



Higher Education in Brazil: Institutional Actions for the Retention of Students in Public and Private Sectors

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INTRODUCTION

This study describes an analysis of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic among different sectors and types of institutions in the Brazilian higher education system (BHES further). By describing the initiatives taken it aims at associating them to the institutional types of higher education (HE further) establishments and to the institutional logics that orient their

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actions. The broad research question addresses a key topic within the field of sociology of organisations: *how do the characteristics that differentiate institutions in the BHES inform their distinct institutional logics and embed institutional agency?* Using the institutional positioning approach (Fumasoli & Huisman, 2013), we used data from the 2019 Brazilian Higher Education Census (further HEC)¹ (INEP, 2020) to build a typology of institutions focusing on four important dimensions of organisational action: the educational profile, research involvement, structural characteristics of institutions, and social inclusion policies. Based on the concepts of institutional logics and embedded institutional agency, empirical narratives collected in documents from institutions and previous research were organised to make sense of otherwise disparate initiatives.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows. Section “[Expansion and Diversification in Brazilian Higher Education](#)” describes the Brazilian system of higher education, considering its recent expansion and diversification. Section “[Institutional Positioning Approach to Higher Education](#)” discusses the theoretical approaches to institutional logics in HE. Section “[The Typology of Institutions in BHES](#)” exploits the Brazilian HEC data set to build up a typology of institutions. Section “[Institutional types and their logics](#)” describes the different policies and actions taken by the HEIs during the pandemic providing analytical connections between institutional actions and policies and the typology built on Brazilian data. The last session comment on the limits and perspectives of this type of analysis.

EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION IN BRAZILIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The expansion of Brazilian HE in the last few decades followed a pattern also found in other countries: produced by diversification and institutional differentiation, it profoundly transformed its structure, including new models of institutions and types of learning, improving academic standards, and an increasingly diverse socioeconomic composition of students and professors.

The Brazilian HE has developed into a complex system of 2587 institutions (INEP, 2020), divided into public (institutions under control of the federal, the state, and the municipal governments) and private (non-profit and for-profit) sectors, which have various levels of autonomy depending on their academic organisation (universities, university centres, or

colleges). The private sector, which is composed mainly of small and medium colleges, accounts for 87% of institutions and concentrates on undergraduate courses in the areas of Business, Administration and Law, and Health and Welfare, especially in distance education. The most technologically demanding and expensive courses are generally provided by public institutions, which are predominantly large research universities. The public sector is tuition free, while the private sector charges tuition.

According to recent data (INEP, 2020), private HEIs account for 75% of the 8.0 million students, most of them (41.5%) attending for-profit institutions. Although enrolment in public HEIs showed a significant increase over the few decades, the expansion of the private sector was more pronounced: while the former grew by 80% between 1980 and 2000, and 120% between 2000 and 2014, the rates for the latter were 104% and 225%. In the 1990s, the expansion of the private sector occurred through the creation of small and medium-sized institutions, but since the 2000s there has been a strong pattern of acquisitions and mergers, led by large business groups including strong foreign capital participation (Sampaio, 2011, 2015; Corbucci et al., 2016; Carvalhaes et al., 2021) (Table 6.1).

The BHES offers several courses² in different fields of study and three types of diplomas or degrees: bachelor's degree, teacher training licence, and vocational degree. Each of these types of courses issues degrees,³ although these credentials are linked, in that order, to labour market opportunities of diminishing economic rewards and social esteem. The proportion of enrolments according to degree types reflects this scale of

Table 6.1 Evolution in the number of institutions, student enrolments, professors, and undergraduate courses in HE (1999–2019)

Year	HEIs		Enrolments		Courses		Teachers	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
1999	192	905	832,022	1,537,923	3494	5384	80,883	92,953
2004	224	1789	1,214,317	3,009,027	6262	12,382	95,800	183,258
2009	278	2100	1,523,864	4,430,157	9245	20,101	122,977	217,840
2014	201	2090	1,961,002	5,867,011	10,850	21,842	155,221	212,061
2019	302	2306	2,080,146	6,523,678	10,714	29,713	176,403	209,670

Source: HEC 1999–2019 available at: (<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/censo-da-educacao-superior>)

prestige and remuneration. Two-thirds of students preferred the first type over the 2000s. Enrolment in licentiate degrees has been falling slightly and the opposite is true for vocational courses which increased its share of total enrolments to 14%. Fields of study are also associated with different income levels (Santos et al., 2020).

The structure of BHES has two key features significantly associated with the socioeconomic profile of students: the high proportion of courses and enrolments in the night shift, and the presence of distance education. The evening/night tertiary courses are attended mostly by older students, who are generally full-time workers, whereas the day courses are those preferred by the middle and upper classes. Distance education courses, practically non-existent at the end of the century, assume increasing proportions, reaching 20% of total enrolments in 2019.

The Changing Profile of Higher Education Students in Brazil

Over the last few decades, the remarkable improvements in primary and secondary education completion in Brazil reduced the racial and economic disparities in education. Thus, the population of candidates to HE has increased both in number and in racial and socioeconomic diversity. Since 2003, public universities in Brazil adopted different formats of affirmative action⁴ and, for private institutions, the federal government implemented a nationwide scholarship programme, “University for All” (ProUni), and raised a federal student loans programme, the Student Financial Fund (FIES).

Partially because of these policies, students from the highest-income quintile had been reducing their participation in both private and public sectors since 2000. We use almost 30 years (1993–2019) of data from the National Household Sample Survey⁵ (PNAD) to sketch the profile of HE students at the moment they were hit by the pandemic. In 1993, almost 40% of Brazilian HE students were more than 24 years old. This proportion was larger yet in 2019 (44.7%). As expected, most students work: in 1993, 63.7% of HE students worked, but in 2019 this percentage dropped to 58%, probably due to the unemployment crisis in Brazil since 2013. The feminisation of HE is not exclusively Brazilian, and during the period in analysis (1993–2019), there was no significant variation, as women continue to comprise 56% of the university population.

If the age and gender profiles have changed little, the income and racial profiles of students modified significantly. In 1993, whites totalled 79.8%,

browns 16.4% and blacks 2.1%. Almost three decades later, these percentages are 50.4%, 36.6%, and 8.9%, respectively. The proportion of black women increased the most, going from 1.8% to 9.3%. Families with lower per capita income (up to one minimum wage) expanded their presence in HE to 32% in 2014.

Historically, the Afro-Brazilian population accumulates, along with prejudice and discrimination, socioeconomic disadvantages. The differences between the social profile of Afro-Brazilian and white students persist, but the first group significantly increased its presence in HE. The poorest and non-white populations grew more in the public than in the private sector. Students from the highest-income quintile ceased to be the majority in both private and public sectors and the white share in college enrolment decreased. It has been challenging for the “new students” to maintain their student life expenses and the processes of “affiliation to the university culture” (de Almeida, 2015; Andrews et al., 2017).

The expansion of the last decades has associated institutional differences with an unequal distribution of student social profiles in HE. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the entire BHES and reinforced the need for student retention strategies. Institutional differences and access to resources can be associated with different responses to the new situation. To analyse how diverse types of higher education institutions (HEIs) faced the pandemic, this study draws upon the literature on institutional diversification in HE, focusing on the logics that drives institutional action.

INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING APPROACH TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The institutional positioning approach was developed to cope with the diversification process in HE and the capability of institutions to shape beneficial relations with other actors in the system (Huisman et al., 2015; Fumasoli et al., 2020). Considering the various government actions and determinations, Fumasoli and Huisman (2013) emphasise the capacity for action and strategic response by HEIs. It is argued that the institutional positioning reflects the “intentions” or projects of the HEIs as well as their ability to deal with the environment and locate them in favourable niches. The conditions of the decision-making process are expressed in this dynamic relationship (Canhilal et al., 2016).

The pandemic posed huge challenges for all groups in Brazilian society. HEIs were urged to act not only to position themselves in a changing field, but also to ensure they will survive in such complex situations. The actions undertaken by these institutions are discussed as a balance between their capacity to intervene in their environment and the power and influence of public policies, and social and market pressures. Their decisions are viewed as an embedded agency, given the highly institutionalised settings where they act (Fumasoli & Huisman, 2013; Hüther & Krücken, 2016).

This analysis aims at showing that diverse institutional types are associated with the observance of specific logics in the actions taken by HEIs. As embedded actions, these initiatives are part and parcel of institutional identity (Frølich et al., 2013) and a key asset in the process of legitimation. Highly institutionalised universities, according to these authors, would be more able to use environmental resources, like social values. The institutional logics are defined as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 804). In the initial phase of this study, we use the conceptualisation that opposes two ideal-types of logics that would see HE as a social institution and HE as an industry (Gumport, 2000). These ideal-types are evident in mid-level analyses and can be defined as academic/professional and market logics respectively (Cai & Mountford, 2021).

The institutional logics perspective helps to explain how HEIs both enable and constrain action by incorporating macro structure, local culture, and human agency. In the Brazilian case, the notion of what the HES should be offers dimensions that allow for differentiating the actions of the public and private sectors, respectively referenced as academic/professional and market logics. The association between academic bias (Yancey, 2012) and patrimonialism (Sell, 2017) and between scientism (Stenmark, 2001) and modern professionalism (Larson, 1977) induces the development of important distinctions in the public sector (Barbosa, 2010; Schwartzman, 1987). The idea that the investment in human capital brings economic development justifies the expansion of vocational education (Castro, 2000) and fosters the values that allow connecting the societal and institutional levels.

THE TYPOLOGY OF INSTITUTIONS IN BHES

Drawing on this approach, we used the 2019 HEC data set to build a preliminary typology of HEIs focusing on the main institutional dimensions related to the strategic positioning of organisations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The HEC is the most complete set of information available to describe the institutional diversity in the BHES. The complementary tables for the graduate students allowed us to create indicators for the research involvement dimension, as described in the next section.

In line with most other research on institutional diversity in higher education (e.g., Huisman et al., 2015; Teixeira et al., 2012), we focus on key dimensions of the HE institutional fabric, related to the three missions of HEIs: teaching, research, and third mission. This conceptual choice stands in contrast with some studies on BHES that proposed typologies based on a very restricted set of variables, such as the sector and the size of the institutions (Schwartzman et al., 2021), in some cases referring to classifications of higher education systems quite different from the Brazilian one (Steiner, 2005, 2006).

For this analysis, we selected indicators that represent four dimensions: the educational profile, research involvement, structural characteristics of institutions, and social inclusion policies. Despite their limitations, these dimensions, and the respective indicators, account for the bulk of our analysis, enabling the selection of variables to describe the differences between large institutional types.

The educational profile characterises the level of the qualifications awarded and the offer of educational programmes, through two indicators: (i) degree structure and (ii) areas of study. The first was measured by the percentage of enrolments in each combination of academic degree and teaching modality (face-to-face or distance education) in each institution. The second was calculated by the percentage of enrolments in each of the ten aggregated areas of study: Applied Social Sciences, STEM, Law, Education, Engineering, Humanities and Languages, Medicine, Production, Health, and Welfare and Services. The areas of study emerge from the literature on institutional expansion and diversification, and horizontal stratification in HE (Knop & Collares, 2019; Vieira, 2021)

As proxies for involvement in research, we consider the percentage of professors with a doctorate and enrolments in *stricto sensu* postgraduate courses. Regarding the structural characteristics of HEIs, three indicators

were selected: (i) governance, measured through administrative dependence (public or private) and academic organisation (Faculty/University Centre or University/Federal Institutes of Technology IFET); (ii) size, calculated by both the number of employees and enrolments.

Finally, we included, as a proxy for the social inclusion policy, the percentage of students who receive some type of non-refundable financing or support (social, food, subsistence allowance, work allowance, teaching material, housing, and transport). All public HEIs implement many of these policies for retaining students, while in the private sector, a few HEIs offer these types of support.

Method and Analytical Strategy

The analysis of the typology of HEIs is based on Hierarchical Clustering on Principal Components (HCPC), which is a data mining method to identify groups of similar observations in a multivariate dataset. The HCPC approach allowed us to combine the three standard methods used in multivariate data analysis: multiple factor analysis, hierarchical clustering, and cluster partitioning (Husson et al., 2010). Multiple factor analysis is a multivariate data analysis method for summarising and visualising a complex data table in which individuals are described by several sets of variables (quantitative and/or qualitative) structured into groups (Pagès, 2002). Hierarchical grouping is performed using Ward's criterion on the selected principal components. Ward's criterion is used in hierarchical grouping because it is based on multidimensional variance as the principal component analysis.

The HCPC results point to the existence of *four* distinct clusters of HEIs (Fig. 6.1), built from two dimensions defined by the selected variables (Fig. 6.3 in the annexe) and named according to the main characteristics identified for each group.

The first cluster, in red, named "Small-sized, inclusive private colleges", consists of small-size private colleges and university centres (99.9%), which are spread through the Southeast (41.4%), Northeast (23.7%), and Midwest (11.7%) regions, and mainly concentrate on in-person bachelor's degrees (71.3%) and the low-cost and lucrative fields of applied social sciences (28.8%) and law (16.0%), presenting above-average percentage of students accessing non-reimbursable financing policies (56.9%).

The second cluster, in green, named "Small-sized, vocational-oriented public colleges", includes only small-sized public colleges and university

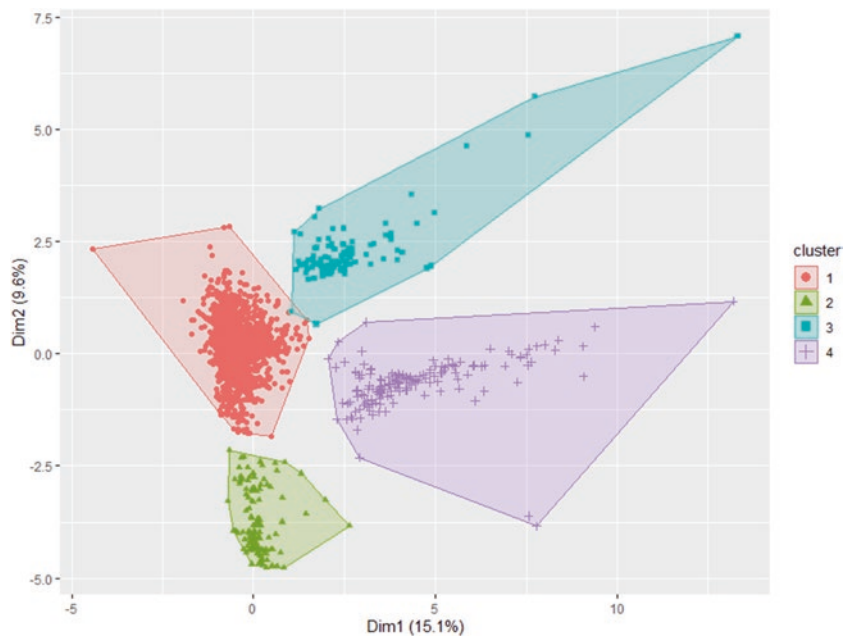


Fig. 6.1 Clusters from the HCPC analysis. (Source: Based on data from the Higher Education Census/Inep [2020])

centres, which largely concentrate on in-person technological degrees (62.8%) and STEM (25.9%) and have a slightly above-average proportion of professors with doctoral degrees (29.6%).

The third cluster, in blue, named “Large-sized private universities”, contained almost exclusively large-size private universities (94.7%), located mainly in the Southeast (51.6%) and South regions (33.7%), and with enrolments concentrated on in-person bachelor’s degrees (70.3%) and applied social sciences (25.7%), health and well-being (17.3%), and law (14.5%).

Finally, in cluster four, in purple, named “Large-sized, academic-oriented public universities”, we find public federal and state universities and IFETs (94.9%), distributed more evenly across regions, with a high percentage of professors with a doctoral degree (58.7%) and which present above-average proportions of enrolments in teacher training degrees (25.9%), fields of education (30.6%), STEM (17.7%), and engineering (14.3%).

The diversification of institutional types or categories is associated with differences in courses and with some levels of social inequality. The social profiles of students and their distribution in the BHES allow for the analysis of differences in the range of policies and institutional actions, and in their impacts. Men and whites are the majority in only one type (the Specialised Public Colleges), which have predominantly STEM courses. The social profiles distributed among the institutional types confirm that the distinctions in the typology can be associated with existing socioeconomic inequalities (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Enrolments by sex, colour/race, and age according to HEIs clusters (Brazil, 2019)

	<i>1 Small-sized, inclusive private colleges</i>	<i>2 Small-sized, vocational- oriented public colleges</i>	<i>3 Large-sized private universities</i>	<i>4 Large-sized, academic- oriented public universities</i>	<i>Total</i>
N	2207	129	95	156	2587
Institutions					
N	3,032,590	115,670	3,490,923	1,941,385	8,580,568
Enrolments					
Sex					
Female	58.8	40.1	59.7	52.1	57.4
Male	41.2	59.9	40.3	47.9	42.6
Colour/ race					
White	41.3	55.2	44.8	39.5	42.5
Black	6.7	8.1	6.1	9.6	7.1
Brown	33.2	22.0	28.0	33.7	31.0
Yellow	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.9	1.7
Indigenous	0.8	0.1	0.5	0.8	0.7
Age					
18–24 years	53.2	53.9	41.6	62.2	50.5
25–34 years	29.9	29.6	33.2	26.3	30.4
35–54 years	15.8	15.0	23.7	10.4	17.7
55–64 years	0.8	1.0	1.3	0.7	1.0
65 years PLUS_SPI	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1

Source: Higher Education Census/INEP (2020)

The Differentiation Among HEIs

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic opened up space for the expression of more profound differences both between and within public and private sectors. These differences can be sketched around the very notion of education and its purposes. Previous studies about the degrees granted by BHES indicate that credentials tend to be socially overvalued compared to the knowledge content acquired in the learning process. Holding a credential is, traditionally, more relevant than the actual knowledge supposedly attached to the learning trajectory. This patrimonialistic logic dominated when the country's HE system experienced its first expansion, in the 1960s. Thus, a new layer of private demand-driven small institutions expanded, catering to students from low-income families, less prepared to face the competitive entrance examinations that protected (and still protects) the public sector from a disruptive massification.

All colleges and universities, at first, opted to cancel all face-to-face classes, including labs and other learning experiences, trying to encourage social distancing and decelerate the transmission of the virus. The closure of educational institutions and the suspension of classes in Brazil were regulated by Ordinances n° 395, 343, 345, and 376/2020 of the federal government which authorised, on an exceptional basis, the replacement of classroom lessons by *emergency remote education*—ERE or *emergency remote teaching*—ERT (Souza et al., 2021). While the private institutions quickly deployed a strategy of ERE—in May 2020, 78% were able to offer remote education for their students—most public federal HEI began their online classes by August 2020 (Castioni et al., 2021). Most of the states' public HEIs (USP, Unicamp, Unesp, UEMG, UESC, UERS, UEL) managed to change to remote classes at almost the same time as private institutions did.

The available information allows for the comparison between clusters 1 and 3 (for the Private Sector) with 4 (Public Sector): small-sized, inclusive private colleges and large-sized private universities compared with large-sized, academic-oriented public universities, which include most of the students and institutions. The capacity and the promptness to pass from

class suspensions to remote classes differentiates institutions, even if they are in the same economic sector, were remarkable.

INSTITUTIONAL TYPES AND THEIR LOGICS

The pandemic created a common soil to embed institutional actions in public and private sectors of HE. In both cases, institutions tried hard to keep their students, following the premises in each sector. The institutional logics, as defined above, are the crucial factor in the shaping of strategies to cope with pandemics. The sense or function attributed to education allows connecting the initiatives to encompassing social values such as patrimonialism and professionalism. The literature indicates that models of HEIs vary according to administrative sectors or field of study, inducing patterns of action that can be more or less oriented to market demands or to the production of knowledge (Fumasoli & Huisman, 2013; Fumasoli et al., 2020; Buckner & Zapp, 2021). Two models emerge as a result of these patterns: one more vocational, oriented to prepare students for the job market; and the other is more academic, focused on research and theoretical advancement. The institutions' characteristics in clusters 1 and 3 allow their classification as establishments more oriented by the first model, while cluster four contains more academic institutions. The few institutions (1.35% of enrolments) in cluster two will be excluded from our analysis due to the absence of reliable information. This partial model of institutional types opposed traditional medium-size and new larger private establishments to public universities and federal institutes. The three clusters gathered 98.6% of students in 2019.

The institutional logics matrix in the public sector are complex, probably because more than economic or efficiency orientations, these institutions sustain their position on the academic and/or professional logics to get public legitimacy. Public universities are autonomous, but the levels of financial autonomy are diverse with many implications for conflict among actors. These institutions also play an important role in elite education. And the institutional actors, especially professors and staff, tried to guarantee their control over their work. Research and science are strong factors for legitimising their actions and can induce both resilience and change in HEIs (Balbachevsky & Kohtamäki, 2020).

In such a complex framework, it is possible to indicate two hypotheses that accounted for different responses among public HEIs. The first would be the presence of consolidated leadership and institutionalisation of the

decision process, as was the case of University of Campinas (Unicamp), São Paulo State University (Unesp), or University of São Paulo (USP). The second hypothesis is related to social values: traditionalism or patrimonialism, in the form of a strong academic bias, left the federal universities dominated by traditional professors and didactic methods, unable to accept or to deal with digital education. More research is needed to explain the state HEIs' responses. But their economic autonomy is a common trait that deserves better understanding as well as the higher academic and research density of state universities in the state of São Paulo.

The calendars and scope of activities demonstrate this cleavage in institutional logics in the public sector of HE. Since the nineteenth century, Brazilian HE delineated a dispute between "modern knowledge" (Schwartzman, 1987) and the ancient patrimonial forms of wisdom and education. The first universities, created as associations of old colleges, reproduced this duality of modern science and traditional "Pedagogy of cultivation" (Watts, 2019). Two exceptions are the USP (1933) and Unicamp (1964), conceived as universities, focused on the development of science and research along with education of high quality and professionalism. There are few exceptions among federal universities, but none had similar responses, probably due to their absence of financial autonomy. The universities controlled by the state of São Paulo represent the best of scientific production, patents registrations, international insertion, publishing, and graduate studies. Different perspectives persist inside the institutions, among knowledge areas, without challenging the dominion of the notion of the modern research university, strongly related to their financial autonomy (Balbachevsky & Kohtamäki, 2020). The public HEIs that have this autonomy proposed responses similar to the private ones.

As in the public sector, HEIs in the private sector show the multidimensionality of their institutional logics. Since private HEIs' funding depends largely on tuition fees, it was expected that they were under greater pressure to be responsive to the diverse needs of students (Teixeira et al., 2013), and adopt measures, such as reducing fees and implementing remote classes, aiming at ensuring that their clientele did not interrupt their studies. Following the prevailing orientation of valuing the formation of human capital, preparing qualified workers for all sectors of activity, these HEIs offer courses that are pedagogically effective and economically efficient. As far as cost control is an important variable in institutional continuity, the size and type of governance differentiate the ability of these HEIs to act. During the period of the pandemic, there was a remodelling

of the institutional ecosystem, reducing the number of small institutions and strengthening large private companies, capable of sustaining themselves for longer and with extensive experience in distance learning.

Actions in the Public Sector

All the public universities suspended classes as soon as the pandemic struck. In May 2020, 89% of public HEIs still kept the suspension of classes. Case studies (e.g., Knobel, 2021) indicate that three public universities, in the state of São Paulo, were working with all the activities online. The official academic calendars in many public state HEIs indicated that most of them managed to keep their activities, especially classes and research. The return of teaching activities was long and distinct in many ways for the federal HEIs. As indicated by Castioni et al. (2021), 69 Brazilian federal universities had to adapt themselves to the restriction period imposed by the worsening of the COVID-19 pandemic. All these institutions offered extension courses in the area of Health and Welfare, essential in this period, and most of them have been offering remote learning in the time of the pandemic (Table 6.3).

All federal universities offered students some type of support during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Three quarters of them advanced financial assistance to pay for Internet plans, while 46% provided chips for mobile data. Most institutions provided financial aid for the purchase of electronics, such as mobiles, tablets, and notebooks (55.5%). Focusing the adoption of virtual platforms to teaching, 90% of institutions used Moodle and Google Meet platforms.

According to Knobel (2021), Unicamp developed similar programmes and got 1.5 million individual donations. The university created more than 70 research groups on COVID and a taskforce to deal with fake news on scientific procedures, vaccines, and charlatanism that exploded in Brazil during the pandemic. This taskforce worked like a council that informed the public and helped the municipal and state authorities in the university area. Unicamp also widened scientific production, creating tests used in public health centres.

Actions in the Private Sector

In 2019, the private sector received 75.8% of enrolments in Brazilian HE. In 2020, the Chamber of Deputies issued a bill, by demand of private

Table 6.3 Beginning of the emergency remote education term at the Brazilian federal universities (2020–2021)

<i>Months</i>	<i>Brazilian federal universities</i>
March	UFMS
April	UNIFEI
June	UFLA
July	UFC; Unifesp*
August	UFRJ; UFMG; UFSC; UFRGS; UFES; UFRN; UFPE; UFU; UFGD; UFG; UFCA; UNILAB; UFR; UNIFESSPA; UTFPR; UNIVASF; UVV; UNB; UFSCar; UFCG; UFRR; UFCAT; UFRPE; UFPel; UFSB; UFCSPA; UFAP; UFVJM; UNIFAL; UFMG
September	UFF; UFBA; UFPR; UFMA; UFAM; UFPA; UFJF; UNILA; UFFS; UNIPAMPA; UFRRJ; UNIFAP; UFOB; UFRB; FURG; UFRSA; UFABC; UFSJ; UFRA; UFPB
October	UNIRIO; UFS; UFSM; UFAL; UFAC; UNIR; UFT
November	UFPI; UFTM; UFDP
December	UFJ
January (2021)	UFOP
February (2021)	UFOPA

Source: Data collected by the authors. *Unifesp implemented two dates for the beginning of the ERE (Unifesp, 2020)

HEIs, that created emergency scholarships for their students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus was to combat debts arising from economic difficulties. Students and organisations such as the National Student Union (UNE) also demanded public policies to support students in the private sector. The actions developed in private HEIs focused more on campaigns for COVID-19 awareness and prevention, discounts on tuition fees and financing. Financial aid took the form of stretching the time periods for loans, and postponing the deadlines, or reducing fees. Free access to equipment took a limited place in this sector. But one of the biggest universities (Estácio de Sá University—UNESA) made agreements with department stores so that students could buy their electronic equipment at reduced prices and with extended time for payments.

The experience of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) stands out in this scenario. Still, in March 2020, the institution sought to implement remote activities and conduct surveys to find

out any difficulties faced by students in monitoring activities during the suspension period of in-person activities. Consequently, The Digital Inclusion Aid was created to guarantee access to computers and/or data packages that met the academic needs of students. The granting of the benefit is subject to the availability of resources from a donation campaign launched by the Vice-Dean for Community Affairs, in conjunction with the Deans of diverse centres. Therefore, in the case of a lack of resources, the institution would prioritise poorer students, considering their monthly *per capita* income (Eisenberg et al., 2020). PUC-Rio is an elite institution, associated to the Catholic Church. Despite being part of private sector, it is not representative of the sector, either for its academic style or for its social inclusion work.

The Impact of COVID on Students According to Institutions

High rates of dropout are an endemic characteristic of Brazilian HE. As shown by INEP, in 2017, only a third of Brazilian students conclude their courses in due time, while in the UK, the proportion is more than double—72% (OECD/INEP). The chances of dropout vary according to field of study. Considering the top 20 most popular courses in both modalities—distance and face-to-face learning—dropout rates are about 10% higher in distance education, ranging from 52.10% in production-engineering to 33.51% in Pedagogy. In face-to-face learning dropouts range from 42.63% in courses of information systems to 20.51% in Dentistry (Table 6.4 in annexe).

High dropout rates are not only due to COVID-19, having multiple causes or factors. At least in part, they can be correlated to institutional actions. The distinction between public and private sectors in the offering of activities for students during the pandemic can be measured by the special data from IBGE, the PNAD Covid. Between July 2020 and November 2020, the proportion of students with extra-academic activities grew from 55.6% to 85.7%. On the other hand, students who had no extra-curricular activities offered by their institutions fell from 24.3% to 9.9% in the same period (Fig. 6.4 in the annex). The following figure, built upon the same data source, confirms that the availability of academic activities is distinct according to the institutional sector (Fig. 6.2).

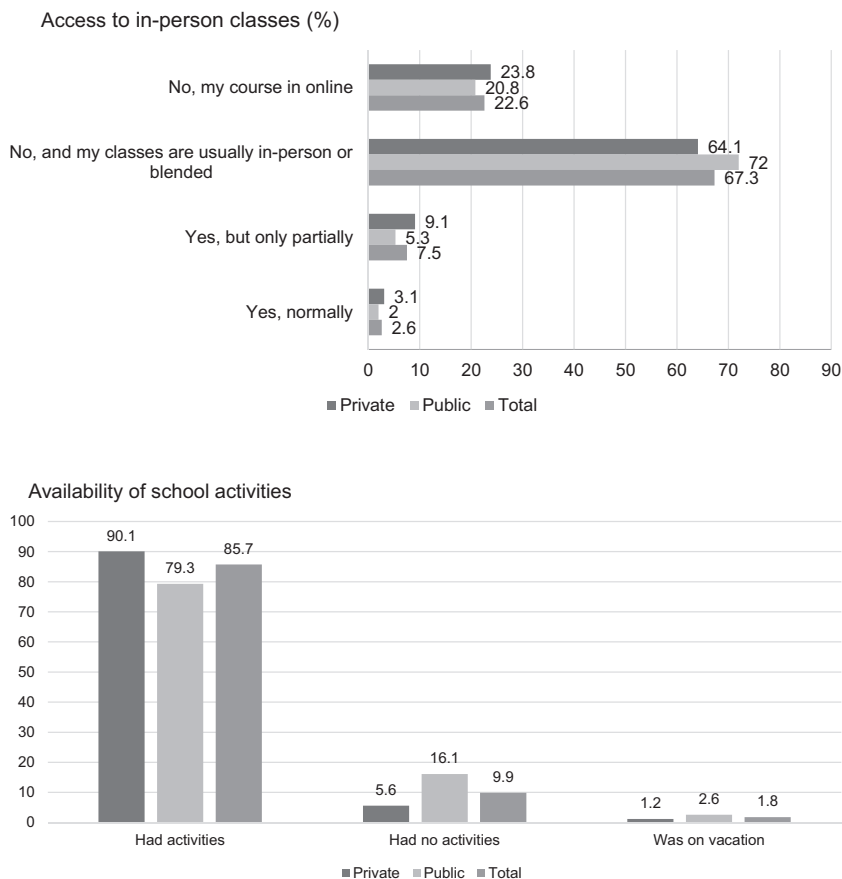


Fig. 6.2 Percentage of HE students, according to the availability of school activities and access to in-person classes, by college sector, November/2020. (Source: PNAD COVID (IBGE), November, 2020)

In November 2020, research showed that 16.3% of HE students quit their institutions. In the private sector, the main reason given was lack of money to pay fees; while in the public sector it was the precarious nature of remote classes that was most often cited (Silva et al., 2021). The private sector lost 10.1% (608,000) of its students in 2020.

The Institutional Logics and the Sense of Institutions' Initiatives

The major distinction among the two groups of institutions, Public and Private, is the decision to suspend classes or to keep teaching activities. To preserve teaching activities, the HEIs, experienced or reinforced distance education. With few exceptions on each side, private institutions preferred the second option, whereas public ones opted for suspending teaching activities.

In the beginning, the pandemic was supposed to end in a few weeks, two months at the latest. The suspension was viewed as a temporary interruption of teaching and research activities that could be somewhat easily retrieved. One of the main arguments that supported the interruption of the academic calendar in public HEIs was the supposed difficulties faced by poorer students in access and the quality of internet connections and of adequate equipment needed to participate actively in remote education. In addition to the historical rejection of remote learning in Brazil, the Public HEIs did not have much information about the students' living conditions and it took more time to implement remote learning compared to the private ones (ARRUDA, 2020).

With the continuity of the social distance requirements for a longer time, the HEIs found themselves making contingency plans. This involved the transition of most teaching activities to the remote modality. The Ministry of Education quickly authorised the readjustments in the academic calendar and the expansion of remote activities. Nonetheless, the process of change in public universities was quite differentiated and particularly slow in some cases. This ministerial regulation was one of the few pieces of COVID-19 pandemic proclamations issued by the federal government. More than establishing new rules for HEIs, this authorisation worked as a liberation from the ministerial supervision on them. This was especially true for the majority of private institutions.

As the pandemic continued to impose social distancing, the difference between the two sectors shows up: at the beginning of May 2020, around 89.4% of federal universities had their teaching activities suspended, whereas research, extension, and administrative activities continued, where possible, remotely. Additionally, new research and extension projects related to the pandemic were promoted or intensified by public universities. All federal universities offered support to students. And most of them used the platforms for teaching and learning activities. Several public federal universities have offered qualification programmes in digital

technologies for teachers. UFRJ proposed psycho-social support for teachers and students.

According to a survey released by the Brazilian Association of Higher Education Maintaining Institutions (ABMES, 2021), 78% of private HEIs kept classes through digital means and 22% of them chose to suspend classes. At the same time, in the private sector, professors were dismissed or had a reduction in the workload and wages. Many smaller private institutions closed, due to economic difficulties associated with student debt. But, as in the public sector, there were private institutions that were prominent examples of policies for digital inclusion (PUC-Rio) and partnerships with big retailers to facilitate the acquisition of equipment by students (UNESA).

The initiatives developed by institutions of the private sector can be seen as a quest for survival, oriented by economic logics and based on their historical knowledge and experience with distance or remote education. In the first place, the ability to use and quickly mobilise digital technologies in education activities was decisive. The already mentioned 2019-CHE showed that the private sector concentrated 93.6% of undergraduate online courses enrolments. In the context of the pandemic, the dominion of this resource was crucial to empower private institutions and was largely explored. On the economic front, the private sector asked the congress to loosen the rules and conditions for students' loans and got it.

Considering scientific recommendations, public universities suspended all activities, except those related to health care as soon as the pandemic was declared by World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020. Two weeks later, the differences began to show. All the federal universities went on with classes suspended until August 2020, while the State of São Paulo universities began to ERE, including undergraduate courses.

The panorama of public universities is very diversified. Nevertheless, connecting and organising information about the institutions allow for the sketch of two poles, opposing marks of patrimonialism and the pedagogy of cultivation (Prates & Barbosa, 2015) in most of the federal HEIs, and those associated with norms produced by science as a nested institution (Balachevsky & Kohtamäki, 2020) and financial autonomy.

Evidence of patrimonial values would be the sharp preference for courses with a general diploma (bachelor), probably more associated with the credential than the knowledge in the area. Courses oriented to preparing well-qualified teachers, desperately needed in the country, are relegated to the less valued or important parties of HES (Brock & Schwartzman,

2005). The expansion of public institutions was conditioned to the opening of these courses and federal universities offered them mainly for the “new students” that work during the day and study in the evening. The persistence of islands of high-quality scientific research and graduate studies amongst federal universities indicates that science is needed as means of legitimation for all institutions, even the more traditional ones (Schwartzman, 2011). Nonetheless, the “Pedagogy of Cultivation” would be the dominant orientation, strongly opposed to technical or vocational studies, seen as mere training, deprived of humanistic traits of “true” education (Barbosa, 2010, 2012).

Actions like improving loan conditions or reducing fees are easily associated with institutional logics in the private sector. The pressures to cut costs hit all these institutions, both the for-profit ones and the non-profit ones. There are cases of for-profit universities helping students with equipment for digital classes and cases of non-profit ones that developed social and psychological assistance for their students. In any case, these actions fit the institutional logics of keeping students able to pay the fees or to stay enrolled to get the public fellowships. The institutions in the first cluster, smaller traditional colleges, were more compelled by economic logics. Some of them had closed and others had fired professors. Those in the third group were able to stay and resist the new situation, especially because they are larger for-profit institutions.

In the private sector, the decision to enter immediately into remote education was oriented by their experience and the economic pressures, being adequate to their institutional logics, that combine professionalism and managerialism. The same can be said of the public sector: the institutions in the scientific/professional pole reinforced their links to science and the concern with the continuity of learning. They profit from their institutional cohesion expressed in strong presidencies/rectorates acting to organise diverse actions for the improvement of learning in such conditions and economic and psycho-social assistance. On the other side, actions were taken in order to preserve the integrity of education, refusing as much as possible, distance education. This refusal expresses the idea that education must be presential to allow for the adequate socialisation supposed to be granted at university. All other actions related to economic and social attention are part of the diverse permanence policies developed by Brazilian public universities in the last decade (Borges & Honorato, 2020; Dias et al., 2020).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The typology built needs more tests and refinements to aggregate dimensions like knowledge area and to specify the functions and effects of distance education. Theoretical contributions and new data can advance the analysis of the role of managerial or scientific leadership and the rapport to the sociocultural context, propitiating a better understanding of the paradox of the embedded agency (Cai & Mountford, 2021). Improving the comprehension of the associations among institutional types and social trajectories of graduates contributes to the study of inequalities in many countries. Enhancing the analytical possibilities of the typology allows for comparisons among similar societies or groups of countries. Studies on the BRICS and Latin America provide interesting examples (M.-L. Barbosa & Dwyer, 2016; Pires et al., 2020; M. L. Barbosa et al., 2018; Paul et al., 2019).

COVID-19 challenged not only the institutional models of HE but also the comprehension of the role and the sense socially ascribed to HE. The politicisation of science and vaccine research highlighted the role of HE and the importance of skilled workers, especially in the areas of health and education. Researchers and university professors appeared daily in the media, with great approval, legitimising the HEIs. If the pandemic seems to have deepened old inequalities, maybe the initiatives taken by HEIs allow figuring new dynamics and rules that could improve the openness of education systems (Salmi, 2020).

The different institutional logics that coexist in the Brazilian HES are indications of the disputes about which HE the country wants or needs, for whom it should be delivered, with what kind of results and returns. Should the answer be in accordance with the demands of students and employers for a more technically oriented education, vocational education would be the ideal one. But the scientific, professional, and democratic university stands for the modern ideal of HE. The development of enhanced teaching methods, the incorporation of learning technologies, the improvement of extension/third mission, amplifying the offering of programmes, with many insertions into the community, and the advancement of research and science popularisation are dimensions of university work that the pandemic highlighted. These trends are similar worldwide (Salmi, 2020) but our analysis draws attention to the dimensions of inclusiveness with quality and of governance with financial autonomy. Will the improvement in technologies and teaching methods for distance education be enough to cope with the deficits, and durable inequalities in the

BHES? Women, Afro-Brazilian and poor students, and professors faced the more challenging situations, and it is not yet clear if the post-pandemic world will favour them. On another dimension, will the HEI be able to establish governance forms in a context of financial restrictions? Maybe the post-pandemic university is not more of the same. Maybe actors learned from their experience and will be able to create a more scientific, more professional, and more inclusive higher education.

ANNEXE

Table 6.4 Higher education dropout by courses in distance and in-person learning

<i>HE dropout rates by courses 2015–2019 (distance learning)</i>		<i>HE dropout rates by courses 2015–2019 (in-person learning)</i>	
<i>Courses (Top 20 most popular courses)</i>	<i>Rates (%)</i>	<i>Courses (Top 20 most popular courses)</i>	<i>Rates (%)</i>
Production engineering	52.10	Information systems (ICTs)	42.63
Administration	51.11	Production engineering	38.37
Commercial management	50.00	Marketing and advertising	37.97
Social work	49.90	Personnel management	37.52
Accounting	49.55	Administration	37.21
Information technology	49.33	Electrical engineering	35.72
administration			
Marketing	48.34	Mechanical engineering	35.36
Logistic management	48.09	Civil engineering	34.66
Information systems (ICTs)	47.47	Physiotherapy	33.86
Financial management	47.08	Teacher training—physical	33.49
		training	
Teacher training—history	46.90	Nutrition	32.67
Business administration	46.21	Physical training (sports)	32.54
Teacher training—Portuguese	46.12	Accounting	32.47
Environmental management	44.68	Nursing	32.21
Teacher training—geography	44.64	Architectural urban design and	32.06
		planning	
Personnel management	43.80	Psychology	30.28
public management	43.69	Pharmacy	30.15
Teacher training—mathematics	42.90	Law	29.87
Teacher training—physical	38.67	Pedagogy	29.73
training			
Pedagogy	33.51	Odontology	20.51

Source: Trajectory indicators per graduate course 2015–2019 (INEP, 2020)

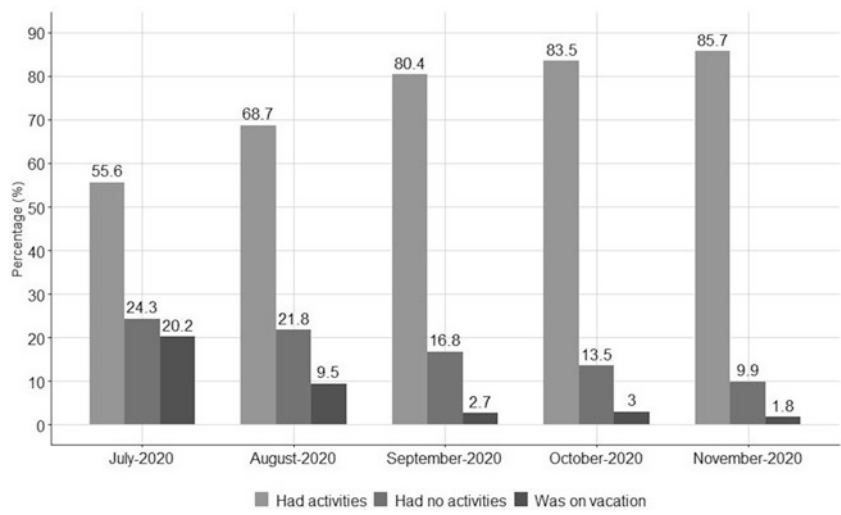


Fig. 6.3 Percentage of HE students, according to the availability of school activities, July–November/2020. (Source: PNAD COVID (IBGE), July–November/2020)

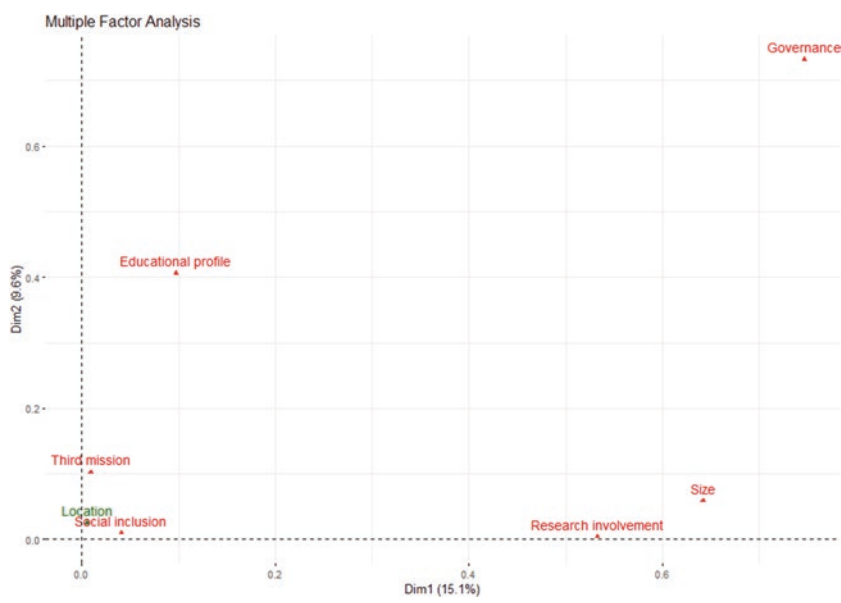


Fig. 6.4 Clusters identified in the HCPC analysis. (Source: Own elaboration)

NOTES

1. The Brazilian HEC, carried out annually by INEP [National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira, at the Ministry of Education], is the most complete research instrument in Brazil on higher education institutions (HEI). The Census collects information about the infrastructure of HEIs, vacancies offered, candidates, enrolments, freshmen, graduates, and professors, in different forms of academic organisation and administrative category (<https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/pesquisas-estatisticas-e-indicadores/censo-da-educacao-superior>).
2. A course is the series of studies that a person must complete in order to obtain a degree and thus be able to practice a certain profession.
3. Undergraduate courses are divided into bachelor's, licentiate, and vocational courses. The "licenciatura" is a model of course aimed at training teachers, and the curriculum includes most of the bachelor's subjects plus specific pedagogy courses. The higher vocational course has a shorter format than a bachelor or a licentiate, being more technical and less theoretical. Available at <https://www.significados.com.br/graduacao/>, accessed on January 12, 2022.
4. In Brazil the affirmative action in HE in the public sector is a combination of social quotas (high school graduates from public school and/or low income) and/or racial (black, brown, and indigenous people) quotas.
5. The survey is conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), a federal institution that provides official data and information about the country.

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