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Produção de conhecimento sobre o analfabetismo funcional e as desigualdades sociais no Brasil

Production of knowledge about functional illiteracy and social inequalities in Brazil

Producción de conocimiento sobre analfabetismo funcional y desigualdades sociales en Brasil



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Resumo: Este artigo apresenta parte dos resultados do Trabalho de Conclusão do Curso (TCC), de Pedagogia, da Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal de Goiás, que teve por título, “O analfabetismo funcional e as

desigualdades sociais no Brasil". A pesquisa objetivou identificar as implicações entre o analfabetismo funcional e as desigualdades sociais no Brasil, adotando como metodologia a abordagem qualitativa do tipo exploratória e de estudo bibliográfico. Os estudos mapeados e analisados propiciaram refletir as repercussões do analfabetismo funcional e sua relação com as desigualdades sociais no país.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Analfabetismo. Desigualdades.

Abstract: This article presents part of the results of the Pedagogy Course Completion Work (TCC), of the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Goiás, titled "Functional Illiteracy and social inequalities in Brazil". The research aims to identify the implications between functional illiteracy and social inequalities in Brazil, adopting the exploratory qualitative approach and bibliographical study. The mapped and analyzed studies allowed reflection on the repercussions of functional illiteracy and its relationship with social inequalities in the country.

Keywords: Education. Illiteracy. Inequalities.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta parte de los resultados del Trabajo de Finalización de Curso (TCC), de Pedagogía, de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Federal de Goiás, que tuvo por título "Analfabetismo funcional y desigualdades sociales en Brasil". La investigación tuvo como objetivo identificar las implicaciones entre el analfabetismo funcional y las desigualdades sociales en Brasil, adoptando como metodología el enfoque cualitativo de tipo exploratorio y de estudio bibliográfico. Los estudios mapeados y analizados permitieron reflexionar sobre las repercusiones del analfabetismo funcional y su relación con las desigualdades sociales en el país.

Palabras clave: Educación. Analfabetismo. Desigualdades.

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Introduction

This research, developed from 2022 to 2023, presents mapping results about functional illiteracy studies and social inequality in Brazil, produced in two digital collection repositories, the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations [*Biblioteca Digital Nacional de Teses e Dissertações*, BDTD] and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).¹

The bibliographical survey shows that the research objects, functional illiteracy and social inequalities, are of interest in other fields beyond Education. Illiteracy and inequality are prominent themes that persist as unresolved and outdated issues. Thus, critical discussions hardly approach the relationship between functional illiteracy and social inequalities in Brazil, considering their connection and aftereffects.

Foremost, this research understands functional illiteracy as an educational process failure because functionally illiterate people are citizens whose literacy process was frustrated by external and internal school aspects (AÇÃO EDUCATIVA E INSTITUTO PAULO MONTENEGRO, 2018, p. 4)

¹ CAPES is a Foundation within the Ministry of Education in Brazil whose central purpose is to coordinate efforts to improve the quality of Brazil's faculty and staff in higher education through grant programs. CAPES is particularly concerned with the training of Doctoral candidates, Pre-doctoral short-term researchers, and Post-doctoral scholars. (Source: Institute of International Education - IIE)

The National Institute for Educational Research and Studies - INEP (BRAZIL, INEP, p. 9, our emphasis) states that “[...] the literate individual is not the one who dominates only reading and writing groundwork and/or some numeric concepts, but the one who is capable of using written language and mathematical concepts in different contexts [...]”. Therefore, the functional literacy concept goes beyond general and superficial reading and writing, encompassing use and social feature (SOARES, 2020).

In Brazil, several governments promote programs and campaigns to fight illiteracy, considered a deep-rooted issue in the country (DINIZ, MACHADO, MOURA, 2014. p; 643, our emphasis), and the inequalities “[...] a national shame, a stain and expression of our backwardness [...]” (ARROYO, 2010, p. 1382, our emphasis). The inequalities, according to Arroyo (2010), are reproduced due to “[...] patterns of cumulative income and land, family farming destruction, immigration increase, a squash of precarious dwelling, informal jobs, survival at its limit” (ARROYO, 2010, p. 1393, our emphasis). Thus, the following research conceives functional illiteracy and inequalities as historical factors in constant reproduction and maintenance.

This paper is organized into two sections besides the introduction, which presents the research theme and purpose. To start “Research Methodology and Corpus” describes the bibliographic survey executed, exposes the results acquired, and reflects on the obtained data. Furthermore, “Analysis, discussion, and results” approaches the selected research appraisal, observing the focus, thematic trends, and how the papers discuss

functional literacy and inequalities in Brazil. Lastly, the final considerations section exhibits essential deliberations on functional illiteracy, the country's social inequality, and its connection.

Research methodology and corpus

The survey required a specific time frame. Initially, this bibliographical and qualitative study encompassed 2014 to 2021. However, due to the limited number of findings, the time frame was extended to include papers dating back to 1998 (considering the earliest publication) until 2021. The survey used descriptors from both repositories, as follows: "Functional illiteracy" and "social inequalities", "functional illiteracy" and "inequalities"; "illiteracy" and "social inequalities" and, finally, "illiteracy" and "inequalities".

Initially, the survey employed the descriptors "Functional illiteracy" and "social inequalities" as the research focus. However, due to a limited number of papers, additional descriptors were developed and utilized. The research encompassed 1,069 papers, including theses, dissertations, and articles, out of which only 21 were selected.

The selection considered the proximity and connection to the theme and area of study through the title, which is the first contact with the research. Subsequently, the survey considered abstract analytical reading, introductions, final considerations, and the paper per se.

In the BDTD repository (National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations), out of the total number of works (137), 12 theses and dissertations were selected, leaving 125 papers excluded from the selection based on their presumed proximity and relevance to the research topic. Upon categorizing the papers by areas of knowledge, the highest quantity was found in the health field, with 48 pieces, followed by the education field, with 30 theses and dissertations. After, the selected academic papers underwent analysis to assess their approach to the knowledge objects "functional illiteracy" and "social inequalities," determining their relevance and thematic focus. However, among the 12 selected papers, two were of moderate significance, and ten had low relevance based on their connection to the theme and study objects.

At the CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) repository, 932 papers were found, including articles, reviews, and congress reports. The categorization of pieces per field highlights the breadth of research directed at the educational field (181), with little quantitative difference compared to the health field (176). It is important to emphasize that more than 30 areas approach the object of study. Among the ten pieces selected, all were classified with low relevance considering the criteria of thematic proximity, approach to the object of study, and how the discussion about their connection.

In general, until the date of research, 1069 were found in both digital collection repositories, with articles, reviews, congress reports, dissertations, and theses specified below:

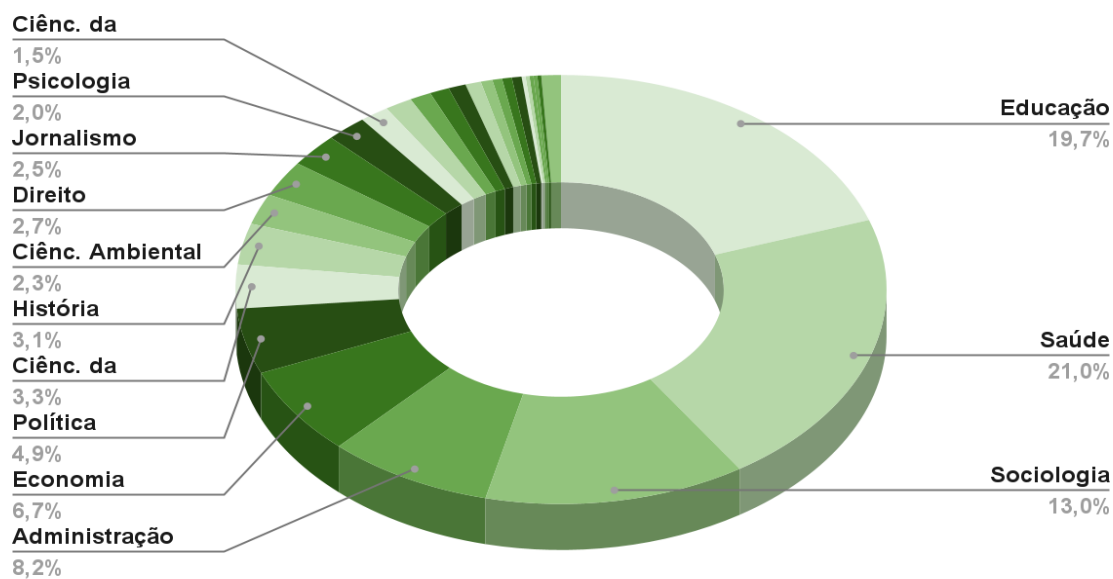
Chart 1 – Classification of found and selected papers

Type of piece	Quantity	Selected pieces
Articles	923	10
Reviews	7	0
Congress reports	2	0
Theses	46	2
Dissertations	91	9
Total	1.069	21

Source: Souza (2023, p. 36), *our translation*.

After subtracting the selected theses and dissertations from the total, there were 1,048 excluded pieces, considering their proximity and thematic relevance. Due to the high number of non-selected research, it was necessary to investigate and justify the excluded pieces. Thus, one can observe the diverse knowledge areas that have studied functional illiteracy, social inequalities, their approach to these study objects, and their relationship. The graph below summarizes the data and promotes understanding of knowledge areas' scope.

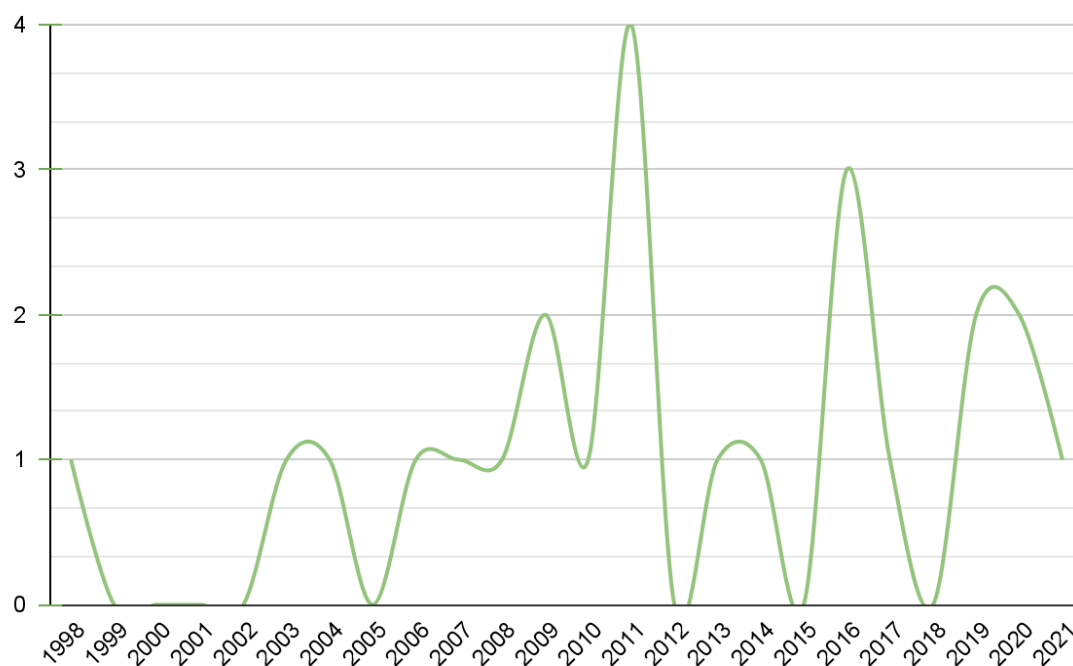
Graph 1 - Paper's area of knowledge



Source: Souza (2023, p. 37).

The survey below about the year of publication of the selected pieces indicates 2011 as the period when more research on the theme was executed, with four papers, followed by 2016 and 2020.

Graph 2 – Year of publication



Source: Souza (2023, p. 37).

The data shown regarding research coverage by region in Brazil highlights the predominance of research in the country's Southern territory, followed by the Southeast in second, and then the Northeast. Research is scarce in Brazil's North and Central-West, with 0 (zero) research on this theme.

The data in the table below presents the keywords mentioned more than once in the 21 selected works and enabled the construction of the word cloud above.

Chart 2 - Most repeated keywords quantitative on the papers chosen

General division	
Keywords	Quantity
Education	8
Inequalities, illiteracy, literacy	5
Youth and Adult Education (EJA) ²	4
Public policies, educational inequalities	3
Citizenship, schooling, poverty, IDEB ³ , development	2

Source: Souza (2023, p. 39). *Our translation.*

Keyword examination plays a crucial role in scientific research. As highlighted by Garcia, Gattaz C., and Gattaz N. (2019, p. 6), "keyword selection aims at efficient retrieval of the content of a text by readers. Additionally, as vital tools for effective indexing in databases, keywords serve as gateways to access the text" (*our translation*). Consequently, as affirmed by the authors, the study of keywords enhances the explanatory capacity of scientific texts.

² EJA (Education for Youth and Adults) results from the "Brasil Alfabetizado" program, which aims to promote literacy among individuals of all ages. Specifically, EJA targets adults and young people who have not completed their formal education or obtained certification at the elementary and secondary levels.

³ The IDEB (Index of Basic Education Development) is a vital educational indicator in Brazilian Basic Education, evaluating students' proficiency in Portuguese and Mathematics and passing rates. It assists in monitoring, evaluating, and supporting the planning of educational policies in the country.

Analysis/discussion and results

After a selection of articles, dissertations, and theses through a deliberate search process, an in-depth analysis was carried out to comprehend the concepts and relationships between functional illiteracy and social inequalities in the context of Brazil. This analysis of the selected scholarly works led to the identification of nine distinct tendencies. The following board exposes the thematic focus per paper and in general.

Board 1 - Papers' thematic tendencies

Thematic focus ⁴	
	Inequalities; illiteracy; literacy; human capital; external evaluation; education and work; access democratization; academic failure; and the teaching-learning process.
Inequalities	"Os sistemas de ensino baiano e mineiro: uma análise das desigualdades regionais utilizando indicadores escolares 2007-2009" (COSTA, 2011); "Índices educacionais como preditores da proficiência em ciências: um estudo multinível" (GUSMÃO, 2011); "Evolution and inequality in Brazilian education" (CASTRO, 2009); "LITERACY: EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT" (SILVA, AZEVEDO, 2017); "EDUCATIONAL SCENARIOS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: REFLECTIONS ON DIFFERENCES AND PERFORMANCES" (SABBI, ROSA, GASCÓN, 2020); "FIGHTING STRATEGIES TO SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN NETWORK HALL OF SÃO JOSÉ" (RAMOS, CARMINATI, 2016);
Illiteracy	"Adults alphabetization in the learners perspective: personal and social experiences" (GARCIA, 2006); "Illiteracy: general history and state of the phenomenon in the second decade of the 21st century. A case study in Jundiá (SP)" (OLIVEIRA, 2021); "Desigualdades Raciais na Incidência de Analfabetismo no Seio da População Brasileira: Uma Leitura Empírica Baseada nos Indicadores do Censo 2000" (PAIXÃO, 2000); "THE CHALLENGES OF EJA IN THE LITERACY PROCESS: A STUDY CASE OF TRÊS LAGOAS-MS" (DEFACCI, RIBEIRO, 2016);

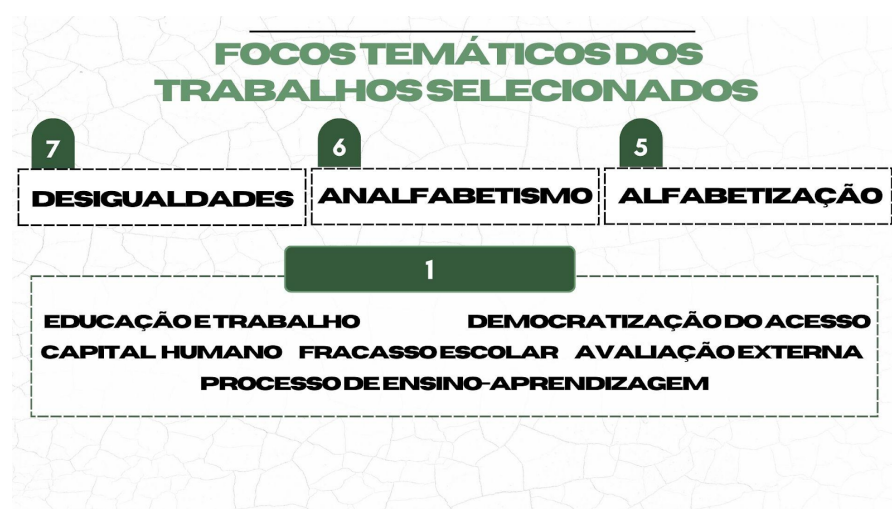
⁴ Papers with no English title kept their original title.

	“Velhice e analfabetismo, uma relação paradoxal: a exclusão educacional em contextos rurais da região nordeste” (PERES, 2011);
Literacy	“Análise da implementação do Projeto Cidadão Nota Dez em Minas Gerais” (CERQUEIRA, 2008); “Cidadania, emancipação e imaginário social: Um estudo sobre as políticas sociais para a alfabetização de jovens e adultos” (PETRÔ, 2009); “Os sentidos atribuídos ao processo de alfabetização, por mulheres oriundas de Palmeira das Missões - RS” (VIEIRA, 2016); “The level of literacy as a determinant in the probability of falling into extreme poverty: An econometric analysis for countries in general” (ROSAS, 2019); “Literacy and Illiteracy in Brazil: Some Reflections” (MORAIS, ARAÚJO, 2011);
Human capital	“Education and economic growth in Brazil” (CASTILHO, 2003);
External evaluation	“Qualidade da Educação: relações entre características de contexto e os resultados das avaliações em larga escala nos municípios de pequeno porte da região Sul do Brasil” (SOLIGO, 2013).
Education and work	“Educação, trabalho e desenvolvimento: Uma complexa relação” (SEGNINI, 2013);
Access democratization	“A democratização do acesso no ensino superior: um estudo sobre o Programa Universidade Para Todos (PROUNI) e sobre o sistema de reservas de cotas de vagas étnico-raciais” (SILVA, 2007);
Academic failure	“Cultural provisions and illiteracy in Brazil: educational exclusion stories.” (PUPO, 2011);
Teaching-learning process	“Memória e identidade do aluno da EJA em relatos autobiográficos” (CARVALHO, 2014).

Source: Souza (2023, p. 73). *Our translation.*

After identifying the thematic focus, a categorization of the focus of the selected and analyzed works followed. The figure below indicates the number of papers that exhibit the thematic trends, specifies the quantity of research with such tendencies, and illustrates the three categories validated through the analysis.

Figure 2 – Papers’ thematic focus⁵



Source: Souza (2023, p. 75).

The contributions of the selected studies promote the exploration of concepts, perceptions, and connections between functional illiteracy and social inequalities in the country. According to Cerqueira (2008), rudimentary and functional illiteracy expose the failure to guarantee the right to education, considering that someone who is a functional illiterate, unlike a rudimentary illiterate, has undergone schooling but has not been alphabetized or literate (GARCIA, 2006, *our translation*). In general, illiteracy and youth and adult education shed light on social and educational inequalities in Brazil (CARVALHO, 2013, *our translation*). Therefore, more than a failure in the educational process and ensuring the right to education, illiteracy is not just a (re)production of educational inequalities but also social inequalities (PUPO, 2011) since the social class, race, sex, and income indicators influence the alphabetization process

⁵ Seven (7) papers focus on inequalities, six (6) on illiteracy, five (5) on alphabetization, and there is one (1) each on education and work, access democratization, human capital, academic failure, external evaluation, and teaching and learning process.

(MORAES, ARAÚJO, 2010, *our translation*). Consequently, there is a noticeable asymmetry among the illiterate population considering age groups, races, genders, social classes, and others (PAIXÃO, 2004).

According to Gusmão (2011) and Castro (2009), social inequalities are reproduced within the educational system, along with the maintenance of power relations and positions of privilege (RAMOS, CARMINATI, 2016).

Finally, three guiding categories emerged from the tendencies: literacy, illiteracy, and inequalities. The following tables indicate the selected and organized research according to their respective categories.

Board 2 - The "Literacy" category

Title	Authors and year	Contributions
Memória e identidade do aluno da EJA em relatos autobiográficos	Adenivan Mendes Carvalho, 2014	Literacy is an economic and social issue, so it must transcend the purpose of entering the job market.
Análise da Implementação do Projeto Cidadão Nota Dez em Minas Gerais	Carla Renata Lima Campos da Gama Cerqueira, 2008	Literacy. Education is a means to overcome inequality. Illiteracy represents an essential right failure.
Cidadania, emancipação e imaginário social: Um estudo sobre as políticas sociais para a alfabetização de jovens e adultos	Vanessa Petrô, 2009	The right to literacy is not guaranteed. The relationship between literacy and citizenship. Young and adult literacy is a means to address the debt owed to a portion of the population who did not have access to education at the appropriate age.
Os sentidos atribuídos ao processo de alfabetização, por mulheres oriundas de Palmeira das Missões - RS	Naira Aparecida de Oliveira Vieira, 2016	The expansion of education has an impact on the expansion of literacy.

The level of literacy as a determinant in the probability of falling into extreme poverty: An econometric analysis for countries in general	Luiz Antônio Andrade Rosas, Alma Cossette Guadarrama Muñoz, Cesaire Chiatchoua, 2019	The level of illiteracy relates to poverty levels.
Literacy and Illiteracy in Brazil: Some Reflections	Jaqueline de Fátima dos Santos Moraes, Mairce da Silva Araújo, 2011	The roots of the country's academic failure in illiteracy relate to inequalities in various facades and inter and extra-academic dimensions. It is imperative to move away from hegemonic notions of literacy.

Source: Souza (2023, p. 80).

To summarize, the papers deliver literacy as a matter inserted in extra-academic dimensions, thus transcending school elements. The analysis emphasizes that literacy, and education in general, should have a critical nature, mobilizing and overcoming inequality, and crushing limited concepts of literacy, such as producing cheap labor, considering education encompasses far more than that.

Board 3 - The "illiteracy" category

Title	Authors and year	Contributions
Adults Alphabetization in the Learners' Perspective: personal and social experiences	Stella de Lourdes Garcia, 2006.	Illiteracy is intricately linked to experiences of inequality within Brazilian society.
Illiteracy: general history and state of the phenomenon in the second decade of the 21st century: a case study in Jundiá (SP)	Rodrigo dos Santos Oliveira, 2021.	Reinforces the relevance of functional illiteracy through quantitative data.

Desigualdades Raciais na Incidência do Analfabetismo no Seio da População Brasileira: Uma Leitura Empírica Baseada nos Indicadores do Censos 2000	Marcelo Paixão, 2004.	Illiteracy as a national theme. Illiteracy is harsher in poor and Black populations.
The challenges of EJA in the literacy process: a study case of Três Lagoas-MS	Fabrcio Deffacci, Gabrielly Ribeiro, 2016.	Illiteracy results from a more significant social issue. The contributions of EJA in reducing rudimentary and functional illiteracy.
Velhice e analfabetismo, uma relação paradoxal: a exclusão educacional em contextos rurais da região nordeste	Marcos Augusto de Castro Peres, 2011.	Illiteracy is one of the major examples of educational and social exclusion. It is proposed as a social dilemma that comprises the obstacle to access to education. Considers the need for more public policies related to it.

Source: Souza (2023, p. 81).

In general, the paper's analysis depicts illiteracy as a socio-historical issue related to inequality in Brazil given that it is more profound in specific social and economic classes, races and ethnicities, locations, and sex.

Board 4 – The “inequalities” category

Title	Authors and year	Contributions
Disposições culturais e analfabetismo no Brasil: histórias de exclusão educacional	Vanessa de Oliveira Pupo, 2011.	There are cultural and socioeconomic factors that impact the rates of functional illiteracy. Schooling is one social facade that neglects functional illiteracy; inequalities mark the intensity of such exclusion.
Os sistemas de ensino baiano e mineiro: uma análise das desigualdades regionais	Claúdia Cristina Caxias da Costa, 2011.	A groundbreaking conception of Education. Inequality endurance inside schools, between the students, social classes, regions, and locations. Inequalities are produced in diverse dimensions and reinforce themselves.

utilizando indicadores escolares 2007-2009		
Qualidade da Educação: relações entre características de contexto e os resultados das avaliações em larga escala nos municípios de pequeno porte na Região Sul do Brasil	Valdecir Soligo, 2013.	The core of educational policies - in macro social aspects (socioeconomic and ethnic-racial factors) as producers of academic learning inequalities or microsocial aspects (classroom, pedagogical relations, resources, and methodologies). The socioeconomic facets of background, gender, disabilities, race, and ethnicity enhance inequalities, and policy development should consider them.
Educação e crescimento econômico no Brasil	Mara Lucy Castilho, 2003.	Inequalities remain stable and intense, resisting structural and conjunctural changes—the relationship between poverty and inequality.
A democratização do acesso no ensino superior: um estudo sobre o Programa Universidade Para Todos (PROUNI) e sobre o sistema de reservas de cotas de vagas étnico-raciais	Fabiana Carvalho da Silva, 2007.	Brazil as a highly unequal country. Inequality as a permanent feature in its economic and social structure. Inequalities impact education in multiple facets. If disparities affect the democratization of access, they also interfere in democracy.
Índices educacionais como preditores da proficiência em ciências: um estudo multinível	Fábio Alexandre Ferreira Gusmão, 2011.	The historical social, educational, and economic inequalities are reproduced and legitimized in the educational system. The quality of education available for poor communities exposes inequality. Inequality affects the learners' performance.
Evolução e desigualdade na educação brasileira	Jorge Abraão de Castro, 2009.	Educational inequality represents a critical factor exacerbating the perpetuation of social disparities experienced by the Brazilian population.
Letramento: processos educacionais no contexto social e político	Marcos Antônio Batista da Silva e Cleomar Azevedo, 2017.	The exclusion of Black and Indigenous individuals from formal education stems from historical inequalities, with racial inequity as one of them.
Cenários educacionais na contemporaneidade: reflexões a respeito das diferenças e performances	Carlos Alberto Sabbi, Antônio Geraldo da Rosa, Agustín	Under various factors, inequality is a historical concern for humanity, particularly in Brazil, a country with one of the highest levels of inequality.

	de la Herrán Gascón, 2020.	
Educação, trabalho e desenvolvimento: Uma complexa relação	Liliana Rolfsen Petrilli Segnini, 1998.	It is possible to approach the relationship between Work and Education - and professional training - considering the latter is an overall and instrumental function. Unresolved social issues mediate the interaction, like profound inequalities and illiteracy.
Estratégias de combate às desigualdades sociais na rede municipal de São José	Karine Rodrigues Ramos Celso João Carminati, 2016.	The impossibility of educational inequality as a result of individuals' natural differences. Contesting the educational system as a factor of social mobility, in light of how it offers the appearance of legitimacy to social inequalities, making it a standard - it is one of the most efficient tools for social maintenance.

Source: Souza (2023, p. 82).

The bibliographic survey study, in summary, revealed that the publications concur with an approach that considers inequalities stable, severe, and permanent, suggesting that underlying factors reproduce and perpetuate them.

Final considerations

The bibliographic study and analysis promote an understanding of the study's theme. The acquired data stimulates reflection and raises inquiries about what functional illiteracy and social inequalities studies in Brazil discuss. Observing the results, it is evident that illiteracy has been a topic of study since the 90s and is of interest to other areas beyond Education. Both observations indicate that illiteracy is a sociohistorical matter still unresolved and impacts societal life, including health and

information domains. Thus, illiteracy is a noteworthy topic of study in other fields.

In that sense, there is the comprehension of functional illiteracy as a failure of the right to Education, encompassing the interruption of the alphabetization and literacy process, the precarity of the offered education, and the inefficiency of political programs, all of which reflect inequalities across multiple dimensions. A historical issue, functional illiteracy arises from educational inequality and social, economic, racial, sexual, and age disparities. Therefore, educational institutions alone cannot be responsible for eradicating functional illiteracy.

Ultimately, the study infers functional illiteracy and inequalities in Brazil as a persistent social issue, perpetually reproduced and sustained. The connection between social inequality and functional illiteracy in the country became evident, requiring theoretical expansion and the development of effective eradication policies. However, this will not be possible without a critical approach to the purposes and conceptions attributed to Education, school, literacy, the educator, and the learner.

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