The Educational System of Brazil

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Background Information

Brazil is the largest country in South America and shares a border with every country on the continent apart from Ecuador and Chile. It is the fifth largest country in the world and is similar in size to the continental United States. Divided into 26 states and one federal district, the geography of Brazil varies significantly by region. The population is around 199 million people. A disproportionate percentage of the population lives in the Southeast region of the country, and 87 percent lives in urban areas. Brazil has a rapidly growing economy. Key industries include agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and the service sectors.

Image obtained from: www.cia.gov/

Brazil was encountered by Pedro Álvares Cabral in the year 1500 and was soon established as a Portuguese colony. After centuries of Portuguese rule, Brazil gained its independence in 1822. Brazil went through periods of monarchical, oligarchic, populist, and military rule until 1985. It was at this time that the military regime relinquished its power to civilian leaders. In 1988 a new Constitution was written and is the basis for modern Brazilian legislation.

Education

The current Brazilian education system is based on the 1988 Constitution, which highlighted education as a universal right that should be promoted and protected by the government. In 1996, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação*) or LBD, was passed. This law required a common national basis for curriculum in primary and secondary education, increased the length and number of teaching days, accounted for the evaluation of courses and institutions at all education levels, allowed for the integration of vocational education, and made considerations for special and indigenous education. Since the implementation of the 1996 LBD, more recent legislation has been passed to continue to improve the Brazilian education system. Some of these changes include the creation of the National System of Higher Education Evaluation (SINAES), the establishment of a compulsory nine-year primary education system, and the development of additional opportunities for vocational training.

While Brazil continues to develop its own education system, many Brazilian students are looking to complement their studies with an experience abroad. Brazil is the fourteenth leading place of origin for international students coming to the United States. In the 2011-12 academic year, 9,029 Brazilian students studied abroad in the United States. The Brazilian government has also recognized the value in international education. In an effort to strengthen higher education and increase international cooperation in the STEM fields, the Brazilian government launched the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program (formerly Science without Borders) in 2011. This program will grant 100,000 scholarships to Brazilian students to study in the world's top universities in 20 countries, including the United States.

Education Bodies

Education in Brazil is supervised by a system of ministries and government offices that work together at the municipality, state and federal level. Municipalities are responsible for providing and regulating early childhood education. The states and federal district are responsible for the provision and regulation of primary and secondary education. The federal government is responsible for the provision of education in its institutions and the regulation of private institutions. The following bodies supervise and administer education in Brazil.

The Ministry of Education
Ministério da Educação
The Ministry of Education is responsible for providing technical and financial support to the municipalities, the states and the federal district for their school systems; drafting education legislation; supporting the network of federal education institutions and supervising the private education system. The principal Secretariats of the Ministry of Education are as follows: Secretariat of Basic Education; Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity; Secretariat of Distance Education; Secretariat of Special Education; Secretariat of Technical and Vocational Education; Secretariat of Higher Education.

The National Committee for the Evaluation of Higher Education
Comissão Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior (CONAES)
CONAES is responsible for the supervision and coordination of the National System of Higher Education Evaluation or *Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior (SINAES)*.

CONAES does the following: evaluate the dynamics, processes and mechanisms of institutional evaluation of courses and student performance; establish guidelines for the organization and designation of evaluation committees, review reports, and make recommendations; formulate proposals for the development of higher education institutions; and submit an annual report on courses in which students took the National Examination of Student Performance or *Exame Nacional de Desempenho dos Estudantes (ENADE)*.

The Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel
Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)
CAPES is responsible for the evaluation of graduate programs as well as promoting international scientific cooperation. CAPES administers the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program scholarship in cooperation with the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development or *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq)*.

Primary and Secondary Education

EducaçãoBásico
Currently, primary and secondary education in Brazil follows a 9+3 pattern. This is an increase from the previous system, which was an 8+3 structure. This change was implemented in 2010 as part of the reforms stemming from the 1996 LDB.

Primary education is compulsory and free at public institutions. Pre-primary and secondary education are not compulsory, but are available for free at public institutions. Private institutions are available at all education levels. Private institutions must be evaluated and approved by the Ministry of Education. The quality of primary and secondary schools varies significantly depending on the individual institution.

Primary Education
Ensino Fundamental (9 Years; Ages 6-15)
As of 2010, fundamental education has a duration of 9 years and is compulsory for children aged 6-14. Previously, fundamental education was compulsory at age 7 and only lasted eight years. Fundamental education curriculum includes history, geography, science, mathematics, arts, Portuguese and physical education.
Leaving Certificate: *Certificado de Ensino Fundamental*

Secondary Education
Ensino Médio (3 Years; Ages 15-18)
Curriculum includes at least one foreign language, philosophy, sociology, Portuguese, geography, history, physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, art and physical education.
Leaving Certificate: *Certificado de Ensino Médio(Certificado de Conclusão de 2º Grau)*

Vocational Secondary Education
Educação Profissional Técnica de Nível Médio (3-4 Years)
After completing *ensino fundamental*, students may choose attend a vocational secondary school. The curriculum can include general as well as specialized vocational subjects.
Leaving Certificate: *Técnico de Nivel Médio or Diploma de Ensino Médio com Habilitação em(…)*

Adult Education
In addition to secondary and vocational secondary education, Brazil offers an adult education secondary school diploma for non-traditional students. Students with this qualification may take university entrance exams.
Leaving Certificate: *Certificado de Conclusão de Ensino Médio Supletivo*

Higher Education

Educação Superior

Admission to universities in Brazil is based on the completion of secondary school as well as the scores on entrance exams. Traditionally, each university had its own entrance exam, called the *vestibular*. The *vestibular* tests students on a variety of subjects. The exam varies by institution. Brazilian students often take extra courses after the completion of secondary school to prepare for the *vestibular*.

Another entrance exam is the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (ENEM).The ENEM was launched in 1998 as a means of assessing the quality of Brazilian education. In 2009 the Brazilian Ministry of Education established ENEM as the official university entrance exam. Hundreds of universities are now using ENEM in replacement of or in addition to their own vestibular to make admissions decisions.

The entrance exams are very challenging and acceptance to the best universities—public federal universities—is very competitive. Traditionally, only students with the means to afford a private primary and secondary education were able to obtain the scores necessary to gain entrance to federal universities. Public secondary schools in Brazil are disproportionately attended by lower-income students. This has been controversial as not only are the federal universities known as the best universities—they are also largely free of charge. In response, Brazil recently passed one of the most comprehensive affirmative action laws in higher education history. This law, passed in 2012, will require that half of the annual incoming class at each federal university matriculate from public secondary schools. Affected universities will have four years to implement the change.

University education in Brazil is divided in two levels: graduação (undergraduate) and pos-graduação (graduate). University credentials are as follows:

Bachelor
Graduação (4-6 Years)
These programs last for 4, 5, or 6 years. All programs require a final paper or final research.
Leaving Certificate: *Bacharel*; *Licenciado* (teaching diploma)

Specialization Courses
Cursos de especialização (Varies)
The specialization courses consist of vocational or professional programs and are generally not accredited by the Ministry of Education. These courses are referred to as *lato sensu* (wide sense).
Leaving Certificate: *Certificado de Especialização*

Master
Mestrado (18-24 Months)
Mestrado programs are referred to as *stricto sensu* (strict sense). The curriculum focuses on theory and research and a demonstrated ability in a foreign language is required. A thesis is mandatory for graduation.
<u>Leaving Certificate:</u> *Mestre*

Doctor
Doutorado (4 Years)
In most cases, a *Mestre* is required for admission. For select programs, a student can be admitted with a *Bacharel*. A thesis or dissertation is required for graduation. The Doutorado is also considered *stricto sensu*.
<u>Leaving Certificate:</u> *Doutor*

Grading Scales

Description	Translation	Abbreviation	Numeric
Superior superior	Superior	SS	9.0-10.0
Media superior	Above Average	MS	7.0-8.9
Media media	Average	MM	5.0-6.9
Media inferior	Below Average	MI	3.0-4.9
Inferior inferior	Inferior	II	0.0-2.9
Sem rendimento	No Results; Fail		
Crédito concedido	Credit Granted		
Description	**Translation**	**Numeric**	
Excelente	Excellent	9.0-10.0	
Bom	Good	7.0-8.9	
Regular	Average	5.0-6.9	
Insuficiente	Insufficient	3.0-4.9	
Deficiente	Deficient	0.0-2.9	
Description	**Translation**	**Numeric**	
Excelente	Excellent	A	
Bom	Good	B	
Regular	Average	C	
Insuficiente	Insufficient	D	

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