

KEY CHALLENGES IN BRAZILIAN AND CHINESE EDUCATION TO IMPLEMENT THE UN'S 2030 AGENDA

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Summary

The essay examines how China and Brazil are working toward the UN's 2030 Agenda in education. Both nations have made progress in integrating SDGs into their education systems but face challenges in achieving balanced coverage across all disciplines. China has incorporated SDGs into various education levels but needs to emphasize underrepresented areas like gender equality and responsible consumption. Brazil struggles with regional disparities and underinvestment but shows potential with renewed educational focus. The essay suggests both countries should adopt interdisciplinary teaching, enhance cooperation, and create better frameworks to align education with SDGs and boost global sustainable development.

1. Educational Challenges in the Global South: Contextualizing China and Brazil

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda by the United Nations Member States in 2015, which includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), significant progress has been made across many regions, though some challenges persist. The COVID-19 pandemic has added additional strain, but research suggests that the pace of progress is often influenced by the availability of strong leadership to coordinate responses at national, regional, and global levels.

In Brazil, while challenges related to access to quality education and corruption persist, education remains a vital solution to combating these issues. It is important to consider not only the inverse relationship between education and corruption but also the broader systemic changes

required to create lasting improvements. Despite these challenges, the country continues to show potential, leveraging its natural resources and geographic position to work toward solutions.

Similarly, China has made significant strides in advancing education and sustainable development. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring equitable access across its diverse regions and aligning its educational policies more closely with the SDGs. The country's progress has been substantial, but like Brazil, it faces the need for further refinement of its educational strategies to meet global standards.

Despite the historical and structural challenges both Brazil and China face, the role of education as a transformative force in promoting sustainable development cannot be overstated. While socio-economic barriers remain in both countries, opportunities for growth and improvement exist, particularly through enhanced educational policies and greater alignment with the SDGs. This study aims to provide insights into the practical solutions and strategies that can help bridge the gaps and promote a more inclusive and sustainable future for both Brazil and China.

2. China's Education and the UN's 2030 Agenda: Current Trends and Challenges

China's approach to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development involves addressing inequality, enhancing environmental policies, and reforming education to achieve integrated sustainable development. China's education policy aligns in part with the UN's SDGs, showing progress in some areas, but also highlighting significant challenges that need to be addressed.

Efforts to achieve SDG 4.2, which focuses on equal access to quality preprimary education, face challenges in cities like Nanjing due to uneven resource distribution. Around 8% of children still struggle to access quality preprimary education, indicating that there is considerable room for improvement.

China's curricula from primary through high school have increasingly integrated SDGs, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). However, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) are less emphasized, suggesting uneven integration across various subjects.

In higher education, progress has been made in aligning policies with sustainable development, covering all four dimensions of sustainability. However, the integration of SDGs into management disciplines remains limited, with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) being the most prominently featured.

Despite these advancements, there are notable challenges and areas for improvement. One key issue is the lack of integration of SDG Target 4.7, which focuses on education for sustainable development, in higher education policies. Students face barriers such as a narrow range of topics and ineffective teaching methods, signaling the need for a more comprehensive approach to embedding sustainability into academic curricula.

Moreover, regional disparities play a significant role in higher education attainment in China. Economic and social factors positively influence education in central and western regions, but environmental sustainability has a negative effect in the Western region, indicating that regional imbalances need to be addressed for a more equitable educational system.

3. Brazil's Education and the UN's 2030 Agenda: Progress and Obstacles¹

As for the Brazilian education system, it is worth analyzing its legal framework, with a focus on Brazilian Constitution and Law No. 9,394, dated December 20, 1996. The former establishes in Article 205 that education, being a right for all and a duty of the State and the family, shall be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming the full development

¹ This session is extracted from the article Bahia, T. (2021) (see References).

of each citizen². In turn, the latter is a specific law that provides the national guidelines and bases of Brazilian education, embracing several topics from elementary to higher education.

In addition, Law No. 13,844, dated June 18, 2019, which repealed Law No. 13,502, dated November 1st, 2017, establishes the competences of the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), in Article 33, conferring to this federal agency a systemic action in the sector. Among other specific areas, MEC plays a pivotal role in the national education policy, educational evaluation, and financial assistance. Its sole paragraph also allows the possibility of partnerships between MEC and “civil and military institutions that have successful experiences in education”.³

Turning to the overcomes before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the report published by the Brazilian Center for Management and Strategic Studies (*Centro de Gestão e Estudos Estratégicos – CGEE*) in 2016 demonstrates the expansion of higher education over the years. In 1996, over 3,000 people earned a doctorate degree, while in 2014 this number increased to 16,729 students — a growth of 486.2%. Likewise, the number of master’s degrees also increased from 10,482 to 50,206 over the same period (from 1996 to 2014).

However, analyzing the investments in Brazilian education over the past few years, they are below the target of 7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2019 and 10% by 2024, as

² Free translation: “Article 205. Education, which is the right of all and duty of the State and of the family, shall be promoted and fostered with the cooperation of society, with a view to the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work.” (Brazilian Constitution and Law No. 9,394)

³ Free translation: “Article 33. The following areas of competence of the Ministry of Education are:

I - national education policy;

II - early childhood education;

III - education in general, including elementary education, secondary education, higher education, youth and adult education, professional education, special education, and distance education, except for military education;

IV - educational evaluation, information, and research;

V - university research and extension;

VI - teaching; and

VII - financial assistance to needy families for the schooling of their children or dependents.

Single paragraph. In order to fulfill its responsibilities, the Ministry of Education may establish partnerships with civil and military institutions that have successful experiences in education.” (Brazilian Law No. 13,844, dated June 18, 2019)

established in the Educational National Plan (Target 20, Annex, Law No. 13,005, dated June 25, 2014). The total (direct and indirect) investment in education in 2020 was equivalent to 4.6% of the GDP, while in 2017 it increased to 6,3%.⁴ In interpreting this numbers, it is worthwhile noting that part of this increasing resources is explained by the inefficiency of a system that sustains a vicious circle of mandatory spending (Moreira et al. 2020).

Between 2014 and 2018, the Brazilian government significantly reduced investments in education, science, and technology, with cuts from BRL 11.3 billion to BRL 4.9 billion (a 56% reduction). In 2020, the Ministry of Education (MEC) presented the lowest investment in basic education since 2010, and the cuts for 2021 were 27% compared to the previous year. However, with the change in government, education investment has been redirected towards progressive development, though further improvements are needed to align Brazil's education system with international standards, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

4. Concluding Insights: Bridging Gaps and Advancing Educational Goals in China and Brazil

The integration of the SDGs into educational systems is crucial for achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. Both China and Brazil have made progress in embedding SDGs within their educational frameworks. However, significant gaps remain in ensuring balanced integration across all disciplines, particularly in areas like the Arts and gender equality.

Brazil also faces challenges in aligning its education system with the SDGs, with regional disparities and insufficient investment impacting the overall quality of education. Despite these

⁴ Source: National Institute of Applied Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Aplicadas Anísio Teixeira– INEP). Accessed August 10, 2021. <https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/acesso-a-informacao/dados-abertos/indicadores-educacionais/indicadores-financeiros-educacionais>.

challenges, the recent change in government has seen a renewed focus on educational investment, which could help move the country closer to achieving the SDGs.

In China, SDGs have been incorporated into primary, secondary, and higher education, especially in subjects such as Physical Education and Health. However, SDGs like Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Responsible Consumption (SDG 12) are underrepresented. Strengthening the coverage of SDGs in these areas will help promote a more comprehensive approach to sustainability education.

Moreover, China has shown significant advances in its strategy for the internationalization of education, which places Chinese universities higher in global rankings every year. Brazil should follow in its footsteps, as the internationalization of education is one of the pillars of development in this sector. In a globalized world, scientific exchange is a key element for a more equal world, where nations work together to build a better future for future generations.

In higher education, both China and Brazil have implemented various initiatives to promote SDG awareness. However, barriers such as limited course offerings and ineffective pedagogies continue to impede full integration. Overcoming these challenges will require developing more engaging and comprehensive educational frameworks.

To accelerate progress, both countries should focus on fostering interdisciplinary teaching methods, enhancing stakeholder cooperation, and creating structured frameworks that integrate SDGs more effectively. By addressing these areas, China and Brazil can advance educational goals and contribute more significantly to global sustainable development.

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