

## Piauí Literacy Program (PPAIC): “literacy at the right age, no matter the cost” \*<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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### Abstract

This study analyzed nine official state-level documents that regulate the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program (PPAIC). The Program is structured around five axes: strengthening learning; strengthening municipal and school management; cooperation, coordination, and incentives; communication and engagement; and external assessment and monitoring of indicators. The objective was to highlight the interfaces between PPAIC and neoliberal-oriented policies and to identify how the actions encompassed by the Program affect the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School. A qualitative research design was adopted, and data was produced through documentary analysis. The results indicate that, although PPAIC represents a collective effort to ensure literacy by age seven, it aligns with market driven logics grounded in managerialism, competitiveness, and meritocracy, which generates contradictions with the principles of a democratic rule of law state. The study concludes that guaranteeing the right to literacy, as well as ensuring a transition that promotes care, continuity of learning, and pedagogical coherence, must be addressed in relation to broader issues expressed in both extra and intra school dimensions. This requires an intersectoral, inclusive, and democratic policy grounded in principles such as respect for the autonomy of school systems and educators, recognition of student diversity, and adequate funding.

### Keywords

Educational policy – Literacy – Transition from early childhood education to elementary school.

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**2-** The expression was used by one of the teachers who participated in the broader research project and accurately reflects the discussion presented here. The excerpt included in this article does not explore the empirical component of the study; it focuses exclusively on the analysis of official documents regulating PPAIC, published by the state government and the State Department of Education of Piauí.

**3-** Data availability: All data supporting the findings of this study are included in the article itself.

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## Initial considerations

In 2025, the Ministry of Education (MEC), through the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), released data from the Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB) indicating that, in 2023, only 36% of children in Piauí enrolled in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Elementary School had achieved literacy. In 2024, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) reported that, in 2022, the illiteracy rate in Piauí reached 17.2% among individuals aged 15 or older—the second highest rate in the country.

These results reveal a harsh reality regarding the denial of the right to literacy, a historical problem whose persistence stems from the insufficiency and/or inefficiency of literacy policies, which have proven incapable of guaranteeing “one of the most important social rights, conceived as the basis for ensuring other rights, that is, the learning of reading and writing” (Gontijo, 2022, p. 39).

The denial of the right to literacy leads a significant portion of children to complete Elementary School without being literate, resulting in learning deficits relative to their years of schooling, grade repetition, dropout, and school failure. This problematic scenario positions literacy as one of the main challenges in Piauí, justifying the need to analyze the state’s current literacy policy—the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program (PPAIC), created in 2021 and inspired by the experience of the municipality of Sobral and by initiatives developed by the State Department of Education of Ceará. This analysis is relevant not only because it examines a statelevel policy, but also because the same inspiration that shaped PPAIC shaped the National Commitment to Literate Children, a policy by the Ministry of Education and Culture developed through collaborative arrangements between states and municipalities.

Given this situated context, we present characterizations of PPAIC and its interfaces with neoliberal policies, followed by an examination of how the Program’s actions affect the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School—a moment in which children face challenges, fears, and expectations that may influence learning processes and school trajectories (Marturano, 2013). For this reason, the transition requires political, administrative, and pedagogical attention, making it essential that both education departments and schools keep in sight the organic, sequential, and articulated nature that should characterize the stages of basic education and the processes of teaching and learning (Brasil, 2013).

This article is organized into four sections. Following this introduction, we present conceptual and contextual considerations regarding literacy policies developed in Brazil, then outline the methodological assumptions of the study and describe the characterizations of PPAIC and its relationship with the policy governing the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School. We conclude with final reflections on the topic.

We hope that the reflections presented here contribute to the understanding that literacy should not be approached from a simplistic, marketoriented perspective whose primary purpose is national economic growth. In this study, literacy is understood as

a citizenship right, and its guarantee therefore involves broader issues, requiring an inclusive, democratic policy supported by sufficient financial investment.

## **Conceptual and contextual considerations on literacy policies**

Public policies, understood as “State responses aimed at addressing existing problems as well as the demands of the population” (Mainardes, 2018, p. 188), including literacy policies, develop from correlations of forces between governments and different social groups, mediated by struggles, social pressures, and conflicts surrounding competing social and economic projects. The analysis of a policy must “transcend its specific sphere and understand the meaning of the State’s broader social project and the general contradictions of the historical moment in question” (Shiroma, Moraes & Evangelista, 2011, p. 9). In examining literacy policies, we sought to identify convergences and divergences between the perspectives of the democratic rule-of-law State, established by the 1988 Federal Constitution, and the propositions of the Minimal State, which serves as a model for neoliberal policies<sup>6</sup>.

Researchers such as Gontijo (2022), Moraes (2022), and Pedralli (2022), among others, highlight the neoliberal character of literacy policies implemented in Brazil since the 1990s, oriented toward fulfilling commitments made with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and the World Bank.

Within neoliberal policy frameworks, several characteristics become evident, such as: emphasis on developing competencies for participation in the labor market; encouragement of the individualization of pedagogical practice; development of technocratic external assessments aimed at stimulating competitiveness; flexibilization of state control over private education; and compensatory, elementary school (reading, writing, arithmetic) for the poor, among others. “In the field of literacy, the most significant changes [resulting from these international agreements] affected curricular reforms, teacher education, assessment, and investment in instructional materials” (Gontijo, 2022, p. 42).

The international organizations mentioned above influence the definition of curricular guidelines and the forms of “social organization of school work and of teaching processes and procedures [...] to meet the interests and needs of capital reproduction and of the class that embodies it” (Souza, 2022, p. 8). This explains why their proposals are marked by methodological trends that generate “discontinuities, reconfigurations, and reformulations that permeate the agencies, institutions, programs, and projects responsible for the National Education System and educational policies” (Souza, 2022, p. 8).

The interest of international organizations and hegemonic groups in literacy—grounded in a practical and elementary perspective—emerged during World War II. At

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**6-** The democratic rule-of-law state operates by seeking agreements, recognizing conflict as a democratic pathway par excellence, and assuming the role of guaranteeing rights through public policies; the Minimal State, in contrast, acts under the aegis of the market, with the dismantling or annulment of politics, adjusting itself to the new order of capital (Carvalho, 2008).



that time, “a significant contingent of officers and soldiers was identified who could not read or understand written instructions, compromising operations” (Souza, 2022, p. 9). At the end of the war, “the internationalization of industrial capital through the expansion of transnational corporations and, consequently, of urban industrial infrastructure” made reading, writing, and arithmetic “essential skills for the circulation of goods and people across various socioproductive spaces” (Souza, 2022, p. 9).

In Brazil, neoliberal educational policies are disseminated primarily through the flow of ideas promoted by nongovernmental organizations and business groups that sell educational programs as solutions for school systems. These solutions are also offered and recommended by multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, which, alongside the OECD, UNESCO, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), exerts influence over the creation of national policies, especially in countries dependent on international capital (Mainardes, 2018).

The fact is that literacy policies, directly or indirectly, express conceptions of reality, of societal projects, and of the type of human being one intends to form. For this reason, they must be analyzed critically, questioning their intentions, social implications, and the interests they serve. At times, these conceptions are coherent; at others, the entire process is ideologically concealed, with discourse moving in one direction and actions in another, as a strategic maneuver. It is essential not to lose sight of the need for a democratic education project with sufficient funding, grounded in a socially referenced conception of educational quality and anchored in an emancipatory and inclusive political pedagogical perspective, structured around both extra and intraschool dimensions.

The extraschool dimension involves socioeconomic and sociocultural factors, adequate public funding, appropriate infrastructure, and the commitment of central administrators and other education personnel to the quality of teacher education. The intraschool dimension encompasses aspects such as the organization of pedagogical work and school management, school projects, forms of communication between schools and families, a healthy environment, effective inclusion policies, respect for differences, and dialogue as a fundamental premise (National Education Conference [Conae], 2010). Articulation, consistency, and coherence between actions across these two dimensions are necessary, as the absence of such criteria leads to “clientelism and patronage in resource distribution, [...] improvisation and immediatism, sometimes inspired by administrative trends, and the decontextualization and depoliticization of pedagogical practice” (Gontijo, 2022, p. 35).

Frade (2022, p. 61) warns that “historical debts cannot be resolved solely through methodologies and learning theories. Although the pedagogical dimension is very important, the multiple facets of literacy cannot be disregarded.” In the same direction, Souza (2022, p. 9) argues that it is impossible to reduce “illiteracy rates without a national project and corresponding plan, in addition to substantial financial investment. This is why illiteracy persists today in several peripheral nations, including Brazil.”

For these reasons, Pedralli (2022, p. 44) highlights two fundamental points for advancing the guarantee of the right to literacy: the first is the need to reclaim literacy as a political issue; and the second is the development of literacy teachers’ autonomy as a “movement of resistance and a possibility for maintaining a commitment to humanization and to class struggle.”

## Methodology

We conducted a qualitative study in which data were produced through the analysis of official documents regulating the PPAIC, published by the state government and the Piauí State Department of Education (SeducPI) between 2020 and 2023.

Cellard (2008) argues that document analysis is a source of data production that significantly contributes to understanding research objects focused on public policies and constitutes evidence of specific activities that occurred in the recent past. The author emphasizes the importance of selecting documents that are representative of what one intends to investigate and discuss. He proposes two stages for documentary analysis. The first, which he calls the preliminary stage, involves examining the documents with a critical lens, analyzing the context in which they were produced; identifying authorship, interests, and motivations; verifying authenticity, reliability, and the nature of the documents; and identifying key concepts and the internal logic of the texts.

The second stage, which Cellard names the analysis stage, is more indepth and detailed, aiming to obtain meaningful information that enables the achievement of the proposed objectives. It prioritizes the research problem and questioning, articulated with observations extracted from the documents in the first stage. This process involves interpretation and the formulation of explanations and arguments.

In summary, the documentary analysis inspired by Cellard’s stages involved: a) researching and reading to select the official documents addressing PPAIC; b) analytical reading to identify information related to the study’s objective, following the aspects indicated by Cellard in the first stage; c) making inferences, interpretations, and selecting the most relevant excerpts to illustrate the data analysis, in accordance with the final stage proposed by the author.

The research gathered a set of official documents produced by public institutions in the state of Piauí. Table 1 presents the selected documents and synthesizes the information produced in the first stage—the preliminary analysis.

**Table 1** – Official documents analyzed

| DOCUMENT                                                                | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | SOURCE                                | YEAR |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|
| Decree No. 7,429, of December 28, 2020                                  | Establishes the ICMS Education mechanism and amends Law No. 5,001, of January 14, 1998, which regulates the distribution of ICMS revenue to municipal governments according to constitutional provisions (Piauí, 2020).                                                                                                                                                                 | Office of the Government of Piauí     | 2020 |
| State Law No. 7,453, of January 8, 2021                                 | Establishes the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program, a program of technical cooperation and incentives to improve learning indicators in Piauí municipalities, and the Alfa10 Award for schools participating in the Program, and provides other measures (Piauí, 2021a).                                                                                                           | Office of the Government of Piauí     | 2021 |
| State Decree No. 20,279, of November 24, 2021                           | Regulates the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program, established by Law No. 7,453 of January 8, 2021, which regulates the granting of technological extension scholarships provided for in the law and establishes parameters for their implementation (Piauí, 2021b).                                                                                                                | Office of the Government of Piauí     | 2021 |
| Pedagogical and Methodological Guidelines for Early Childhood Education | Pedagogical and methodological document aimed at improving the quality of education in institutions serving children aged 0 to 5, offering curricular and methodological guidance for each institution to (re)develop its political/pedagogical project and reframe educational practice (Piauí, 2021c).                                                                                | State Department of Education (Seduc) | 2021 |
| State Decree No. 21,592, of November 16, 2022                           | Regulates the ALFA10 Award, established by Law No. 7,453 of January 8, 2021, intended for schools participating in the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program—a program of technical cooperation and incentives to improve learning indicators in Piauí municipalities (Piauí, 2022a).                                                                                                 | Office of the Government of Piauí     | 2022 |
| Seduc/GSE Ordinance No. 1,012/2022                                      | Establishes the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program, hereafter referred to as PRO Literacy at the Right Age, and publishes the call for applications to select active state public servants to serve as Regional Trainers, responsible for managing actions, providing continuing education, and offering technical/pedagogical support, as established in the call (Piauí, 2022b). | State Department of Education (Seduc) | 2022 |
| Normative Instruction No. 3, of April 18, 2022                          | Establishes norms and procedures for the accountability of funds received by municipal and/or state schools awarded or supported by the Alfa10 Award, based on performance in the Saepi assessment (Piauí, 2022c).                                                                                                                                                                      | State Department of Education (Seduc) | 2022 |
| Guidelines for the Transition Plan                                      | Guidance for regional and municipal trainers for the development of the Municipal Transition Plan from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School (Piauí, 2022d).                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | State Department of Education (Seduc) | 2022 |
| State Law No. 8,018, of April 10, 2023                                  | Amends the annex of Law No. 7,453 of January 8, 2021, which establishes the Piauí Literacy at the Right Age Program, a program of technical cooperation and incentives to improve learning indicators in Piauí municipalities, and the ALFA10 Award for participating schools (Piauí, 2023).                                                                                            | Office of the Government of Piauí     | 2023 |

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The documents analyzed were produced between 2020 and 2023, during the implementation of the National Literacy Policy (PNA), which operated in the state of Piauí from 2019 to 2022. For this reason, PPAIC aligns with several of the policy’s underlying conceptions, including technical rationality and the view of literacy as codebased (Moraes, 2022).

In the preliminary analysis, we engaged in dialogue with Mainardes (2006, p. 97) regarding the broader context that shapes the production of official documents—understood by the author as a context of influence that “is often associated with narrower interests and dogmatic ideologies,” whereas the writing of official texts adopts the language of the broader public interest.

Such texts are not necessarily internally coherent or clear, and they may also be contradictory. They may employ key terms in different ways. [...] Political texts are the result of disputes and agreements, as groups operating within different arenas of text production compete to control policy representations (Mainardes, 2006, p. 97).

We now turn to the second stage of analysis, presenting the findings and interpretations developed regarding PPAIC and its interfaces with neoliberal policies and with the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School.

## **PPAIC: Program Design and Its Neoliberal Biases**

In 2021, the government of Piauí, through its State Department of Education (Seduc), created PPAIC, a literacy policy developed in collaboration with the state’s 224 municipalities, with the goal of ensuring that students complete the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Elementary School with mastery of reading, writing, and mathematical literacy competencies and, consequently, with the skills needed to progress in their studies autonomously (Piauí, 2021a). The Program’s actions target Early Childhood Education and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of Elementary School in state and municipal public schools, serving a total of 3,050 school administrators, 4,650 early childhood teachers, and 3,850 teachers in the literacy cycle (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years) (Lino *et al.*, 2024).

To enable the implementation of PPAIC, Seduc required each partner municipality to establish a team composed of a municipal coordinator, a literacycycle trainer, and an Early Childhood Education trainer; later, the inclusion of a schoolmanagement trainer was also recommended (Piauí, 2022b). These professionals are responsible for continuing education activities, pedagogical support, and the coordination of internal and external assessment processes, among other actions proposed by the Program (Piauí, 2022b).

PPAIC is structured around five axes: strengthening learning; strengthening municipal and school management; cooperation, coordination, and incentives; communication and engagement; and external assessment and monitoring of indicators (Piauí, 2021a).

Axis I—strengthening learning—includes the following actions:



- a) professional development for Early Childhood Education teachers and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers;
- b) distribution of supplementary instructional materials for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades;
- c) pedagogical guidance for regional offices and municipalities;
- d) systematization of a routine of meetings and training sessions involving Seduc, regional education offices, and municipal education departments to strengthen pedagogical processes;
- e) workshops on the use of literature materials;
- f) production of templates for the materials used in teacher training (Piauí, 2021a).

The central focus is continuing teacher education, implemented as a key element for materializing the Program's objectives (Shiroma, Moraes & Evangelista, 2011). This confirms the strategic role of teacher training in legitimizing the discourses that shape educational policy and in disseminating the social purposes of education as defined by governments. Through a cascading training methodology<sup>7</sup>, PPAIC's professional development activities reach municipalities across Piauí through the following strategy:

[...] the Program's statelevel trainers, coordinated by Axes I and II, deliver training sessions every two months to the regional PPAIC teams in Teresina. In turn, the regional teams replicate the training every two months for the municipal teams, which then deliver monthly sessions to school administrators and teachers in Early Childhood Education and the literacy cycle across all 224 municipalities (Lino *et al.*, 2024, p. 14).

The training sessions for municipal coordinators and trainers occur both in person and remotely and provide guidance and resources for conducting teacher and administrator training, with a total annual workload of 64 hours (Piauí, 2022b). These professionals, from both state and municipal school systems, receive monthly technological extension scholarships as incentives. PPAIC includes 750 scholarship grantees across the 224 municipalities, with amounts ranging from R\$ 600.00, paid to 511 municipal trainers, to R\$ 4,000.00, paid to two consultants (Lino *et al.*, 2024).

The training materials consist of slides, short videos, and methodological instructions for classroom application. Lino, Rodrigues, Oliveira, Sousa, Brito, and Moraes (2024, p. 13) evaluate the Program positively, highlighting "innovative and literacy-oriented strategies and methodologies [...], as well as a pedagogical manual for early childhood teachers." We argue, however, that there are strong indications that these training processes are grounded, a priori, in a technicist perspective in which teachers' roles, according to Gontijo (2022, p. 34), "are limited to applying, in the form of pedagogical proposals, the most innovative theories in the field of literacy."

Another component of the learning-strengthening axis is the distribution of standardized instructional and pedagogical materials aligned with the *National Common Curricular Base* (BNCC). Because they are standardized, these materials constrain teacher autonomy, fail to respect student diversity, and hinder the learning of those who most

**7-** The cascading methodology has been used in Brazil for the implementation of continuing education programs. It receives this designation because it divides the training process into sequential stages, in which each stage begins only after the previous one has been completed.

need support. Moreover, the BNCC is grounded in the pedagogy of learning to learn and contains conceptual inconsistencies, particularly regarding conceptions of language and literacy (Moraes, 2022).

Reinforcing the emphasis on continuing education as the main mechanism for implementing the PPAIC, Axis II—strengthening municipal and school management—also includes professional development activities for school administrators (coordinators and principals), municipal education directors, regional education managers, and regional and municipal coordinators, as well as technical support visits to regional offices and schools (Piauí, 2021a).

With the analysis of all documents, the categories “results based public management,” “monitoring,” “efficiency,” “productivity,” and “work control” reveal the strong connection between PPAIC and neoliberal policies, whose characteristics demonstrate concern with performance, management, control, and outcomes. Thus, the focus appears to be shaping educational management in municipalities and schools so that they operate according to a business oriented model, aiming for short term results at any cost.

Axis III—coordination, cooperation, and incentives—is responsible for managing the Program’s incentive mechanisms, such as: monitoring the use of funds and accountability procedures implemented by awarded<sup>8</sup> and supported<sup>9</sup> schools; analyzing and validating the execution of action plans in these schools; supporting the processes of designation, follow up, and performance monitoring; and providing assistance to professionals receiving technological extension scholarships (Piauí, 2021a).

The primary focus of this axis is the implementation of the Alfa10 Award, an incentive directly linked to PPAIC, which has the following objectives:

- I- to value educational management with an emphasis on student learning;
- II- to improve educational indicators related to reading, writing, and mathematical literacy competencies in elementary school;
- III- to promote an incentive policy for elementary schools to improve their learning outcomes;
- IV- to provide pedagogical and financial support to elementary schools with the lowest learning outcomes;
- V- to foster the creation of a healthy environment of mutual collaboration among schools;
- VI- to encourage the engagement of education professionals in the pursuit of better educational results, especially regarding literacy at the right age (Piauí, 2022a).

The Alfa10 Award is intended for public schools in municipalities participating in PPAIC that achieve the highest literacy results, expressed through the IdepiAlfa index<sup>10</sup>, measured by the Piauí Educational Assessment System (Saepi)<sup>11</sup>. The eligibility requirements for this award include conditions such as: “having at least 20 students enrolled in the 2<sup>nd</sup>

**8-** According to Decree No. 21,592/2022 (Piauí, 2022a), which regulates the Alfa10 Award, award winning schools are those that, among other criteria, obtain the highest scores on the Literacy Education Development Index (IdepiAlfa), with results between 8.5 and 10 points.

**9-** According to the same Decree No. 21,592/2022 (Piauí, 2022a), “supported schools” are those that present the lowest results on the IdepiAlfa, calculated based on Saepi, among other requirements.

**10-** A standardized synthetic parameter used to measure performance in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of Elementary School across school networks and individual schools.

**11-** Saepi annually assesses the performance of students enrolled in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grades of Elementary School in municipal school systems.

year of regular Elementary School; achieving an IDEPIAlfa score between 8.5 and 10; and ensuring the participation of at least 90% of enrolled students” (Piauí, 2022a).

The tiebreaking criteria established for this award is having the highest percentage of students at the advanced level, according to the Saepi literacy scale. In this context, the assessment assumes “a more classificatory and less formative diagnostic purpose, aiming to stimulate competition and improve performance through financial incentives” (Costa, 2016, p. 24).

Schools awarded the Alfa10 Prize are required to develop technical pedagogical cooperation activities aimed at achieving improvement targets for the learning outcomes of the supported school, and this is one of the legal requirements for receiving the second installment of the award. In these terms, “the State’s regulatory frameworks are redefined according to the market-oriented logic of prescribing goals, objectives, and control of products and results” (Costa, 2016, p. 24).

The Alfa10 Award is based on the experience of the “Escola Nota Dez Award,” created by the Government of the State of Ceará. According to Costa (2016), this award constitutes an accountability policy that, through managerial logics, requires reporting and holds schools and educators materially and symbolically responsible for large-scale assessment results, associating these outcomes with reward mechanisms that include performance-based bonuses.

In Piauí, the managerial logic embedded in the design of PPAIC is reinforced by the distribution mechanism of ICMSEducation funds, regulated by Decree No. 7,429 of December 28, 2020 (Piauí, 2020). The distribution formula incorporates the IdepiAlfa index as one of the indicators used to calculate the Municipal Education Quality Index (Iqem), which determines the allocation of the education-related share of state tax revenues.

What becomes evident is that both the Alfa10 Award and the ICMSEducation distribution mechanism operate with the intention of reshaping educational governance, primarily through process decentralization, increased school autonomy, and results-oriented management, combined with centralized assessment processes and educator accountability. Furthermore, these are managerial policies that operate through the “establishment of targets [...] and the distribution of ‘bonuses’ to those who meet the imposed goals” (Moraes, 2022, p. 11).

Axis IV—communication and engagement—is responsible for ensuring communication flows within PPAIC through the following actions:

- a) implementing the Program’s communication plan;
- b) promoting engagement among mayors, regional education managers, and municipal education secretaries with the aim of improving student learning in the municipalities;
- c) mobilizing the public sector, private sector, third sector, and civil society around learning and literacy at the right age;
- d) mobilizing and engaging partners and municipalities;
- e) disseminating the Program’s actions and results (Piauí, 2021a).

The implementation of the actions under this axis is supported by Article 7 of State Law No. 7,453, of January 8, 2021 (Piauí, 2021a), which states that, in order to strengthen the collaborative regime and achieve PPAIC’s goals, Seduc and municipal education departments may enter into collaboration and funding agreements, as well as cooperation and partnership arrangements, with governmental and civil society organizations, international organizations, and public, private, or foundationbased research institutes and higher education institutions.

When analyzing the proposal to mobilize the private sector, the third sector, and civil society around learning and literacy at the right age, we identify yet another characteristic of neoliberal educational policies: the withdrawal of State responsibility for guaranteeing socially referenced quality public education for all, to the benefit of political and corporate groups that, acting through nongovernmental organizations, promote the privatization of public education “and the consequent entronement of market agents as the natural and qualified actors responsible for defining our public education policies” (Moraes, 2022, p. 11).

In Piauí, the outsourcing of literacy policy is led by the Partnership for Literacy in Collaborative Regime (Parc), an alliance involving Associação Bem Comum, Fundação Lemann, and Instituto Natura. These organizations provide technical support for implementing what they call a collaborative regime for the development of structural policies aimed at ensuring that all children become literate at the right age.

This is a corporate and political group with significant influence within the Ministry of Education and increasing control over educational policy, both nationally and in states such as Alagoas, Amapá, Espírito Santo, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, Maranhão, Pernambuco, Piauí, Sergipe, São Paulo, and Goiás<sup>12</sup>. Gontijo (2022, p. 38) argues that “outsourcing is one of the most devastating forms of exclusion, as it removes from the Public Power the responsibility toward those who most need its attention—poor children who fail in school.”

In our analysis, we found no reference to actions aimed at ensuring the participation of governmental, political, social, or scientific entities engaged in the literacy agenda. The proponents of PPAIC did not consider the participation of the main actors involved in educational processes (educators) nor of political and educational movements (Gontijo, 2022), thereby neglecting local realities and the biological and cultural diversity of children.

Although the collaborative regime is a category widely emphasized in all documents regulating PPAIC, what we observe, in practice, is that this policy is characterized by authoritarianism and by the absence of debate in its formulation and implementation—unlike what occurred in Ceará, where, according to Costa (2016), there was discussion with society, municipal governments, universities, the Legislative Assembly, and other participatory bodies. In the implementation of PPAIC, municipalities are expected to relinquish their autonomy and subordinate their local needs, which emerge from diverse contexts. What prevails is the absence of debate in defining literacy policies and practices,

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**12-** Information in the official website of Associação Bem Comum. Available at: <https://abemcomum.org/> Accessed on: 22 Aug. 2024.

along with limited interest in guiding and supporting specific policies aimed at meeting local needs and, above all, the needs of children (Moraes, 2022).

Axis V—external assessment and monitoring of indicators—aims to ensure conditions for implementing the SaepiAlfa assessment, to guarantee coordination and followup of Fluency Assessment actions, and to develop and implement diagnostic assessment protocols, as described by Lino, Rodrigues, Oliveira, Sousa, Brito, and Morais (2024, p. 17):

[...] PPAIC strengthens its purpose by considering assessment as essential for achieving children's effective learning. The assessments applied across the 224 municipalities of Piauí are: the PPAIC Reading Assessment, conducted four times a year; the Reading Fluency Assessment, conducted three times a year; and the Piauí Educational Assessment System (SAEPI), conducted once a year.

Learning assessment is one of the most highly valued strategies within PPAIC. Eight assessments are scheduled annually, reinforcing its function as an instrument of control, regulation, supervision, and reward. The managerial model adopted measures performance not only to classify and publicize results but also to establish comparative parameters for ranking and awarding schools.

Moraes (2022) draws attention to the fact that school systems often use largescale assessment results to promote the culpabilization of teachers, who are frequently portrayed as unprepared and/or uncommitted, and therefore responsible for children's failure to achieve literacy. Another important point is that, when discussing assessment results, the proponents of these educational programs tend to emphasize a supposed inability of municipalities to create and develop their own policies, thereby reaffirming and strengthening the role these external actors have assumed in proposing and directing educational policies.

In analyzing the Reading Fluency Assessment proposal, Medeiros, Manfré, and Shimazaki (2024, p. 17) identified shortcomings, particularly because the test “does not consider the coordination of the multiple abilities involved in the act of reading, as it is directed solely toward decoding and linguistic comprehension.” These researchers expressed concern about the role assumed by partnerships such as Associação Bem Comum, which

[...] expose the minimal participation of the State in education, leaving this fundamental function to the coparticipations it establishes, and reveal the deplorable conditions in which public education currently finds itself, leading society to discard public education as a cultural asset” (Medeiros; Manfré; Shimazaki, 2024, p. 18).

In summary, PPAIC invests in a training model grounded in the application of strategies, materials, and activities, reducing opportunities for reflection and for the reconstruction of practices that are fundamentally and intentionally situated. There are a rigid structure and an explicit proposal of control through standardized instructional materials and classificatory assessments that distance teachers from processes of constructing their professional practice in alignment with the needs of their local contexts. This is not about renouncing the teaching of knowledge historically accumulated by

humanity, as defended by Libâneo (2019) and Saviani (2011), but rather about advancing toward the realization of an emancipatory pedagogy committed to the learning for all children. This implies considering individuality and recognizing the multiplicity of learning modes and rhythms, which do not necessarily follow a linear progression, contrary to what the Program seems to assume. The emphasis on performance-based awards and the mechanisms for distributing resources confirm neoliberal principles, valuing the highest performers, intensifying exclusionary strategies, and outsourcing responsibilities.

## **PPAIC and the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School**

Within PPAIC, the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School has been addressed in continuing education meetings, with guidance for municipal teams to develop a transition plan. The document titled *Guidelines for the Transition Plan* (Piauí, 2022d), published by Seduc in 2022, defines transition as a complex process marked by various circumstances experienced by children, their families, and education professionals.

To address these challenges, the document suggests that it is necessary to “include the entire school and the family in a joint meeting of strategies [...] so as to enable greater adaptation and interaction [of the child] to the new forms of organization of teaching and its demands” (Piauí, 2022d, p. 3). Two misunderstandings become evident: the first is understanding transition as the sole responsibility of teachers and families, when in fact the issue requires political, administrative, and pedagogical action to ensure funding and administrative and pedagogical support across all dimensions of educational policy. The second misunderstanding is conceiving transition as a process of adapting children to the demands of Elementary School, when the focus should be on ensuring that children are welcomed in ways that guarantee continuity, avoiding ruptures in teaching and learning processes and in affective relationships.

Although the *Guidelines for the Transition Plan* (Piauí, 2022d) emphasize the need to consider the histories, experiences, and conceptions of each stage (Early Childhood Education and Elementary School), proposing curricular organization strategies that promote continuity in learning through dialogue, cooperation, and negotiation, this stands in contradiction to earlier statements. The document recommends that interactions and play should not be abruptly interrupted in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Elementary School and that integrated and playful activities should be developed, grounded in the principles of educating and caring.

The document, however, does not specify the axes that should compose the *Municipal Transition Plan*. Instead, it merely references official documents addressing transition—such as the BNCC and the Currículo Piauí—and subsequently presents a set of suggestions for preschool and 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers and for families. Regarding responsibility for drafting the Municipal Transition Plan, the document recommends a collective process involving representatives of institutions working with early childhood, but explicitly mentions only the participation of teachers from both stages, thereby neglecting the essential roles of school administrators, pedagogical coordinators, and education department teams.

Finally, it suggests that the evaluation and monitoring processes of the Municipal Transition Plan should consider the following principles: efficiency in achieving objectives using the least amount of resources; effectiveness in the productive execution of actions; and quality to ensure the attainment of goals. In summary, these are economic criteria, which have become a constant in national educational projects developed under neoliberal perspectives.

In analyzing PPAIC's proposals for the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, Melo and Barros (2023) highlight that discussions held within continuing education contexts may contribute to a better understanding of the ruptures experienced by children during this process, and that the Municipal Transition Plan may support the development of actions that promote continuity in learning processes. Nevertheless, the authors emphasize that a long path remains before municipalities can establish a transition policy, given that PPAIC's guidance focuses primarily on the pedagogical dimension, relegating administrative and institutional dimensions—both essential for ensuring the necessary balance between change and continuity in children's transition experiences.

The analysis of the documents revealed the following points of convergence between the literacy policy and the transition policy proposed by PPAIC: both are influenced by neoliberal international organizations that advocate for a strong and balanced partnership between the two stages; both share the conception of education as a financial investment and an important factor for a nation's economic and social development; and both recognize that the reading and writing experiences children encounter in Early Childhood Education contribute to their becoming literate by age seven.

Regarding the impacts of PPAIC on the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, we identified that some neoliberal principles proposed for Elementary School—such as technocratic assessment—end up contaminating practices in Early Childhood Education; that the agenda imposed by PPAIC creates difficulties for implementing a transition policy; and that the focus on ensuring literacy by the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade transforms Early Childhood Education into a preparatory stage for Elementary School, sacrificing other forms of expression, such as play and drawing, which precede writing acquisition and create the conditions for its development.

We highlight that the public policy in Piauí faces real and persistent challenges—among them, precarious working conditions and school infrastructure—evidenced by the following data: only 36% of schools have accessibility infrastructure, and only 14% have a room for specialized educational services; only 19% have a library or reading room; just 18% have computer labs; and 26% have sports courts (QEdu, 2023).

Another serious issue in the educational policy is the precarization of teaching work, characterized by the increasing replacement of tenured teachers—with rights and guarantees—by temporary substitute teachers and workers hired under private-sector labor rules, who receive lower salaries while performing the same work. Added to this is the erosion of the Career, Positions, and Salary Plan and the losses resulting from the lack of salary adjustments according to the percentages proposed annually by the Ministry of Education (Arruda, 2022). Regarding initial teacher education, data from the

Observatório da Criança e do Adolescente (2024a, 2024b) show that although 85% of basic education teachers hold a higher education degree, in terms of adequacy, only 2% of Early Childhood Education teachers have appropriate training; in Elementary School, the figure is only 58.1%. Furthermore, a significant portion of teachers complete their initial training in private institutions through distance-learning programs.

Given this scenario, we ask: what can be done to change this reality, which directly affects the guarantee of the right to literacy?

## Final considerations

Literacy at the right age, when framed through a marketoriented logic as proposed by PPAIC, should concern all those who believe in the democratic rule of law and in the State’s role in reducing social and educational inequalities through public policy. The neoliberal perspective—grounded in principles such as managerialism, competitiveness, and meritocracy—is incapable of guaranteeing the right to literacy for all children, excluding above all those who most need support to progress in their studies.

Thus, it is necessary to denounce policies formulated under the aegis of the Minimal State, which, acting in accordance with economic interests, promote social and educational exclusion. At the same time, it is essential to advocate for comprehensive literacy policies that encompass actions across both extra and intraschool dimensions, developed on the basis of diagnostic assessments that reveal challenges and possibilities, as well as contributions from research across different fields of knowledge.

Despite the efforts of all those who, directly or indirectly, contribute to the implementation of PPAIC’s actions, after three years of implementation, SAEB data for 2023 released by INEP (2025) indicate that literacy rates in Piauí remain below the national average—36% and 49%, respectively. This compels us to reflect on the idea that literacy must be understood in its complex nature and requires the guarantee of multiple conditions.

Regarding the transition from Early Childhood Education to Elementary School, it is essential that education departments commit to implementing policies that bring about structural transformations in schools, “in the reorganization of school time and space, in the ways of teaching, learning, assessing, organizing and developing the curriculum, and working with knowledge, respecting the singularities of human development” (Brasil, 2007, p. 6).

Therefore, it is fundamental to advance in the development of literacy and transition policies grounded in principles such as respect for the autonomy of school systems and their educators, recognition of student diversity, adequate funding, and the capacity to confront the issues that affect living conditions and the (re)construction of a democratic, just, and inclusive school.

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