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Task Force 01

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

Reducing Ethnic and Racial Inequalities in Education

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Abstract

Worldwide, ethnic-racial disparities in education are deeply rooted in a complex and entangled legacy of racism and discrimination, persistent socioeconomic inequalities, and biased educational systems. Unequal access to resources, lack of representation, and cultural sensitivity feed into a cycle of disadvantages with enduring impacts on ethnic-racial minority students. This policy brief presents a series of recommendations to address racial and ethnic inequality in educational systems. The first step highlights the need to strengthen monitoring and accountability systems to assess progress in reducing educational disparities across ethnic-racial groups. Despite the advances in the past decades, several countries have a data gap, failing to create ethnic-racial indicators for analyzing educational disparities. The second step focuses on alleviating ethnic-racial inequality within schools. Recommendations include promoting inclusive curricula, continuous educator training on the ethnic-racial equity agenda, and policies to address potential discriminatory processes. Additionally, implementing mentoring and psychosocial support programs is relevant for combating disparities in academic performance and access to educational opportunities. The third step emphasizes the need to address ethnic-racial inequality across schools, involving reviewing and reforming funding systems to ensure an equitable distribution of resources. Additionally, promoting diversity among teachers and school administrators is relevant to ensure representativeness, increasing the likelihood that educational policies address the demands of all ethnic-racial groups and serve as potential role models for students. Identifying and disseminating best practices and policies implemented by schools with lower racial disparities concludes the recommendations.

Keywords: ethnic-racial inequality, education, equity

Diagnosis of the issue

Ethnic-racial inequality in education is a common issue worldwide. Regardless of socioeconomic and political contexts, such disparities persist within educational systems, reflecting and exacerbating societal inequalities. These disparities often manifest in various forms, including unequal access to academic resources, higher dropout rates among ethnic-racial minority groups, disparities in the quality of minority-serving schools, and persistent learning gaps.

Education is fundamental to human development, and reducing such educational inequality is urgent. By ensuring that all groups have equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities, we promote social justice while developing a skilled workforce and opening avenues for economic growth. Education quality directly builds opportunities for access to higher education and, consequently, students' professional success, economic stability, and social mobility (Murray et al., 1998; Johnstone and Marcucci, 2010).

In the absence of effective public policies, ethnic-racial minorities have historically been pushed into poverty. The persistence of discriminatory processes and lower-quality education for these minorities make the fight against poverty more challenging. Therefore, quality education goes beyond dismantling prejudices. Training and developing the skills of individuals contribute to promoting the productive inclusion of those historically marginalized, fostering income autonomy, and shaking the poverty cycle.

Recognizing the historical roots of educational inequalities is the first step toward addressing them. Authors such as Van de Werfhorst and Mijs (2010) argue that these disparities are not isolated phenomena but rather products of social structures based on

legacies of discrimination and exclusion. They point out that, often, school curricula and teaching materials perpetuate narratives and perspectives that do not reflect the ethnic-racial diversity of the population, contributing to the alienation and lack of interest of students from minority groups. The interaction between teachers and students is another critical factor. Educators' low expectations and implicit biases can compromise students' performance and self-esteem. Authors such as Thomas Dee (2005) have highlighted the importance of teacher training that considers cultural and ethnic-racial diversity to promote an inclusive pedagogy.

Schools' geographic location and infrastructure mirror broader socioeconomic inequalities, with those in highly vulnerable areas providing precarious conditions and limited resources. This fact is corroborated by studies such as those by Lee (2002) and Orfield and Lee (2005) in the United States and by Ribeiro and Koslinski (2010) in Brazil, who demonstrate how inaccessibility and unequal distribution of resources harm the quality of education offered and, consequently, on academic performance, reinforcing poverty and exclusion.

This topic is central to the G20 agenda. Understanding the extent and tenacity of these inequalities is fundamental to any initiative dedicated to building a more prosperous society. The disparities in question reflect and intensify existing socioeconomic inequalities, raising obstacles to social progress, justice, and sustainable development.

Recommendations

1) Monitoring and Evaluation

Despite significant educational advances in recent decades, most countries with a history of ethnic-racial discrimination still present gaps in administrative data and lack indicators to monitor the evolution of educational disparities. For example, for decades, Brazil ignored the ethnic-racial dimension of its educational policies, focusing its evaluations on average performance. However, this overlooked the substantial increase in inequality between white and black people in recent decades. Barbosa, França, and Portella (2023) showed that despite recent improvements in students' academic performance among fifth graders, black people were behind in almost all states of the country (see Figures 1 and 2 in the appendix). Our first recommendation emphasizes the importance of collecting and analyzing ethnic-racial data in the educational context. Effective monitoring systems allow for a consistent evaluation of the progress and results of implemented initiatives, allowing continuous adjustments, and ensuring that adopted strategies produce the desired effects. In this way, improving ethnic-racial data collection promotes a deeper understanding of educational disparities and is relevant to designing more equitable and inclusive policies and practices in an educational system.

2) Ethnic-racial Inequality within Schools

Curriculum

The inclusion of African diaspora and other racialized subaltern groups' history and contributions in school curricula plays an essential role in promoting the identity and self-esteem of black and indigenous students. Recognizing and valuing Africa's historical and

cultural contributions, as well as the history and contributions of native/indigenous populations to the regional, national, and international context over time, provides a more comprehensive and accurate representation of human diversity, combating deep-rooted stereotypes and prejudices. By understanding their cultural heritage and the history of their ancestors, students develop a sense of belonging and pride in their ethnic-racial identity.

Research emphasizes the importance of curricula in supporting the identity development of students from ethnic-racial minority backgrounds. Contributions such as Yosso (2002), Boaler (2002), and Gamoran (2001) discuss the broader implications of content on academic achievement, professional success, and identity-building among black students in the United States. They show that American schools' curricula that include African history and culture foster a sense of belonging among black students, explained by students' perception that their history and culture are valued in the school environment, significantly contributing to developing a positive identity. Additionally, continued curriculum updates combat systemic biases and promote a more inclusive representation of history and culture.

Social models

When exposed to inspiring and successful figures sharing ethnic and racial origins, black students find tangible examples of future possibilities they can pursue. These role models illustrate the diversity of talents and achievements within the black community, inspiring students to persevere despite numerous challenges to overcome unequal barriers.

Exposure to role models improves academic performance and expands black students' professional aspirations. Studies such as those by Chang et al. (2014), Griffin et al. (2011), and MacLeod (2008) examine the impact of black teachers as role models for black students in different educational settings, identifying both greater engagement and success among these students and a more excellent perception of inclusion in academic institutions. According to Husband (2012), these effects are even more prominent among ethnic-racial minority students in the early years of primary education.

Disparities between ethnic groups can also be observed regarding educational aspirations. For example, using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Kao and Tienda (1998) show that while 50 percent of Asian boys had post-secondary aspirations, the percentage among blacks was 20 percent. Similarly, black students are less likely to aspire to attend college than their white peers despite having sufficient capacity to do so (Gershenson et al., 2021).

When students and teachers share the same race or ethnicity, students are more likely to identify such teachers as models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators (Egalite et al., 2015). Gershenson et al. (2021) evidenced through an experimental study in the United States that black students who have at least one black teacher in elementary school are nine percentage points more likely to complete high school and six percentage points more likely to enroll in college than their peers who do not have a black teacher.

Teacher training

Teaching educators to recognize and address potential ethnic-racial biases within and outside educational contexts is paramount in building an inclusive academic environment. This training helps educators in their pedagogical practice, strengthening learning and

forming citizens who are more aware of ethnic-racial challenges, empathetic, and committed to building a fairer society.

Integrating racial literacy into teacher training can enrich education and improve fairness and representativeness. Authors like Smith and Johnson (2018) analyze the impact of teacher training programs incorporating racial literacy, demonstrating notable improvements in teachers' ability to address diversity and discrimination issues in the classroom. Similarly, López and Hernandez (2019) show how including Afro-Brazilian history and culture content in teacher training curricula promotes greater racial awareness and sensitivity among educators.

Mentoring and psychosocial support

Racial inequality in schools also encompasses differences in treatment and expectations for students of different ethnic-racial backgrounds, demanding interventions that also address the emotional needs of students. Mentoring and psychosocial support emerge as promising tools for addressing the psychological effects of racial disparities.

Systematic literature reviews, such as those by Cullen and Klimaitis (2021) and Jacobi (2001), and meta-analyses, such as that by Pascoe and Smart Richman (2009), have pointed out the benefits of these initiatives in promoting the inclusion and psychological safety of minority ethnic-racial students. Experiments like those by Sue et al. (2007) and Williams et al. (1997) have also demonstrated the effectiveness of mentoring and psychosocial support in reducing the impact of psychological stress and microaggressions on the performance and well-being of black and Latino students in the United States.

3) Ethnic-racial Inequality across Schools

Unequal funding

Unequal school funding is another expression of racial inequality in education when the allocation of resources depends on the geographic location and, therefore, the socioeconomic and ethnic-racial composition of the communities. This factor most impacts the quality of education and students' opportunities.

Unequal financing is closely associated with the persistent socioeconomic disadvantage and the maintenance of structures of racial inequality. In areas with high levels of social vulnerability, schools face challenges amplified by the scarcity of financial resources. This limits the improvement of physical infrastructures, the acquisition of adequate teaching materials, and the adoption of new technologies, affecting learning opportunities.

The solution centers on public policies dedicated to the equitable redistribution of resources. Strengthening the infrastructure of schools in vulnerable communities, qualifying teaching staff, and adopting modern technology constitute complementary measures equally useful in addressing existing disparities. Alternatively, it is necessary to assess the causes of underlying financing inequality, developing integrated approaches that consider different dimensions to promote the sustainability of public policies and initiatives over time.

Dissemination of good practices

In several countries, the educational system is decentralized, with the national government sharing responsibilities with local entities. In many cases, this leads to wide variation in educational policies. As a result, some places manage to get their



interventions right and make considerable progress regarding more equitable education. By creating robust monitoring systems, assessing and identifying these places is possible. By identifying the best policies and practices, one can scale them up to other schools in the country and other parts of the world.

Scenario of Outcomes

Effect delay

Implementing policies designed to reduce racial inequalities in education requires time to produce significant results. However, although the effects of these policies are often not immediately noticeable, in the long term, these policies have the potential to create a more equitable educational environment where all students, regardless of their ethnic-racial origin, have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential, thus contributing to the development of society as a whole and the prosperity of nations.

Reaction from a portion of the population

In different parts of the globe, it is typical to observe popular resistance to policies that aim to reduce racial inequality. This fact arises from, among others, prejudices deeply rooted in various institutions. Breaking this pattern is often seen as a threat to the privileges of other ethnic-racial groups, leading to resistance. Misinformation regarding discriminatory processes can lead to social myths, such as the belief that race does not interfere with opportunities and blaming victims for their disadvantages. Resistance may take a more intense form of political lobbying, campaign financing against policies, or even institutional discrimination.

Institutional resistance

Institutional resistance is one of the main challenges in implementing policies to reduce racial inequalities in education. This type of resistance can manifest differently, particularly in the reluctance to modify curricula, pedagogical practices, and

administrative policies. Many educational institutions, rooted in tradition, can demonstrate inertia in the face of changes necessary to promote racial equity. This inertia is not only due to the resistance of the school administration but also to governance systems and bureaucracies that hinder the effective implementation of new policies. Resistance may also emanate from an inadequate understanding of racial inequality or a fear that such changes will provoke discomfort or controversy. In this sense, institutional resistance delays the adoption of necessary corrective measures and undermines efforts to create fairer educational environments.

Temporary widening of the ethnic-racial gaps

The implementation of policies dedicated to combating racial inequalities in education can, paradoxically, temporarily expose or even widen racial performance disparities. They occur when the policies adopted are not comprehensive enough, do not consider the specific needs of students, or do not consider spillover or unintended effects. Without proper support and monitoring, these policies can inadvertently highlight existing gaps without necessarily contributing to overcoming them. Additionally, focusing on deficiencies rather than potentialities can reinforce stereotypes and lower expectations for students from ethnic-racial minority groups. This potential temporary widening of the performance gap thus highlights the complexity of the challenges of promoting racial equality in education. It also underscores the importance of developing broad-spectrum policies based on solid evidence and combating inequalities on different fronts, thus ensuring students can achieve their full potential.

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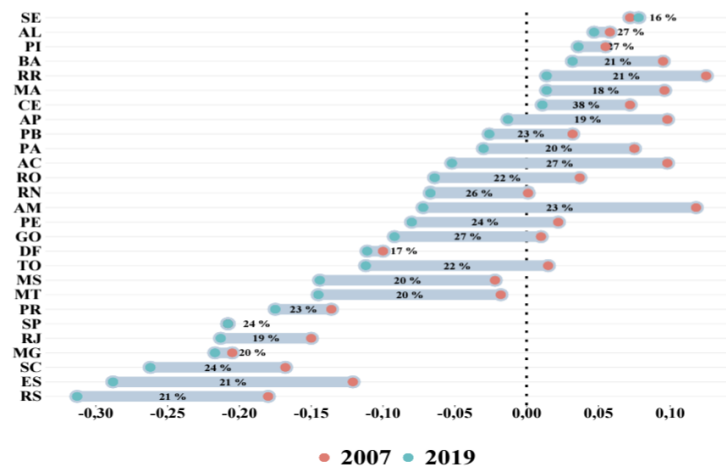
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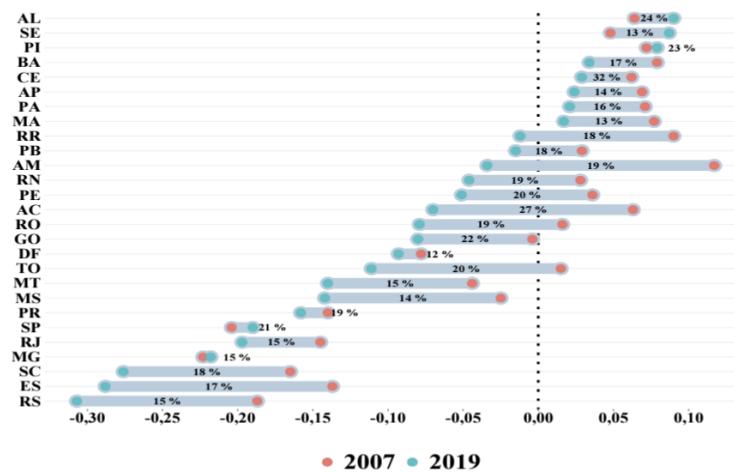
Appendix

Figure 1: Achievement gaps (Black vs. White) among 5th graders in the public school system in Brazil, by state, in 2007 and 2019

(a) Portuguese



(b) Mathematics



Note: The percent values represent the growth rate in achievement for the universe of students per state. On the x-axis, scores are z-scores, with mean and standard deviations from 2007. From Barbosa, França, and Portella (2023).



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