

Brazil

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

Article 205 of the Brazilian Constitution states that education is “the right of all and the duty of the State and the family and should be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society.”¹ The responsibility for the fulfillment of this duty is shared between the Union (federal level), the States, and the Brazilian municipalities. Public, free, and compulsory education covers the age range from 4 to 17, including preschool,^a elementary school,^b and high school.^c

Brazilian school education is organized into two levels: Basic Education (early childhood education,^d elementary school, and high school), and Higher Education. Basic Education is a compulsory attribution of the States, the Federal District,^e and the municipalities as follows: early childhood education is an attribution of the municipalities, elementary school is a shared responsibility between the States and municipalities, and high school is a specific attribution of the States. The Union has a coordinating, articulating, and redistributive role with other federated entities.

Basic Education is offered by both public and private institutions. The financing of public Basic Education is done through FUNDEB,^f whose resources come from several direct and indirect administration departments at the federal, State, and municipal levels.

^a Preschool is offered for children ages 4 and 5.

^b Elementary school has a duration of nine years. Entry into the first year of elementary school must occur only for children age 6 until March 31 of the school year.

^c High school has an average duration of three years.

^d Early childhood education covers Kindergartens and preschools.

^e The Federal District is the only federal unit that does not have municipalities, therefore assuming the offer of early childhood education to high school.

^f Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Appreciation of Education Professionals (Law No. 14.276, of December 27, 2021)

The organization of Basic Education implies a high level of autonomy of States and municipalities. There are, however, national laws that must be observed in the exercise of this autonomy: the Law of Directives and Bases of Education (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação*, LDB);² the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education;³ and other guidelines issued by the National Education Council (*Conselho Nacional de Educação*, CNE)⁸ and the National Common Curriculum Base (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular*, BNCC),⁴ which covers all Basic Education.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Brazil participated in PIRLS for the first time in 2021. Despite being an atypical period—given the closure of schools as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic—it is expected that PIRLS results can contribute to measuring the reading skills of students in the fourth year of elementary school. This, together with other evaluations, can support the process of implementation of the BNCC (ongoing throughout the national territory) in addition to fostering the development of specific public policies.

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

In 2017, the National Education Council approved, through Resolution CNE/CP N°. 2, of December 22, 2017, the National Common Curriculum Base for early childhood education and elementary school. In 2018, the base for high school was approved. The existence of a common basis for Brazilian Basic Education was foreseen in the Federal Constitution of 1988, reaffirmed in the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education,⁵ and established as one of the goals of the National Education Plan⁶ for the period from 2014 to 2024. Its elaboration process was conducted with the participation of a group of consultants, experts in different areas of knowledge, technicians from the education departments of the States of the federation, Basic Education teachers representing their States and municipalities, and with broad public consultation through a digital portal and in-person seminars in the five regions of the country (South, Southeast, Midwest, Northeast, and North).

Specifically regarding elementary school, the BNCC has the following structure: presentation of 10 general skills throughout all Basic Education that express the guidelines that must be implemented from early childhood education to high school; presentation of the areas of knowledge, including the area of Languages, comprising the curricular components Portuguese Language, English Language, Physical Education, and Art. The Languages area of knowledge includes 6 general competencies that must be covered by all of the curricular components in the area, 10 specific competencies of the Portuguese Language curricular component for all of

⁹ The National Education Council is composed of the Chambers of Basic Education and Higher Education and fulfills normative, deliberative, and advisory duties to the Minister of State for Education to ensure the participation of society in the improvement of national education.

elementary school, and specific skills and objects of knowledge of the Portuguese Language curricular component, organized year by year from the first to the ninth year of elementary school.

The skills related to the curricular component of Portuguese Language are arranged in the BNCC in the following axes that organize language practices: orality, linguistic/semiotic analysis (which involves linguistic knowledge about the writing system, the language system, and the standard norm; textual genres, such as discursive genres and their different modalities, in addition to other semiotic elements), reading/listening, and text production (writing and multisemiotics). According to the BNCC, the foundations of working with these language practices should be the texts and their contexts of production.

The BNCC predicts that students should be literate in the first two years of elementary school, during which time the alphabetical skills related to the writing system in Portuguese are an area of emphasis. In the years that follow (elementary school–early years), this process is consolidated in the following terms:

- In the **Orality** axis, knowledge and use of the oral language are deepened, as are the characteristics of discursive interactions and the strategies of speech and listening in oral exchanges.
- In the **Linguistic/Semiotic Analysis** axis, literacy is systematized, particularly in the first two years, and the observation and analysis of the functioning of the language and other languages are developed over the following three years.
- In the **Reading/Listening** axis, literacy is expanded through the progressive incorporation of reading strategies in texts of increasing complexity.
- In the **Text Production** axis, literacy is expanded further by the progressive incorporation of strategies to produce texts of different genres.

According to the BNCC, progression of knowledge is expected to follow from the consolidation of learning from the years before the fourth year and the expansion of both language practices and the aesthetic and intercultural experience of students.

For the definition of the skills and objects of knowledge (specific contents) of Portuguese for all years of elementary school, Portuguese Language is organized into fields of action^h in the BNCC, aiming to consider that language practices are situated socially and account for specificities depending on the spheres of social life where language is used. The fields of action in which reading skills and objects of knowledge are organized for the early years of elementary school are as follows:

- The fields of action of everyday life, which include the discursive genres that are common in reading/listening, writing, and speaking practices
- The field of action of artistic-literary performance, which includes the literary discursive genres

^h The term “fields of action” refers to the learning possibilities in each area of the student’s life, including public, everyday, artistic, and school life.

- The field of action of public life related to reading and writing texts from a journalistic, advertising, political, legal, and political activist perspective, contemplating themes that impact citizenship and the exercise of rights⁷
- The field of action of studies and research, which includes reading/writing situations based on the expository and argumentative texts, language, and practices related to study, research, and scientific dissemination, favoring learning inside and outside school

Regarding the initial years of elementary school, the BNCC provides 19 skills and objects of knowledge that must be covered by the State and municipal curricula and by the pedagogical proposals of the schools. These skills, which must be mobilized in reading, writing, and oral/listening practices, concern all the fields in which the BNCC is organized.

Next, the specific skills and objects of knowledge for the fourth year of elementary school are presented, a stage in which students must already have consolidated their initial literacy. This second part of the BNCC, organized from the fields of action, presents 31 skills and objects of knowledge that should be covered from the third to the fifth year of elementary school, and 26 skills and objects of knowledge specific to the fourth year of elementary school.

Overall, reading skills for fourth grade aim to develop students' writing that observes the main orthographic rules of the Portuguese language (using dictionaries when necessary), and writing that observes the proper organization of the text in order to make sense. For reading, such skills should develop reading comprehension, ranging from the location of information that is on the surface of a text to the realization of inferences (inference of the global meaning of the text, lexical inferences, inferences from the reading of texts that combine verbal and nonverbal language). The BNCC for the fourth year indicates that students have contact with texts of different genres, literary (field of artistic-literary performance) and nonliterary (fields of everyday life, public life, and studies and research), in different media, materials, and digital. The abilities foreseen for this stage mainly address the recognition of the purposes of these genres and the elements of their macrostructure that make it possible to achieve these purposes.

In the case of literary texts, the BNCC also provides for the development of a taste for reading, the ability to make choices to read specific genres and authors, as well as involvement in individual and/or shared reading practices, in addition to the fundamental skills to produce narratives and poems. In the case of nonliterary texts, the skills planned for fourth grade include understanding genres that are part of daily life, such as warnings, slips, and school rules. Planned skills also include analysis of the compositional structure of news so that it is possible to understand what is being reported, and the production of news about facts of school and community life. For all fields of action, discursive genres more suitable for working with students of each particular stage of education are suggested.

Given the wide range of written and multimodal genres conveyed and also the great diversity of supports present in the fourth grade skills (both specified in the skills indicated for Grades 1 to 5 and in those indicated for Grades 3 to 5), this scope reveals the plausibility of considering all fields

of social action for the teaching of the early years of elementary school and reinforces the flexible and current autonomy of education networks and school institutions in building their curricula.

Generally, the BNCC for the fourth year is quite comprehensive and includes the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking/listening, and linguistic analysis. The skills that should be the object of pedagogical interventions in broader periods of schooling (such as the skills indicated for Grades 1 to 5 or those indicated for Grades 3 to 5) indicate that some aspects of the students' education require a focus that extends beyond one year of schooling.

The BNCC does not include didactic suggestions on how teaching should be organized to develop the planned skills. Such didactic referrals should be defined by the State, Federal District, and municipal education systems, considering the specificities of these contexts and safeguarding their autonomy.

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

To be a teacher of fourth grade students, the legislation in force requires initial training in public or private colleges or universities in the Degree in Pedagogy course, which trains the professional to work in early childhood education and the first five years of elementary school. On average, the duration of the degree is four years, with at least 3,200 hours. It should be noted that training also is allowed in the Normal high school course (three years of training after the completion of nine years of elementary school). This second situation is less frequent but still exists in some States and municipalities.

There are no general requirements for the performance of teachers who are teaching. For teachers in some States and municipalities who are not connected with the education networks, there may be some requirements for hiring those teachers after the end of the term of the contract, such as, for example, proof of having attended a few hours of continuing education courses.

Although there are no requirements for the professional development of teachers who work in the fourth year, there are continuing education programs aimed at these teachers, both at the federal level and developed by States, the Federal District, and municipalities. At the federal level, the current program is the National Literacy Policy,⁸ which offers courses and guidance through distance learning to teachers of the early years of elementary school. The Ministry of Education provides continuing education courses aimed at teachers who work in different stages of Basic Education through the AVA-MEC platform.¹ However, at the federal level, there are no continuing education or in-service policies aimed specifically at fourth grade teachers.

¹ For more information, see <https://www.gov.br/mec/pt-br>

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

Reading progress is monitored through evaluation instruments developed within the school by teachers, and through instruments and evaluation programs external to the school; in large-scale evaluations promoted by evaluation systems at the federal level, such as the Basic Education Evaluation System (*Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica*, Saeb);^j and by evaluation systems of States and municipalities.

The steps evaluated by each of these programs and their format are diverse. Exhibit 1 presents the latest edition of Saeb.

Exhibit 1: Saeb 2021 Structure⁹

Target Audience	Scope	Areas of Knowledge/Subjects Evaluated
Early Childhood Education	Public and accredited schools (sample)	Evaluation of education supply conditions through the application of questionnaires for State and municipal managers and principals and teachers in a sample of schools ^k
Grade 2 of Elementary School	Public and private schools (sample)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics
Grades 5 and 9 of Elementary School	Public schools (census), private schools (sample)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics
Grade 9 of Elementary School	Public and private schools (sample)	Natural Sciences and Human Sciences
Third Year of High School	Public schools (census), private schools (sample)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics

Some State and municipal assessment programs have incorporated cognitive assessments applied to students in the early years, including tests that evaluate comprehension and instruments to assess fluency in reading.

Special Reading Initiatives

The BNCC establishes that children should be literate in the first two years of elementary school. To achieve this goal, the main literacy policy of the current government is the National Literacy Policy (*Política Nacional de Alfabetização*, PNA).¹⁰ The PNA refers to an initiative of the Union, in collaboration with the States, the Federal District, and the municipalities, that aims to

^j Saeb is a large-scale evaluation conducted by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research that evaluates the quality of education in the country from the production of empirical data, and offers subsidies for the elaboration, monitoring, and improvement of education policies through tests and questionnaires. It is applied every two years throughout the public network and in a sample of the private network. The student performance averages calculated in Saeb, together with the passing, failing, and abandonment rates calculated in the School Census (<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br>), make up the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) (<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/ideb>).

^k No testing is foreseen for children at the early childhood education level.

implement programs and actions to promote literacy and improve the quality of literacy in the national territory.

Furthermore, since the 1990s, Brazil has been implementing important policies for the distribution of textbooks and other reading materials, such as literary works, to be included in school collections. In 1998, the National School Library Program (*Programa Nacional Biblioteca na Escola*, PNBE) began and remained in force until 2017. The objective of the program was to distribute books to school libraries. In 2018, this program was incorporated into the National Textbook Program, whose focus was the distribution of textbooks to Basic Education students. In 2018, the program was renamed PNLD Literário. Besides these programs, there are other actions aimed at fostering and promoting reading among students of Basic Education, supported by the States, the Federal District, and Brazilian municipalities, as well as by entities involved with education.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

The National Institute of Educational Studies and Research conducted a survey¹¹ with the objective of verifying the education response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Between February and May 2021, the survey was answered by 168,739 Basic Education schools, which corresponds to 94 percent of all schools in Brazil.¹ Among the schools that responded to the survey, 167,566 reported having suspended classes, equivalent to more than 99 percent of the total. The survey indicated that most schools did not return to face-to-face mode in 2020 or 2021.

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Teachers' most reported actions were adapting the lesson plan to prioritize specific contents (reported by 90.4 percent of the responding institutions) and holding virtual meetings for planning, coordination, and monitoring (adopted by about 89 percent of the schools). Training for the use of remote teaching methods was reported by 63.7 percent of the schools, and the availability of equipment for teachers, such as computers or laptops, was indicated by 30.3 percent of the schools surveyed.

The communication strategies and technological support offered to students were especially focused on maintaining a direct channel with teachers (email, telephone, social networks, messaging application), which was reported by 86 percent of institutions. Provision of equipment for the student and free or subsidized access to the internet at home were indicated by only 9.2 percent and 6.3 percent of the schools, respectively.

Regarding teaching-learning strategies, the most referenced was the availability of printed materials to be picked up at school and/or delivered to the home, cited by almost 93 percent of schools. The availability of pedagogical materials via the internet was indicated by 80 percent of

¹ The survey reached 97.2 percent of public schools and 83.2 percent of private schools in the country.

the schools. Of the institutions that responded, 65.9 percent indicated that tests could be done remotely over the internet or by sending physical materials.

Virtual or face-to-face care scheduled with students, their parents, or guardians was provided by 63.3 percent of the schools, and the offer of support for the development of study plans was mentioned by 57.7 percent of the schools. The offer of previously recorded classes on the internet was reported by 55.7 percent of schools, and synchronous classes with the possibility of interaction was reported by just over 42 percent of institutions. The broadcast of live classes on the internet was done by 33 percent of the schools, and the broadcast of live or recorded classes on TV or radio was done by 19.47 percent of the schools.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

Another study developed by the Carlos Chagas Foundation^{m,12} in 2020 found that teachers from public and private networks reported that there was a decrease in learning and increase in anxiety of their students.

More accurate data on the impact of the pandemic on Brazilian education can be obtained from the results of the 2021 Saeb, expected to be released in September 2022.

Policy and Practice Changes

Generally, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes to Brazil's education policies and practices. At the federal level, there is flexibility in the fulfillment of conditionalities for the receipt of financial resources from FUNDEB,ⁿ due to situations of public calamity, natural disasters, or force majeure exceptionalities at the national level that do not allow the normal performance of pedagogical activities and face-to-face classes in schools.

At the level of the States, local changes have been identified, especially pedagogical ones, such as the expansion of internet provision to students and teachers, the use of educational equipment and technologies, increased monitoring of student attendance and participation, and the permanent adoption of health safety protocols in schools.

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

One of the most relevant impacts of the pandemic on PIRLS 2021 was the impossibility of applying the field test. This had an especially significant effect since it was the first time Brazil participated in PIRLS.

The pandemic also impacted the preparatory processes for the administration, especially considering the conditions for contacts with schools, since most of them operated in a semiremote

^m The study was conducted by administering questionnaires to a nonprobabilistic convenience sample of 14,285 teachers from all 27 States. Data collection was carried out from April 30 to May 10, 2020. The objective of the study was to verify how public and private teachers were developing their activities.

ⁿ Law No. 14.276, of 2021 (available at http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2021/Lei/L14276.htm)

or remote way. Another important repercussion was in relation to the participation rate of schools and students in the main study.

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