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Theoretical-empirical Article

Cultural Capital and Professional Earnings of Quota and Non-Quota Students from Brazilian Federal Universities

Capital Cultural e Ganhos Profissionais de Egressos Cotistas e Não Cotistas das Universidades Federais Brasileiras

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ABSTRACT

Objective: compare the levels of cultural capital inherited from the family among quota and non-quota students from Brazilian federal universities and analyze its influence on the occupation and remuneration of graduates. **Theoretical framework:** the sociological literature points out that students from low-income families (such as quota holders) lack cultural capital inherited from the family and this can negatively affect their opportunities in the job market. **Methods:** we applied an electronic questionnaire to 11,458 graduates from 248 undergraduate courses and 18 Brazilian federal universities. We created the levels of cultural capital of graduates based on a factor analysis, carried out through a combination of variables such as parents' education and frequency of consumption of cultural goods by students before entering university. We compared the averages obtained for cultural capital between quota and non-quota students through Student's t-test, and through multinomial logistic regression, we analyzed the influence of this cultural capital on the occupation and remuneration of graduates. **Results:** the results suggest that quota student graduates have lower levels of cultural capital before entering the federal university than non-quota student graduates. However, the results suggest little influence of this cultural capital for occupational and salary gains in the labor market. **Conclusions:** the results highlight the relevance of the quota policy of federal universities for the sociocultural and socioeconomic inclusion of quota students.

Keywords: cultural capital; students; affirmative action; university education; job market.

RESUMO

Objetivo: comparar os níveis de capital cultural herdado da família entre egressos cotistas e não cotistas das universidades federais brasileiras e analisar a sua influência sobre a ocupação e remuneração dos egressos. **Marco teórico:** a literatura sociológica destaca que estudantes de famílias de baixa renda (como os cotistas) carecem de capital cultural herdado da família e isso pode afetar negativamente suas oportunidades no mercado de trabalho. **Métodos:** aplicamos um questionário eletrônico a 11.458 egressos, de 248 cursos de graduação e de 18 universidades federais brasileiras. Criamos os níveis de capital cultural dos egressos a partir de uma análise fatorial, realizada através de uma combinação de variáveis como escolaridade dos pais e frequência de consumo de bens culturais pelos estudantes antes de eles entrarem na universidade. Comparamos as médias obtidas de capital cultural entre egressos cotistas e não cotistas através do teste *t* de Student, e por meio da regressão logística multinomial, analisamos a influência desse capital cultural sobre a ocupação e remuneração dos egressos. **Resultados:** os resultados sugerem que egressos cotistas possuem menores níveis de capital cultural antes de entrarem na universidade federal do que os egressos não cotistas. No entanto, os resultados sugerem pouca influência desse capital cultural para ganhos ocupacionais e salariais no mercado de trabalho. **Conclusões:** os resultados destacam a relevância da política de cotas das universidades federais para a inclusão sociocultural e socioeconômica dos estudantes cotistas.

Palavras-chave: capital cultural; estudantes; ação afirmativa; ensino superior; mercado de trabalho.

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INTRODUCTION

To confront enduring barriers to accessing public, tuition-free, high-quality higher education, the transformative quota policy (Law no. 12.711, 2012) was enacted in 2012. This groundbreaking legislation compels federal universities to allocate at least half of their undergraduate positions to public school graduates, with special consideration for marginalized demographics, including Black, Indigenous, disabled, and low-income individuals, collectively known as quota students. These students, bypassing traditional admission routes, gain entry through this progressive affirmative action strategy, directly tackling the longstanding marginalization of numerous low-income Brazilians from higher education (Silva et al., 2020).

State-of-the-art research on quota policies primarily explores the effects on students after university admission. Studies investigate changes in university student demographics post-quota implementation (Vieira & Arends-Kuenning, 2019), compare academic performance between quota and non-quota undergraduate students (Silva et al., 2020), and assess job market success after graduation from federal universities (Biazotto et al., 2022).

Beyond the connections already scrutinized by scholars, the quota policy plays a crucial role in mitigating the disparities rooted in formal education and the unequal opportunities tied to a student's family financial background. These pre-existing conditions, especially in terms of cultural experiences, might make the university environment more accessible to non-quota students, leading to further imbalances in education and career outcomes for graduates.

This consideration becomes crucial when evaluating the impact of cultural capital on the career trajectories and financial success of both quota and general admission students (or non-quota students). Drawing from Bourdieu's (1986) seminal work, cultural capital is defined by the attitudes, knowledge, and skills derived from an individual's exposure to and understanding of cultural assets, including literature, the arts, and educational credentials. Bourdieu (1986) posited that while individuals can acquire cultural capital, it is predominantly passed down from parents to children. Consequently, those born to highly educated parents, endowed with substantial cultural capital, inherit a distinct advantage, absorbing this capital more effortlessly and rapidly from a young age, which confers lifelong benefits.

Bourdieu (1986) highlights the disparity between students from low-income families, such as quota students, who lack inherited cultural capital, and students from more affluent backgrounds, such as non-quota students, who may possess this capital, thereby benefiting from enhanced educational and professional opportunities. Evidence from various countries suggests that higher education graduates with more cultural capital gain greater advantages in the job market, especially in securing top occupations (Choi, 2015; Erickson, 1996; Flemmen, 2012; Friedman et al., 2015; Hartmann, 2000; Koppman, 2016; Lemos & Pinto, 2008; Rivera, 2011, 2015; Turco, 2010).

This study aims to compare the levels of family-inherited cultural capital between quota and non-quota graduates from Brazilian federal universities and analyze its influence on their occupation and earnings. Based on Bourdieu (1986, 1992, 2007a, 2007b), we hypothesize that (H1) quota graduates have lower levels of family-inherited cultural capital compared to non-quota graduates, and (H2) cultural capital positively affects graduates' occupation and earnings in the job market.

Our study seeks to fill a significant gap in the literature by exploring how cultural capital affects quota and non-quota graduates both before university admission and in terms of their earnings in the job market. This research represents the first extensive analysis to investigate the impact of cultural capital on graduates from a range of undergraduate programs across multiple federal universities in all five Brazilian regions. Additionally, the timing of our study aligns with the 2023 reassessment of the quota policy, igniting discussions on public higher education policies aimed at fostering students' cultural growth for a more equitable Brazilian society.

After a brief introduction, we explore key theoretical frameworks, focusing on Bourdieu's capital theory and its implications for the job market. We then discuss methodological considerations and present results, highlighting the differences in accumulated cultural capital between quota and non-quota graduates and their effects on occupation and income. We conclude with the main findings of our study.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL CAPITAL ON EARNINGS IN THE JOB MARKET, ACCORDING TO BOURDIEU

Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as habits, mental tendencies, and individual behaviors (in their embodied form) shaped by engaging with cultural goods, like books, music, and art (in its materialized form), and academic achievements (in its institutionalized form). Bourdieu (2007a) contends that shared tastes and cultural habits foster class cohesion, a phenomenon he terms *habitus*. This innate alignment with *habitus* arises from its recognizability. For instance, navigating cultural spaces

such as theaters and museums typically requires specific prior knowledge (Bourdieu, 2007b).

Bourdieu (1986) elucidates that cultural capital, though acquirable by individuals, is most effectively inherited from parents to children. This inheritance bestows upon children from culturally affluent families a head start in amassing cultural capital, providing them with lifelong advantages. These benefits extend beyond mere material wealth, encompassing a profound cultural heritage (Bourdieu, 2007a). This heritage is conveyed, both subtly and directly, through various means and practices, regardless of intent (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014). The link between higher education attainment, prestigious job positions, and engagement with recognized cultural artifacts, such as literature and performing arts, is significant (Bourdieu, 2007b). Consequently, the offspring of socially advantaged families are granted early and easier access to cultural assets that are esteemed and valued by society (Bourdieu, 2007a), reinforcing the cycle of privilege.

Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) point out that cultural privilege is marked by an individual's familiarity with culture, gained from family-supported visits to theaters, museums, and concerts, a role schools neglect. Schools paradoxically expect students to possess cultural knowledge in evaluations that they do not provide within their curriculum, legitimizing the dominant class's cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2007a). This creates a cycle of continuous accumulation of cultural capital among privileged students (Bourdieu, 2002). As a result, the educational system predominantly benefits the dominant class (Bourdieu, 2007a), perpetuating existing social disparities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014).

In this system, schools essentially exclude socially underprivileged students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014), and those who defy the odds still struggle to enter the job market effectively due to a lack of cultural and other capitals esteemed by elite employers (Bourdieu, 2007b). Thus, educational qualifications primarily secure privileged children's positions rather than facilitating social mobility for the less privileged (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014).

Bourdieu (2007a) delineates that the acquisition of elite job positions hinges not just on an individual's cultural and social capital, but critically, on the congruence of *habitus* between job applicants and prospective employers, surpassing the value of academic credentials. Even among candidates with similar educational backgrounds, disparities emerge from a wealth of predispositions and knowledge, inherited from their families, that educational institutions do not impart (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014). Bourdieu (2007a, 2007b) further articulates that for offspring of the dominant social strata, the nuanced aspects of cultural capital — such as *habitus*, cultivated tastes, and lifestyle choices, including etiquette, high society preferences, aesthetic appreciation for classical music, participation in prestigious sports, a deep understanding of art, and active involvement in cultural activities — are more crucial for seamlessly integrating into the job market than the mere possession of academic qualifications and titles.

Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) note that students from the dominant class inherit knowledge, skills, and tastes that are both educationally and socially esteemed. They possess cultural capital, such as effortless irony, style, wit, elegance, and a confident demeanor, which conveys apparent naturalness. This signals their elite status and harmonizes with the dominant culture, marking them as naturally adept at understanding and navigating the job market's rules and challenges, thanks to their background and adaptability (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014).

Bourdieu (2007b) asserts that the dominant class not only thrives in environments conducive to cultivating the cultural capital essential for career advancement but also actively engages in cultural practices to augment their unique cultural capital, regardless of the inherent attractiveness of these activities. This strategic enrichment places individuals without such background at a disadvantage, limiting their ability to leverage academic achievements for economic gain or societal prestige (Bourdieu, 2007a). Moreover, the dominant class uses its economic clout to elevate its cultural practices, thereby cementing its supremacy (Bourdieu, 1992). Through this lens, Bourdieu (1992) highlights how cultural capital endows the dominant class with social influence, perpetuating a cycle of exclusivity and setting the parameters for societal hierarchy based on cultural affluence.

Research from various countries confirms Bourdieu's (1986, 1992, 2007a, 2007b) and Bourdieu and Passeron's (2014) theories, demonstrating that cultural capital greatly influences the hiring and promotion of elite employees (Choi, 2015; Erickson, 1996; Flemmen, 2012; Friedman et al., 2015; Hartmann, 2000; Koppman, 2016; Lemos & Pinto, 2008; Rivera, 2011, 2015; Turco, 2010). This evidence indicates that educational qualification is not the sole determinant of success in the job market (Bills et al., 2017).

Influence of cultural capital on earnings in the labor market: Evidence from Brazil

Having discussed Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, we now focus on studies exploring its impact on job prospects and earnings. While research on this topic is scarce in Brazil, extensive evidence from more developed and egalitarian countries — including Norway, Germany, France, the UK, Canada, the US, and South Korea — shows cultural capital's significant effect on job market outcomes (Bills et al., 2017; Choi, 2015; Erickson, 1996; Flemmen,

2012; Friedman et al., 2015; Hartmann, 2000; Koppman, 2016; Rivera, 2011, 2015; Turco, 2010).

In a pivotal study focused on Brazil, Lemos and Pinto (2008) investigated the hiring preferences of large private companies in Rio de Janeiro, specifically targeting firms with over 100 employees and aiming to identify the traits sought in newly graduated candidates for management positions. These companies, representing the elite business sector in the state of Rio de Janeiro — a key urban and economic hub in the Southeast Region —, highlight a significant trend. Lemos and Pinto (2008) found that beyond cognitive/technical qualifications (human capital), recruiters placed greater emphasis on behavior, experiences, and the prestige of the candidate's *alma mater*.

Lemos and Pinto (2008) discovered that recruiters from elite companies in Rio de Janeiro prioritize candidates with international experience, fluency in English, and education from prestigious colleges, especially those with linguistic and artistic backgrounds (cultural capital). This reflects Choi's (2015) observation that studying abroad enhances job market opportunities for Korean students. The preference for candidates with distinguished educational experiences may also subtly indicate their class and cultural context, a phenomenon similarly observed in France (Hartmann, 2000).

Lemos et al. (2009) built on the findings of Lemos and Pinto (2008) by analyzing 98 business administration graduates from a prestigious higher education institution in Rio de Janeiro[1]. Their study revealed job market benefits for students from high-income backgrounds compared to their low-income counterparts in terms of job types and salaries. These advantages were attributed to cultural capital indicators such as parental education — 81% of high-income students had parents with a college degree versus 27% of low-income students — and travel experience, where 98% of high-income students frequently traveled and all had been abroad, in stark contrast to 55% and 42%, respectively, of low-income students. However, later studies did not find significant differences in job market outcomes between graduates from privileged and less privileged backgrounds in Brazil, indicating a recruitment process that appears to be meritocratic and unaffected by cultural or other forms of capital (Falcão, 2012; Lemos et al., 2011; Lemos et al., 2013, 2014; Vargas, 2011).

While these studies offer optimism for reducing social inequality in Brazil through merit-based hiring centered on academic credentials, their limitations — such as research volume, sample size, observation period, course completion, and geographic coverage — restrict their applicability across Brazil. This underscores the necessity for more comprehensive research, especially considering the context of affirmative action for socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

METHODOLOGY

Our study employed a cross-sectional survey conducted between September 15 and December 31, 2021, via an electronic questionnaire on Google Forms. We collected responses from 11,458 university graduates — 32.41% quota students and 67.59% non-quota students — from 248 undergraduate programs in all knowledge areas, across 18 federal universities in Brazil's five regions. The participants graduated between 2016 and 2021, allowing our sample to span graduates who completed their degrees up to six years before the 2021 survey.

Despite equal admission policies for quota and general admission students, true parity was reached in 2015 due to the law permitting federal institutions to gradually introduce reserved spots for quota students. Consequently, by 2020, the proportion of quota graduates from federal institutions remained lower than that of their non-quota counterparts, factoring in a minimum four-year course duration.

Our goal was to minimize selection and data bias by focusing on quota and non-quota graduates from all in-person undergraduate courses across Brazilian federal universities, who graduated between 2016 and 2021. We excluded six out of the 69 federal universities established after 2018, likely without any graduates[2]. From the remaining 63, 30 universities were included in our study.

We requested the 30 universities to distribute the questionnaire to their graduates via email and posted it in alumni Facebook groups of these universities. However, only 18 federal universities sent the questionnaire by email, resulting in the highest response rates (over 100 responses per university). To maintain methodological consistency and minimize sample bias, our analysis was limited to graduates from these 18 universities who received the questionnaire by email.

Adhering to the guidance for statistical reliability provided by Hair et al. (2009), we ensured our dataset included a minimum of 100 observations, a criterion met by the 18 universities that emailed the questionnaire to their alumni, each receiving at least 100 responses. Consequently, we excluded responses from universities contributing only 1.74% of the total responses. Table 1 showcases our final sample, detailing the universities, their country region, respective response rates, and their share of the total sample.

Table 1. The final sample of graduates and research unit analysis.

University	Region	Number of responding graduates	Percentage of final sample
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)	South	1,932	16.9%
Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA)	Northeast	1,790	15.6%
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)	Southeast	1,657	14.5%
Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (Ufes)	Southeast	1,220	10.6%
Universidade Federal do Maranhão (UFMA)	Northeast	928	8.1%
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN)	Northeast	763	6.7%
Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR)	South	759	6.6%
Universidade Federal do Amazonas (Ufam)	North	435	3.8%
Universidade Federal do ABC (UFABC)	Southeast	319	2.8%
Universidade Federal de Viçosa (UFV)	Southeast	267	2.3%
Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso (UFMT)	Central-West	243	2.1%
Universidade Federal de Itajubá (Unifei)	Southeast	198	1.7%
Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados (UFGD)	Central-West	191	1.7%
Universidade Federal Rural do Semi-Árido (Ufersa)	Northeast	169	1.5%
Universidade Federal de Roraima (UFRR)	North	166	1.4%
Universidade Federal de Alfenas (Unifal)	Southeast	162	1.4%
Universidade Federal do Cariri (UFCA)	Northeast	136	1.2%
Universidade Federal do Vale do São Francisco (Univasf)	Northeast	123	1.1%
Total		11,458	100%

Note. Source: elaborated by the authors.

Before distribution, two survey research experts and a visual programmer with a background in social communication and visual communication reviewed our questionnaire. They proposed adjustments to improve question clarity, data collection, and analysis. The visual programmer additionally verified the questionnaire's design and structure. We implemented these changes, as suggested by professionals from two of the participating research universities.

Before finalizing the questionnaire for graduates listed in Table 1, we tested different question formats with 16 graduates from the social communication — journalism (bachelor's degree) program and 22 from the architecture and urbanism (bachelor's degree) program. The setup used with the social communication — journalism graduates was more statistically valid and was therefore chosen for the final questionnaire version. This test aimed to validate the questionnaire format, and its responses were excluded from the final sample analysis.

We measure graduates' labor market success by their job type and salary, a common method in social stratification research focused on the social mobility of university students from low-income backgrounds (Hout, 1984; Karlson, 2019; Torche, 2011). The variable 'Job Qualifications' helps determine the graduates' job type, based on the educational qualifications needed for their current jobs. Table 2 outlines the definition, format, and description of our variables.

After the survey responses from the graduates, we organized and tabulated the data in Excel, and then analyzed them in SPSS (version 23). We derived the 'Cultural Capital' variable through factor analysis, combining several variables. This method aligns with previous studies in Brazilian literature, as demonstrated by Mendes and Ferreira (2021), who similarly constructed a 'State Capacity' variable for Minas Gerais municipalities by merging factors like employee education levels, municipalities' gross revenues, and political affiliations of deputies and mayors.

Drawing on Bourdieu (1986, 1992, 2007a, 2007b), Bourdieu and Passeron (2014), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and other studies focused on cultural capital (Choi, 2015; Erickson, 1996; Flemmen, 2012; Friedman et al., 2015; Hartmann, 2000; Koppman, 2016; Lemos & Pinto, 2008; Rivera, 2011, 2015; Turco, 2010), we understand that the variables used in our factor analysis to construct the 'Cultural Capital' variable are effective in representing the transmission of cultural capital from parents to children. This notably highlights how inherited cultural capital varies between quota and non-beneficiaries, linked to their families' economic capital.

To create the 'Cultural Capital' variable, we conducted a factor analysis using Z-scores (standardized), supported by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.729, based on variables like 'Paternal Education Level,' 'Maternal Education Level,' 'Cinema Frequency,' 'Theater Frequency,' 'Museum Frequency,' and 'Foreign Travel Frequency,' as these variables

were not in the same dimension. The response options for 'Cinema Frequency,' 'Theater Frequency,' and 'Museum Frequency,' originally in categorical format, were converted into numerical scores as follows: 'never' was scored as one, 'rarely' as two, 'occasionally' as three, 'frequently' as four, and 'always' as five.

Table 2. Format and description of the research variables.

Variable	Format/Description
Graduate's Admission Category	This is a categorical variable indicating the graduate's admission category to the university: either as a quota student or a non-quota student.
Paternal Education Level	This categorical variable corresponds to the graduate's father's educational level: none; incomplete primary education; complete primary education; incomplete secondary education; complete secondary education; incomplete higher education; complete higher education; incomplete specialization; complete specialization; incomplete master's degree; complete master's degree; incomplete doctorate; complete doctorate; incomplete post-doctorate; or complete post-doctorate.
Maternal Education Level	This categorical variable denotes the graduate's mother's educational level: none; incomplete elementary education; complete elementary education; incomplete secondary education; complete secondary education; incomplete higher education; complete higher education; incomplete specialization; complete specialization; incomplete master's; complete master's; incomplete doctoral; complete doctoral; incomplete post-doctoral; or complete post-doctoral.
Cinema Frequency	This categorical variable corresponds to the frequency with which the graduate went to the cinema before starting their university course, with the options being never; rarely; occasionally; frequently; or always.
Theater Frequency	This categorical variable provides the frequency with which the graduate attended the theater before university, with options being never; rarely; occasionally; frequently; or always.
Museum Frequency	This categorical variable assesses the frequency with which the graduate visited museums before university, with options being never; rarely; occasionally; frequently; or always.
Foreign Travel Frequency	This categorical variable evaluates the frequency of the graduate's trips abroad during vacations before university, with options being never; once; twice; three times; four times; or five times or more.
Cultural Capital	This metric variable represents the mean derived from factor analysis. It is generated by combining the variables 'Paternal Education Level,' 'Maternal Education Level,' 'Cinema Frequency,' 'Theater Frequency,' 'Museum Frequency,' and 'Foreign Travel Frequency.'
Job Qualifications	Dependent variable, of the categorical type. It corresponds to the required educational level for the graduate's position/job, with the options being no education or incomplete elementary education; complete elementary education or incomplete secondary education; complete secondary education or incomplete higher education; complete higher education or incomplete postgraduate education; or complete postgraduate education.
Remuneration	Dependent variable, ordinal type. Corresponds to the gross monthly income of the graduate: up to 1 minimum wage; more than 1 up to 4 minimum wages; more than 4 up to 10 minimum wages; more than 10 up to 20 minimum wages; or above 20 minimum wages. The income classification into wage brackets was adapted from the social class criteria established by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

Note. Source: Elaborated by the authors. Based on Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (n. d.). ISM - Indicadores Sociais Mínimos. https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/populacao/17374-indicadores-sociais-minimos.html?=&t=resultados.

Our factor analysis on these variables yielded two factors to create the 'Cultural Capital' variable. Following Sabioni et al. (2016) we transformed our factor scores into positive values ranging from zero to one, using the following standardization formula:

$$F_{ij} = \frac{(F - Fmin)}{(Fmax - Fmin)}$$

where F_{min} and F_{max} are the observed minimum and maximum values, respectively, for the factor scores related to graduates' cultural capital in our sample.

The 'Cultural Capital' variable has a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.729, signaling strong internal reliability — a testament to its robust consistency as confirmed by Landis and Koch (1977). Our factor analysis is bolstered by robust statistical supports: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests validate our approach, while commonalities, explained variance, and a detailed rotated matrix enrich the findings detailed in the Results section. We applied the oblimin oblique rotation, ideal for extensive datasets like our 11,458 observation sample (Matos & Rodrigues, 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the development process of the 'Cultural Capital' variable.

We used the Student's t-test and the chi-square test at a 95% confidence level to compare variables. Specifically, the Student's t-test assessed differences in cultural capital levels (a metric variable) between quota and non-quota graduates, aligning with the approach recommended by Fávero and Belfiore (2017), for metric variables. A p-value below 0.05 signifies a significant difference between the groups' means at the 5% significance level, rejecting the null hypothesis. Conversely, a p-value above 0.05 indicates no significant difference, suggesting the population means are equivalent at this significance level. The formulated hypotheses are as follows:

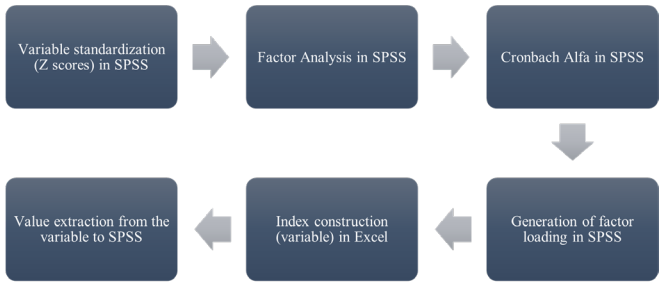

Figure 1. Fluxogram of the creation process of the 'Cultural Capital' variable.
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

H0: $\mu 1 = \mu 2$

H1: $\mu 1 \neq \mu 2$

The chi-square test was applied to assess differences between observed and expected values for categorical variables like 'Paternal Education Level' across quota and non-quota graduates (independent samples). Fávero and Belfiore (2017) recommend this test for nominal and ordinal variables, setting up two hypotheses:

H0: there is no significant difference between observed and expected frequencies.

H1: there is a significant difference between observed and expected frequencies.

Subsequently, we carried out two multinomial logistic regressions, focusing on 'Job Qualifications' and 'Remuneration' as dependent variables, with 'Cultural Capital' as the key independent variable. This approach is suitable for modeling relationships where the dependent variable is categorical, not metric, encompassing binary, dichotomous, ordinal, or multiple-choice categories (Daniels & Minot, 2019). We controlled both models for additional explanatory variables known to influence college-educated professionals' earnings in the job market — such as race/color, family origin, course prestige, university quality, and regional location. These variables, however, are not covered in this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the outline of the study's methodology, this section presents the primary findings. For clarity, the discussion is divided into two main parts: the difference in cultural capital accumulation between quota and non-quota graduates, and the impact on their employment and income.

The literature, notably (Bourdieu, 2007a), establishes a link between cultural capital and parental education levels, uncovering stark differences between quota and non-quota graduates' families. Data shows 32.86% of quota graduates' parents did not finish elementary school, compared to higher educational attainment among non-quota graduates' parents — 26.47% hold higher education degrees, and 16.58% have postgraduate qualifications. Only 15.24% of quota graduates' parents have a bachelor's degree or higher, significantly less than the 43.05% of non-quota graduates' parents. This disparity, illustrated in Figure 2, underscores deep educational inequalities and their impact on cultural capital distribution.

The data on mothers' education levels mirror those of fathers but are somewhat less disparate. Among quota graduates' mothers, 22.7% have a higher education degree or higher, versus 50% among non-quota graduates. For postgraduate degrees, the percentages are 9.1% for quota graduates' mothers and 22.2% for non-quota graduates' mothers. These variances are statistically significant (p-value = 0.000), indicating that quota graduates' mothers generally have lower education levels compared to non-quota graduates' mothers, as depicted in Figure 3.

Parental education levels reveal stark differences in students' family cultural environments. Our analysis focused on pre-university engagement with cultural products, such as the frequency of cinema visits, to understand these disparities better. Table 3 showcases the consumption patterns of cultural goods, highlighting how often respondents frequented the cinema before university. This approach offers a direct insight into the varied cultural landscapes from which students emerge.

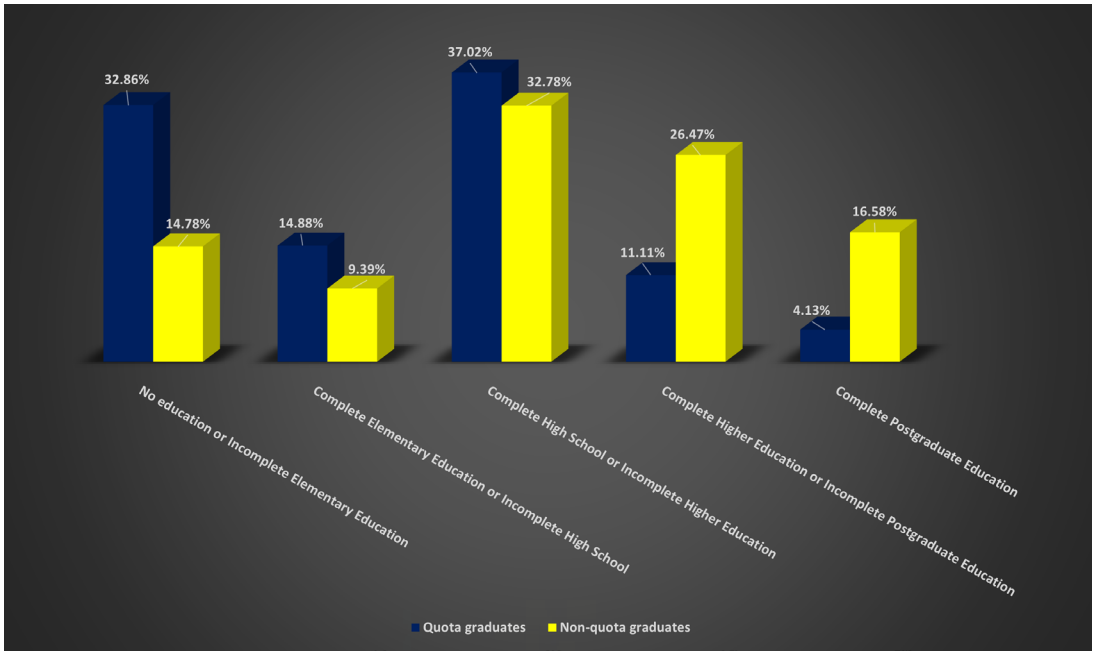

Figure 2. Graduates' paternal education level (p-value = 0.000).
Source: Research data.

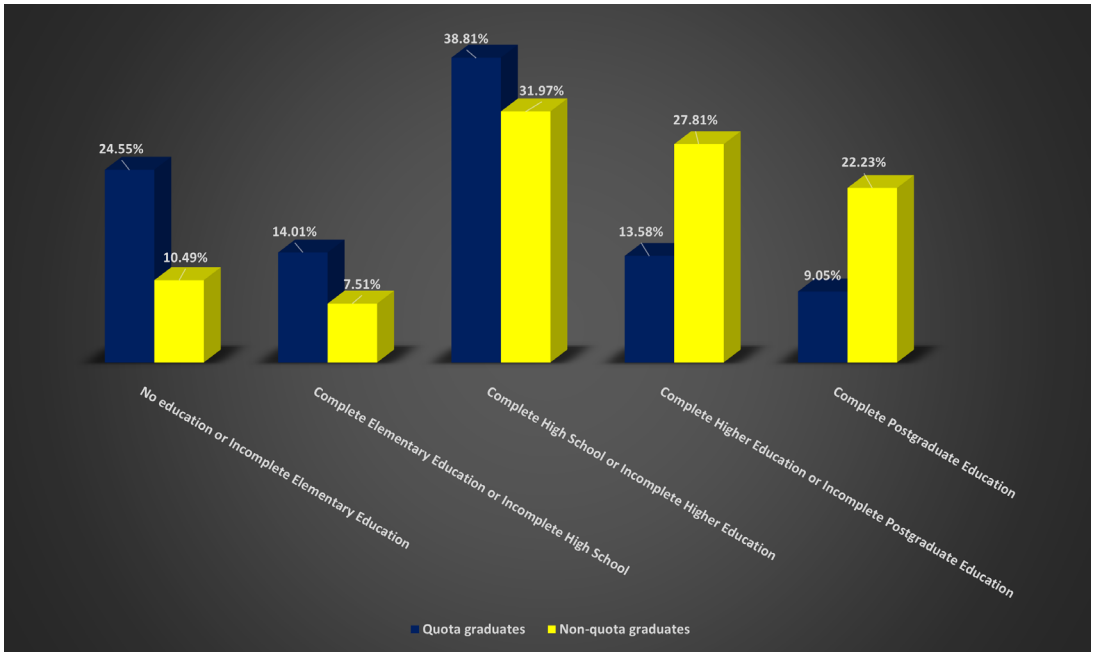

Figure 3. Graduates ' maternal education level (p-value = 0.000).
Source: Research data.

Table 3. Regular participation in cultural activities among quota and non-quota graduates before entering a federal university.

Cultural activities	Regular frequency (in %)				
Cinema	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
Quota	13.4%	29.6%	36.6%	17.4%	2.9%
Non-quota	6.4%	20.4%	40.2%	26.9%	6.2%
Theater	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
Quota	48.8%	37.1%	11.2%	2.3%	0.6%
Non-quota	34.3%	44.7%	16.6%	3.6%	0.8%
Museums	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
Quota	37.2%	43.6%	15.1%	3.3%	0.9%
Non-quota	26.7%	46.6%	21.1%	4.5%	1.1%

Note. Source: Research data.

The data reveal that non-quota graduates attended cinemas more frequently (either always or often) compared to quota graduates, with rates of 26.9% and 17.4%, respectively. This trend extends to occasional cinema visits, as indicated in Table 3 (p-value = 0.000).

Theater attendance before university was generally low for both groups, although it was slightly higher among non-quota graduates. Specifically, 21% of non-quota graduates and 14.1% of quota graduates reported attending the theater, whether regularly, frequently, or occasionally. Notably, nearly half (48.8%) of quota graduates had never visited a theater before university, in contrast to 34.3% of their non-quota counterparts (p-value = 0.000).

A similarly low participation rate was observed for museum visits, with 19.3% of quota graduates and 26.7% of non-quota graduates reporting some level of attendance. Despite the overall low engagement, the rate among quota graduates remains lower than that of their non-quota counterparts (p-value = 0.000). This limited engagement with museums and theaters is likely due to a scarcity of cultural facilities in many areas. Additionally, individuals often replace these experiences with alternative activities or access them digitally via the internet.

The literature identifies international travel as a key factor in building cultural capital, highlighting its importance for language practice and exposure to various cultural experiences. In our study, a mere 6.65% of quota graduates had traveled abroad for vacation before entering university, a figure significantly lower than the 27.44% of non-quota graduates. Additionally, among the quota graduates who traveled internationally, 61.94% did so only once, whereas 38.06% had multiple trips. Conversely, for non-quota graduates, 41.13% traveled once and 58.87% traveled abroad multiple times.

Table 4 presents the results from the factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha, establishing the 'Cultural Capital' variable from the discussed factors. Subsequently, we share the results of the Student's t-test, which assesses the differences in 'Cultural Capital' between quota graduates and non-quota graduates.

Table 4. Factor analysis results for the 'Cultural Capital' variable.

KMO and Bartlett tests				
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) of sampling adequacy	.723	Barlett's test of sphericity	gl	15
Approximate chi-square	12021.345		Sig.	.000
Communalities*				
	Initial	Extraction		
Z-score (Maternal Education Level)	1.000	.694		
Z-score (Paternal Education Level)	1.000	.716		
Z-score (Museum Frequency)	1.000	.715		
Z-score (Cinema Frequency)	1.000	.584		
Z-score (Theater Frequency)	1.000	.752		
Z-score (Foreign Travel Frequency)	1.000	.374		

(Continues)

Table 4. Factor analysis results for the 'Cultural Capital' variable. (Continued)

Total variance explained*							
Component	Initial eigenvalues			Sum of squared loading extractions			Rotation sums of squared loadings[a]
	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %	Total	Variance %	Cumulative %	Total
1	2.564	42.734	42.734	2.564	42.734	42.734	2.225
2	1.271	21.180	63.914	1.271	21.180	63.914	2.035
3	.767	12.790	76.704				
4	.550	9.170	85.874				
5	.453	7.550	93.424				
6	.395	6.576	100				

	Component matrix*[b]		Pattern matrix**[c]		Structural matrix*	
	Component		Component		Component	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
Z-score (Maternal Education Level)	.592	.587		.855		.830
Z-score (Paternal Education Level)	.631	.564		.856		.846
Z-score (Museum Frequency)	.707	-.464	.858		.845	
Z-score (Cinema Frequency)	.725		.688		.746	.404
Z-score (Theater Frequency)	.706	-.504	.889		.864	
Z-score (Foreign Travel Frequency)	.541			,554	.318	.599

Component correlation matrix*		
Component	1	2
1	1	.333
2	.333	1

Reliability statistics for Cronbach's alpha	
Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
.729	6

Item-total statistics for Cronbach's alpha				
	Scale mean if item is deleted	Scale variance if item is deleted	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item is deleted
Z-score (Maternal Education Level)	.027	11.490	.422	.703
Z-score (Paternal Education Level)	.036	11.237	.465	.691
Z-score (Museum Frequency)	.029	11.022	.501	.680
Z-score (Cinema Frequency)	.028	10.874	.527	.672
Z-score (Theater Frequency)	.032	11.058	.495	.682
Z-score (Foreign Travel Frequency)	.024	11.755	.371	.718

Note. * Extraction method: principal component analysis; ** Rotation method: oblimin with Kaiser Normalization[c]; a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain total variance; b. 2 components extracted; c. Rotation converged in 5 iterations. Source: Research data.

The Student's t-test results show significant differences in pre-university cultural capital levels between quota and non-quota graduates, with a p-value of 0.000. Quota graduates, on average, have parents with lower levels of education, fewer international travel experiences, and participate less in cultural activities like cinema, theater, and museum visits than non-quota graduates, as detailed in Table 5 and Figure 4.

Our study confirms Bourdieu's (1986, 1992, 2007a, 2007b) theories, along with insights from Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), showing that quota graduates from low-income families start with less cultural capital than their non-quota counterparts from wealthier backgrounds. This disparity reveals the deep cultural and socio-economic divides among Brazilian families and highlights how different family environments (i.e., habitus) shape students' cultural resources. This inequality points to an often-ignored aspect of cultural inheritance that challenges the notion of meritocracy, a critical issue raised by Souza (2006).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the 'Cultural Capital' variable before university entry among quota and non-quota graduates (p-value = 0.000).

Graduate's admission category	No	Mean	DP	Variance	Minimum	Maximum
Quota graduate	3,525	25.205	14.322	205.123	0	77.11
Non-quota graduate	7,540	35.098	16.120	259.886	0	100

Note. Source: Research data.

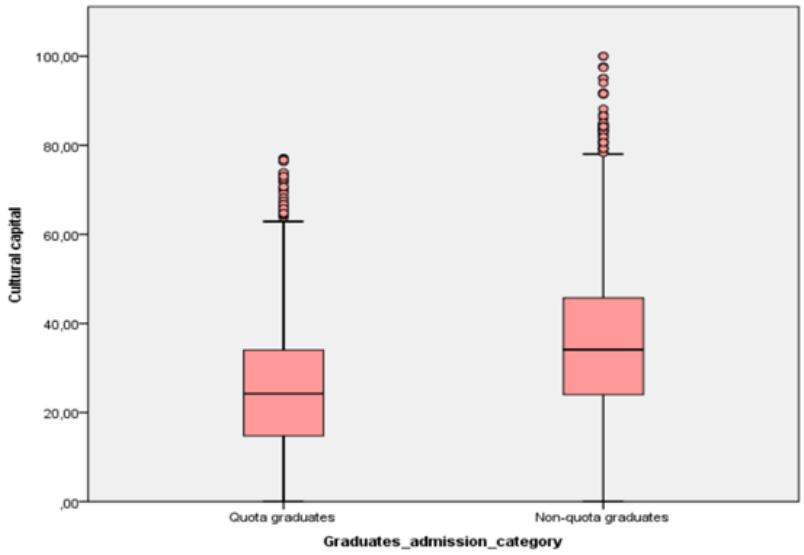

Figure 4. Box plot of the 'Cultural Capital' variable before university admission among quota and non-quota graduates (p-value = 0.000).
Source: Research data.

Our results highlight the importance of quota policies at federal universities for the sociocultural inclusion of quota students. To further reduce the disparities arising from material privilege, investments need to extend beyond academic training (Vieira & Arends-Kuenning, 2019).

Influence of cultural capital on graduates' earnings in the job market

This study delves into the role of cultural capital, accrued before university, on the job and income prospects of Brazilian federal university alumni. Our logistic regression analysis reveals a significant influence of cultural capital on employment and income: graduates with more cultural capital are 3% less likely to occupy jobs needing only basic education (elementary or incomplete high school education), effectively lowering the chances of underemployment. Yet, cultural capital does not boost the odds of landing college-degree jobs, hinting that it does not guarantee access to elite professional spheres. Nonetheless, it plays a crucial role in mitigating underemployment, a challenge that hits the Black community hardest (IBGE, 2019), as Table 6 illustrates.

Our income analysis reveals that graduates with more cultural capital tend to earn higher salaries than those with less. However, the impact of cultural capital on income shows diminishing returns. Moreover, within the lowest salary brackets (up to four minimum wages), cultural capital does not affect earnings, leading to equal earning opportunities for graduates regardless of their cultural capital. See Table 7 for detailed findings.

Our analysis of graduates in higher salary brackets shows that family-inherited cultural capital positively impacts earnings. Graduates with more cultural capital are likelier to earn higher salaries, although the influence of cultural capital is modest.

Table 6. The likelihood of graduates with higher cultural capital securing more qualified positions relative to graduates with lower cultural capital.

Graduates	Graduates' job qualifications*			
	Complete elementary education or incomplete high school education	Complete high school or incomplete higher education	Complete higher education or incomplete postgraduate education	Complete postgraduate education
Greater cultural capital	3% less likely	Identical chances	Identical chances	Identical chances
Model information				
Model adjustment criteria	Only intercept: 14776.939	Final: 13242.264	Sig. .000	
Likelihood ratio test	Chi-square: 1534.676	gl: 72	Sig. .000	
Pseudo R^2	Cox and Snell: .173	Nagelkerke: .206	McFadden: .104	
Goodness of fit	Pearson	Chi-square: 33421.532	gl: 32188	Sig. .000
	Deviance	Chi-square: 13240.877	gl: 32188	Sig. 1.000
Classification table	Global percentage (correct): 70.5%			

Note. *The comparison baseline targets occupations of graduates where education is optional or only up to incomplete elementary education. Source: Research data.

Table 7. Probabilities of graduates with higher cultural capital obtaining higher salaries compared to graduates with lower cultural capital.

Graduates	Graduates' remuneration*			
	Between 1 and 4 minimum salaries	Between 4 and 10 minimum salaries	Between 10 and 20 minimum salaries	Above 20 minimum salaries
Greater cultural capital	Identical chances	1.5% more probable	1.9% more probable	2.5% more probable
Model information				
Model adjustment criteria	Only intercept: 19764.824	Final: 17793.425	Sig. .000	
Likelihood ratio test	Chi-square: 1971.399	gl: 72	Sig. .000	
Pseudo R^2	Cox and Snell: .210	Nagelkerke: .232	McFadden: .100	
Goodness of fit	Pearson	Chi-square: 31267.531	gl: 33424	Sig. 1.000
	Deviance	Chi-square: 17790.653	gl: 33424	Sig. 1.000
Classification table	Global percentage (correct): 56.1%			

Note. *The benchmark for comparison is the income bracket of graduates who earn no more than one minimum wage. Source: Research data.

Despite this limited effect, our findings align with the theories proposed by Bourdieu (1986, 1992, 2007a, 2007b), Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). However, this contrasts with findings from various national studies, such as from Falcão (2012), Lemos et al. (2011), Lemos et al. (2013, 2014) and Vargas (2021), which did not observe a significant influence of cultural capital on the income of university graduates from low-income backgrounds. According to our analysis, non-quota graduates possess higher levels of cultural capital compared to quota graduates. This suggests that merely obtaining a university degree and implementing quota policies may not suffice to eliminate income disparities. Initiatives aimed at closing the cultural capital gap among university entrants are crucial.

Our analysis reveals that although cultural capital affects graduates' salaries, it surprisingly plays a minor role in determining their occupations. Graduates with higher cultural capital are less confined to roles requiring only elementary or some high school education. This means that inherited cultural capital does not influence employment in higher-educated roles within our sample, suggesting that quota graduates (with lower cultural capital) occupy positions as qualified as non-quota graduates (with higher cultural capital). This finding diverges from the perspectives of Bourdieu (1986, 1992, 2007a, 2007b), Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) and Bourdieu e Wacquant (1992) who viewed cultural capital as crucial for entering desirable job positions.

Our findings indicate that the likelihood of securing jobs that demand higher education is not influenced by the level of cultural capital among graduates. The effect of cultural capital on the positions held by college-educated individuals is minimal, becoming significant only in cases

of underemployment. Furthermore, the marginal influence of cultural capital on earnings underscores the effectiveness of quota policies in leveling the playing field. By opening the doors of higher education to public school students, these policies guarantee that individuals from less privileged backgrounds can secure positions and earn wages on par with their non-quota peers, bridging the gap created by socio-economic disparities.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the disparities in familial cultural capital between quota and non-quota graduates from Brazilian federal universities, aiming to uncover how this capital impacts their career trajectories and earnings. By pioneering a nationwide survey, we have enriched the dialogue on this topic by dissecting the nuances of cultural capital inherited by quota and non-quota graduates before university admission and its subsequent effect on their financial success in the job market. Our findings decisively confirm our initial hypothesis: quota graduates, on average, come from backgrounds with less inherited cultural capital compared to their non-quota counterparts before entering federal universities.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the cultural capital landscape has evolved with the revolution in cultural product formats and access channels, marked by the rise of exclusive platforms, streaming services, and other digital media. These sweeping changes compel us to critically reassess and redefine how we conceptualize the accumulation of cultural capital in the age of digital access to cultural products.

This study not only calls for a profound reevaluation of what constitutes cultural capital but also highlights the stark contextual disparities that influence its formation. In contrast to France, locus of analysis of Bourdieu's studies, and with its extensive policies promoting the accessibility and production of cultural activities, Brazil has historically overlooked the importance of such access as a public policy imperative. This oversight has entrenched deep-rooted disparities across social classes. Furthermore, the variability in cultural access depending on urban scale introduces further layers of inequality, underscoring the urgent need for a reassessment of cultural policy and its impact on societal stratification.

Our examination of the second hypothesis yields a nuanced affirmation: cultural capital has limited influence on graduates' careers and income. Possessing an abundance of cultural capital does not markedly boost one's prospects of securing high-ranking job roles. The influence of cultural capital becomes clearer in the context of underemployment, where graduates with more cultural capital are less likely to find themselves in underemployed positions. Similarly, while the impact on earnings is modest, it becomes more evident at the higher end of the income spectrum. This indicates a complex but meaningful link between cultural capital and financial achievement.

Our results underscore the critical role of quota policies in federal universities as catalysts for socio-cultural and socio-economic inclusion, reinforcing the necessity of their continued enforcement. Moreover, we urgently advocate for the development and enactment of educational and cultural policies that guarantee access to cultural assets for socio-economically disadvantaged students from an early age. This strategic approach is pivotal in forging a more just and equitable society in Brazil.

A notable limitation of our study, beyond the complexities of cultural capital, lies in its methodological approach. The reliance on a questionnaire, given its voluntary nature, might skew results toward respondents with an inherent interest in the topic, introducing potential bias. Yet, in the face of scant official statistics and a lack of comprehensive data from the Ministry of Education (MEC), our survey — conducted at the close of 2021 — is a critical tool for uncovering insights otherwise unattainable. Our robust sample, encompassing 11,458 graduates from 248 undergraduate programs across diverse disciplines and spanning 18 Brazilian federal universities, ensures the statistical robustness of our findings, effectively counterbalancing possible data collection and interpretation biases. However, the retrospective aspect of the study, asking graduates to revisit pre-university experiences, might inject a layer of uncertainty into the reported data.

Future research could adopt a qualitative methodology to examine the disparities in cultural resource access between quota and non-quota graduates, emphasizing the roles of economic capital and family support before university. Further investigations are also needed to understand the development of quota students' cultural capital within top-tier, tuition-free public higher education. Crucially, assessing the influence of family-inherited cultural capital on graduates' long-term career trajectories is essential.

NOTES

1. The authors do not mention the institution's name.
2. They are: Universidade Federal de Catalão (UFCat), Universidade Federal de Jataí (UFJ), Universidade Federal de Rondonópolis (UFR), Universidade Federal do Agreste de Pernambuco (Ufape), Universidade Federal do Delta do Parnaíba (UFDPar) e Universidade

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