks the structure for expansion. Funds earmarked for higher education in the region are inadequate, including resources for research and development, currently held at an average of 0.38% of GDP. This is in contrast to the 2.25% allocated in Europe and North America. Overall, the analysis highlights the differences between Brazil and Africa in the development of higher education, influenced by different historical contexts and educational policies. Brazil has benefited from a robust private sector presence and initiatives such as FIES, promoting considerable expansion. Africa, on the other hand, due to later decolonization, faced slower progress, reflected in discrepant enrollment rates. Brazil faces challenges with the commodification of education, while Africa lacks structure and funding, especially in research, remaining below international standards. These differences point to distinct areas of focus and urgent challenges in both educational settings.

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