

Developing Education: Exploring Concession and Management Models



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Resumo

The inefficiency of the state in managing educational services is a recurring issue in Brazil. To optimize management and improve infrastructure, some partnership programs between the public and private sectors have been implemented, such as concession models and public-private partnerships (PPPs). However, these models remain underutilized in education, which continues to be predominantly state-administered. As a result, the sector faces significant challenges, including a lack of investment, low administrative efficiency, and difficulties in expanding access and improving the quality of education, ultimately hindering its potential for progress and innovation.

This article aims to explore the applicability of the concession model in the management of public higher education in Brazil, based on the hypothesis that introducing partnerships with the private sector—under a well-defined regulatory framework—could lead to gains in efficiency and quality without compromising the public mission of universities.

Concessions, in particular, have proven to be an effective solution for modernizing and expanding infrastructure, bringing significant benefits to sectors struggling with management and investment challenges. In this context, we analyze successful concession experiences in areas such as transportation and infrastructure, as well as international models of public-private collaboration in education, such as charter schools in the United States and academies in the United Kingdom. Our goal is to understand how these approaches could be applied to higher education in Brazil.

The study follows these steps: first, we present the concept and main benefits of the concession model, detailing its application in sectors such as transportation and infrastructure. Next, we discuss the challenges faced by public higher

education in Brazil, highlighting issues related to costs, efficiency, and governance. We then analyze international examples of public-private partnerships in education and existing national experiences in the educational sector. Finally, we assess the feasibility of implementing a concession model for Brazilian public universities, proposing a pilot project to test its effectiveness and impact.

With this approach, we aim to provide a broad perspective on the potential for modernizing higher education through collaboration between the public and private sectors, considering lessons learned from other contexts.

I. Definition and Evolution of Concession Models

A concession is a legal agreement in which the government (granting authority) delegates to a private entity (concessionaire) the responsibility of providing a public service or economically exploiting a public asset for a specified period. During this period, the concessionaire commits to investing in the improvement, maintenance, and operation of the granted service or asset in exchange for the right to economically exploit it, typically through user fees. At the end of the concession period, the asset or service returns to government control, with the possibility of renewal.

The transportation sector has historically stood out in the implementation of concessions, beginning with railroads in the 19th century and later expanding to highways in the 1990s. These concessions played a crucial role in expanding the railway network, connecting isolated regions, and facilitating the distribution of agricultural products. Similarly, highway concessions emerged in response to the need for improved infrastructure and road safety, which faced significant challenges due to a lack of public investment. The involvement of private entities in the operation and maintenance of major roads led to a considerable

improvement in road quality (CNT, 2023).

In 2022, 67.1% of the concessioned road network was rated as excellent or good, while only 32.4% of public-managed highways received the same evaluation. This difference reflects a long-standing pattern: a study by CNT (National Confederation of Transport), analyzing the period from 2009 to 2022, found that highways managed by private concessionaires received, on average, ratings 41.2 percentage points higher than those administered by the federal government, considering criteria such as pavement quality, signage, and road geometry.

In the airport sector, concessions emerged as a strategy to modernize and expand an infrastructure that, until 2011, was outdated and unable to keep up with the growing demand for air transport (MACHADO, 2019). At the time, Infraero (Brazilian Airport Infrastructure Company), a federal public company, was responsible for managing most Brazilian airports. However, it faced significant challenges in meeting the sector's needs, which was experiencing rapid expansion.

Centralized management and limited resources resulted in a lack of investment, delays in essential construction projects, and unsatisfactory service quality, compromising the operational capacity of airports. By 2010, thirteen of Brazil's twenty main airports were already operating with restrictions due to aircraft parking limitations and/or passenger terminal capacity (McKinsey & Company, 2010). This situation led to infrastructure overload, making it difficult to accommodate the increasing number of passengers and the expansion of flight routes, further reinforcing the need for modernization.

With the introduction of concessions, the airport sector underwent a significant transformation. The transfer of strategic airport management to private operators brought an infusion of capital and greater operational efficiency. By the second year of the contracts, private investments had already reached

R\$ 4.5 billion (NETO, 2016). Additionally, between 2015 and 2016, there was a reduction in general and administrative expenses among concessioned airports, contrasting with rising costs at airports still under Infraero's management (RIBEIRO, 2018).

The impacts of concessions were evident in the expansion of terminal capacity, modernization of infrastructure, and the introduction of new technologies to optimize the flow of passengers and cargo. São Paulo's Guarulhos International Airport, for example, received investments that enabled the construction of a new terminal, runway expansions, and improvements in customer service facilities. These enhancements resulted in increased operational capacity and higher user satisfaction levels (MACHADO, 2019). Another success story was Brasília Airport, where infrastructure investments led to terminal modernization and an improved passenger experience. The overall satisfaction index rose from 3.85 in 2013 to 4.35 in 2018, according to data from the Horus system of the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Despite these advancements, airport concessions faced significant challenges, particularly in maintaining the economic and financial balance of contracts in an environment of economic uncertainties and fluctuating demand. A striking example was Viracopos Airport, whose concessionaire filed for bankruptcy protection in 2018 due to severe financial difficulties.

The crisis was exacerbated by overestimated projections of passenger and cargo demand, which failed to materialize. In 2018, the airport recorded less than 40% of the originally expected demand, compromising its financial sustainability. Since passenger and cargo volumes are the primary revenue drivers, these unmet expectations resulted in lower-than-expected revenues, making it difficult to meet financial obligations, including concession fee payments to the government (MACHADO, 2019).

Moreover, the relationship between public and private entities in airport concessions

posed challenges in contract coordination and renegotiation. A key issue was the slow response from the National Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC) in processing requests for economic and financial rebalancing, which undermined investor confidence and predictability. The absence of efficient independent arbitration mechanisms further complicated dispute resolution between parties.

Over successive concession rounds, contractual models evolved. New rounds introduced important adjustments, such as removing public-sector responsibilities for infrastructure works and changing the concession fee structure from a fixed amount to a progressive increase, allowing for more efficient investments. Demand triggers were also introduced to align investment with actual growth, preventing inadequate expenditures. Additionally, the profile of winning companies shifted, with global operators gaining prominence and bringing greater expertise and management capacity.

These contract modifications and the success of private operators in airport concessions have led to significant improvements, not only increasing operational capacity but also enhancing service quality and user satisfaction. The success of airport concessions since 2011 has created a favorable environment for expanding this model to other sectors. By adjusting concession rules, promoting greater contractual clarity, and attracting international operators, Brazil has laid the foundation to replicate this success in other areas, such as ports and highways.

In the port sector, the concession of terminals and port areas to private entities has been seen as a solution to chronic inefficiencies and high logistical costs, which negatively impacted Brazil's economic competitiveness. With the approval of Law 12.815/2013, which regulates the operation of ports and port facilities, a legal framework was established to expand concession models similar to

those adopted in airports.

Port concessions have generated significant benefits, including increased cargo handling capacity and improved operational efficiency (BORGES, 2023). Private sector participation models, such as leasing agreements and Private Use Terminals (TUPs), have attracted substantial investments, totaling R\$ 6 billion in leases between 2019 and 2022.

Beyond stimulating competitiveness and driving economic growth, these concessions contribute to making Brazilian ports more globally competitive, reinforcing the concession model as an effective strategy for infrastructure development in the country. Reflecting this progress, TUPs handled 66.14 million tons of cargo in February 2024, marking a 10.89% increase compared to the same period in the previous year (Social Communication Office, Ministry of Ports and Airports, 2024).

Given these results, it is possible to envision the application of the concession model in new sectors, such as education. The concession of public universities, for example, could serve as a strategy to improve the management and infrastructure of institutions, similar to what was achieved with airports. By transferring administration to the private sector under well-defined contracts and oversight mechanisms, it would be possible to enhance efficiency and optimize investments, ensuring that higher education institutions deliver higher-quality education with available resources while preserving their public nature.

II. The Problem of Education in Brazil and Initial Focus on Higher Education

Just as the transportation sector faced significant challenges in improving and expanding infrastructure in past decades—requiring innovative solutions and strategic collaborations to mitigate chronic issues—education today stands as one of the primary obstacles to be addressed.

The need to enhance the quality and efficiency of educational services, expand access, and modernize infrastructure places education at the center of public policy discussions, emphasizing its crucial role in the country's social and economic development.

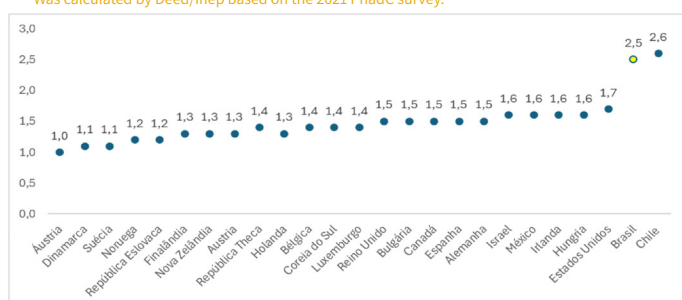
The current demographic landscape, characterized by a declining birth rate, has led to a decrease in demand for basic education. According to IBGE, Brazil's fertility rate dropped from 6.3 children per woman in 1960 to 1.7 in 2020, directly impacting school enrollment numbers in primary and secondary education.

Conversely, the modern labor market increasingly demands advanced qualifications, driving higher demand for higher education and, particularly, for postgraduate programs. Data from the Higher Education Census indicate that between 2010 and 2020, enrollment in stricto sensu postgraduate programs grew by approximately 60%. Simultaneously, the pursuit of multiple undergraduate degrees has become more common, reflecting the need for continuous specialization and professional updating.

Additionally, Brazil stands out for the significant impact that a university degree has on workers' earnings. With an earnings ratio of 2.5 between higher education graduates and high school graduates, Brazil ranks second only to Chile, maintaining a substantial gap compared to the next country, the United States.

| Graph 1 | Earnings ratio between workers with higher education degrees and those with a high school diploma

Was calculated by Deed/Inep based on the 2021 PnadC survey.



There is an ongoing transformation in the educational profile of the population, which now requires a greater focus on higher education and lifelong learning. As birth rates decline, the demand for primary education has decreased, while the labor market increasingly seeks professionals with advanced qualifications, such as multiple degrees and postgraduate education, making higher education a key priority.

III. Public-Private Collaboration in Education: International Lessons and Guidelines for Efficient Management Models

When designing projects that involve public-private collaboration in education, it is essential to consider various practices and models that have been implemented in other countries. A successful approach must include a clear legal and regulatory framework that ensures the sustainability of the partnership. A robust legal environment facilitates the autonomy of the institutions involved while also promoting accountability for educational outcomes. By establishing predefined goals, as observed in international models, it is possible to ensure that educational institutions are continuously evaluated and held accountable for their performance.

An effective example of combining public funding with private management in education is the charter school model, widely adopted in the United States. These institutions are publicly funded but managed by external entities through specific contracts. A key feature of this system is the contract renewal mechanism, which depends on meeting established performance goals. As a result, charter schools not only tend to be more cost-effective compared to traditional public schools but also create strong performance incentives: institutions that fail to achieve expected results can be shut down.

This model has demonstrated strong performance in educational rankings—in 2019, 3 of the top 10 public high schools in the U.S. were charter schools, as well as 23 of the top 100 (Ibid)—and has had a significant impact on low-income students and ethnic minority groups, contributing to reducing educational inequalities.

Another international experience worth noting is the Academies Programme in the United Kingdom. Under this model, public schools—particularly those with low performance—can become independent academies. These academies are operated by private entities, nonprofit organizations, or community groups but continue to receive government funding. One of the key benefits of this system is the autonomy that academies have in defining their curricula, schedules, and financial management, allowing them to tailor their operations to the specific needs of their communities.

The program offers three main types of academies:

1. Converter Academies – Schools that were previously managed by local governments and voluntarily chose to become independent.
2. Sponsored Academies – Low-performing schools that, by law, transitioned into academies to receive additional support.
3. Free Schools – Newly created schools designed to meet demand in specific areas.

Many academies are also part of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), which are nonprofit organizations that manage multiple academies. This structure allows schools to share resources and best practices, fostering continuous improvement in educational outcomes. The government actively encourages schools to join MATs, emphasizing that this model strengthens leadership, enhances teacher development, and enables a stronger focus on the quality of teaching and curriculum.

The experience of charter schools in the United States demonstrates that models allowing external management can yield significant results and highlights the importance of incorporating rigorous evaluation mechanisms to determine which practices are effective, for whom, and in what way. This aligns with the need to promote accountability among educational providers. Strengthening transparency and fostering a culture of accountability are essential to ensuring that desired educational outcomes are achieved.

Moreover, diversifying the educational landscape should be a priority in any effort to innovate the traditional public education model. By including different types of providers—such as the Academies Programme in the United Kingdom—it is possible to create a more dynamic and responsive system that better addresses local demands. This diversity not only expands choices for students and parents but also increases the responsibility of providers, who become directly accountable to the communities they serve. Encouraging this variety can lead to significant improvements in educational outcomes, as different institutions experiment with innovative approaches and share best practices.

A case closer to our proposal is the school concession model in Bogotá, Colombia, which has been implemented in the country's capital for the past 24 years. Under this system, high-performing private schools manage publicly funded institutions, providing quality education to children from vulnerable or lower-income backgrounds within their areas of influence. This model is based on inclusion and access to quality education, leveraging the private sector's expertise to enhance school management (APONTE, 2018). By 2018, 22 schools were operating under the concession model, taking over the management of public schools to improve educational quality and optimize resource allocation.

In summary, it is crucial to learn from

international experiences, analyzing the factors that contributed to the success of different models. The lessons drawn from these contexts underscore the importance of meticulous planning, clearly defined responsibilities, and continuous monitoring. These elements are fundamental to ensuring that public-private partnerships not only improve education but also contribute to broader social development.

Just as concession models have demonstrated a positive impact in modernizing and optimizing sectors such as transportation and infrastructure through various public bidding processes, the lessons learned from international experiences can be applied to structure more effective partnerships in Brazilian public higher education. Considering the examples presented, there is an opportunity to implement a system that combines efficient private management, greater administrative autonomy, and robust performance evaluation mechanisms, without compromising the public mission of universities.

This approach could stimulate innovation through investments in technology and infrastructure, enhance resource allocation, and strengthen academic governance, enabling a more flexible and results-oriented management model.

IV. Selected Experiences of Public-Private Initiatives in Brazilian Education

Although Brazil has a limited history of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education, some initiatives have been implemented in different states and municipalities. These experiences generally follow a common pattern: the private entity is restricted to logistical and operational aspects, while pedagogical management remains under public control. The goal of this model is to improve infrastructure, ensure proper school maintenance, and optimize resource allocation without compromising educational autonomy.

This guideline should also be considered when evaluating the feasibility of applying this model to higher education, ensuring that any concessions preserve the academic mission and public nature of universities.

In this context, some initiatives in Brazil have already demonstrated how public-private partnerships can be structured in the education sector, focusing on administrative and operational management of schools.

One example is the contract signed in Belo Horizonte between the municipal government and Inova BH, a Special Purpose Entity (SPE) created to manage the country's first educational PPP. Under a 20-year contract, 55 public early childhood and primary schools were built, with Inova BH responsible for administration, while pedagogical management remains under municipal control. In this model, the private company handles construction, maintenance, cleaning, security, and furniture supply, while public employees continue to be responsible for teaching and academic activities.

In São Paulo, two PPPs are currently in place:

1. The first, launched in 2014, involves the construction and management of eight Unified Educational Centers (CEUs), where the private partner is responsible for infrastructure, cleaning, maintenance, and security, while pedagogical management and school meals remain under the Municipal Department of Education.
2. The second PPP focuses on the renovation and maintenance of educational facilities in the São Mateus Regional Education Directorate, also without interference in academic activities.

In Rio Grande do Sul, a PPP is under development to renovate 100 schools across 15 municipalities, following a model where the private partner is responsible solely for infrastructure, with no

involvement in pedagogical functions. Additionally, the São Paulo state government has introduced the “Educação Novas Escolas” project, which includes the construction and non-pedagogical management of 33 full-time public schools, while the State Department of Education retains control over teaching and curriculum development.

The experience of PPPs demonstrates that private sector participation in educational administration can increase efficiency and reduce operational costs. However, since these partnerships focus only on logistical aspects, their impact on financial sustainability and university modernization remains limited. Given this scenario, the concession model emerges as an alternative that could deepen the benefits of public-private collaboration, enabling a more flexible, efficient, and results-driven university management, without compromising academic autonomy and the public nature of higher education.

Based on the experiences analyzed, it is possible to develop a higher education concession model that goes beyond the efficiency gains of PPPs, ensuring better university administration, greater investment capacity in infrastructure modernization, and technological innovation. This advancement could represent a significant step toward a more sustainable and competitive public higher education system.

V. Challenges of Public Higher Education and Proposal for Implementing Concessions

Brazilian public universities face financial, structural, and governance challenges that often hinder their ability to maintain high standards of quality and innovation. At the same time, successful experiences of public-private collaborations demonstrate the potential of these partnerships to overcome such difficulties.

Large private educational companies bring

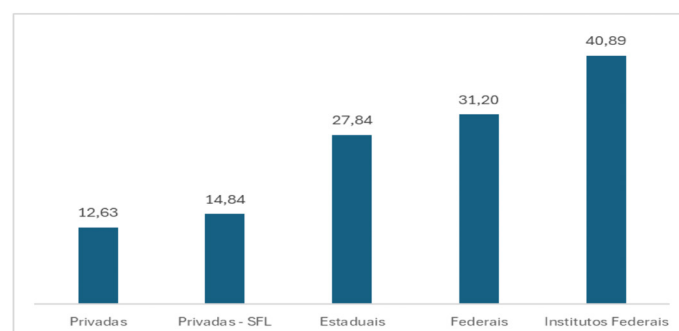
extensive expertise in managing institutions, allowing them to operate more efficiently and at lower costs, as will be demonstrated below. This specialized knowledge could be crucial for modernizing public universities, ensuring that they continue to provide high-quality education in an increasingly competitive environment.

By analyzing the graph below, it is evident that the cost per student in public universities is higher than in private institutions. While several factors contribute to this difference and warrant further discussion, this data highlights an opportunity to explore ways to enhance efficiency in public higher education management.

Examining this disparity requires consideration of various structural aspects, but it reinforces the need to evaluate alternative models that optimize resource allocation, including more efficient management structures.

| Graph 2 | Average Cost per Student in Higher Education (2013–2015, adjusted to 2016 values)

Source: World Bank (2017). A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil: Volume I – Summary. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.



Additionally, in a further analysis by the World Bank (2017), efficiency was measured using the DEA (Data Envelopment Analysis) methodology, a technique that applies linear programming to assess the relative efficiency of productive units—in this case, different types of institutions—by comparing resources used with outcomes achieved.

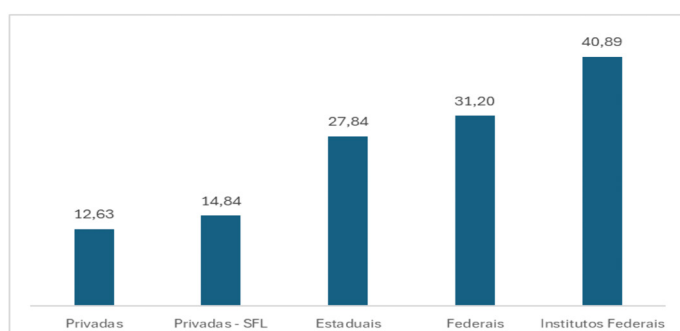
The study revealed a high level of inefficiency, indicating that the same results could be achieved with approximately 17% fewer resources. This

inefficiency is even more pronounced in federal universities, where the added value is relatively low compared to operational costs. On average, a student in public universities in Brazil costs two to three times more than a student in private universities, despite delivering similar academic outcomes.

This finding further reinforces the need to evaluate alternative management and funding models to improve efficiency in public higher education.

| Graph 3 | Input-Oriented Efficiency Score in Higher Education Efficiency Analysis

Source: World Bank (2017). A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil: Volume I – Summary. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.



VI. Proposal for Implementing Concessions in Higher Education

Given this scenario, the concession model, with its proven success across various sectors, emerges as a promising solution to the challenges faced by higher education. By allowing private companies to manage the administrative operations of public universities, this model could introduce modern governance practices, optimize resource utilization, and attract additional investments in infrastructure and innovation. However, pedagogical management would remain under public sector control, ensuring that academic autonomy and

educational objectives are preserved.

This approach, aligned with the positive experiences of previous public-private collaborations, demonstrates how the combination of private sector expertise in administration and the public mission of education can contribute to the revitalization of the educational sector. In this way, concessions not only enable more efficient management but also create conditions for universities to maintain high standards of quality and innovation in an increasingly demanding environment.

However, granting concessions in higher education presents a new and complex challenge, requiring careful planning and safeguards. It is essential to establish clear guidelines, train regulatory personnel, and implement institutional safeguards to prevent private sector capture and ensure that the concession serves the public interest.

To assess feasibility and effectiveness, a pilot project is proposed, implementing concessions in two universities. Private companies would be selected through a competitive bidding process to manage specific areas of university operations, such as infrastructure, administrative services, technological innovation, and financial management, while academic governance would remain under university control, preserving institutional autonomy.

If successful, this model could be expanded to other higher education institutions, fostering a more efficient, modern, and sustainable university environment. This would ensure that universities continue to uphold their commitment to academic excellence without compromising their public and social mission.

VII. VIII) Conclusion

Brazilian public higher education faces structural and financial challenges that compromise

its efficiency and long-term sustainability. A comparative analysis between public and private universities highlights the need to rethink management models, as the cost per student in public institutions is significantly higher, without a proportional return in efficiency or academic outcomes.

The successful experience of concessions in other sectors and international education models demonstrate that public-private collaboration can be a viable alternative to improving university management. The proposed pilot project for university concessions seeks to balance academic autonomy with administrative efficiency, ensuring the preservation of educational quality, innovation, and financial sustainability.

If this initiative proves successful, it could pave the way for expanding the model and adopting new management approaches that secure the future of public higher education in Brazil. This would align the system with 21st-century demands, fostering a more modern, efficient, and accessible university environment.

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