Indirect Power and the Unification of Secondary Education in the Empire of Brazil: 1837-1889

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This paper discusses the efforts of the Imperial Government of Brazil to influence programs of studies in secondary schools that were under the exclusive authority of the provincial governments. The Court’s inability to directly affect education in the provinces can be ascribed to circumstances surrounding the formation and consolidation of the Empire.
In 1808 King João VI fled to Brazil to escape invading Napoleonic armies and established his government-in-exile in Rio de Janeiro. In 1821 the King returned to Portugal, and on September 7, 1822 the prince regent, Dom Pedro I, emboldened by colonial support and bristling under the threat of legislative sanctions by the National Assembly in Lisbon, declared the colony’s independence from Portugal and established the Empire of Brazil.

In 1824 the Emperor imposed on the country a constitution that retained his absolutist powers, thus leading to his title as “Perpetual Emperor and Protector of Brazil”. While the constitution provided for executive, legislative and judiciary branches, the emperor was given the “moderating” power to influence the composition and decisions of these branches. It effectively established a unitary state, guided by the hand of the Emperor, in which the provinces had a limited voice on many policies that affected them.

In 1831 Pedro I returned to Portugal and named his five-year-old son, Pedro II, as his successor. Following the abdication of Pedro I a power vacuum resulted in political disputes between local factions. The regency was weak and characterized by political instability and calls for liberal reforms and regional independence. Civil wars in Pará in 1831, in Minas Gerais in 1833, and in Maranhão and Mato Grosso in 1834 erupted and were squelched. Also, in 1828 Brazil was defeated by the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata, present-day Argentina, and lost Cisplatina, which would later become the Republic of Uruguay.

Ato Adicional

As a response to decentralization and separatist movements plaguing the country, the Brazilian legislative assembly amended the constitution on August 12, 1834. The Additional Act
(Ato Adicional) was enacted as a concession to strong federalist and republican factions in the Assembly who demanded a lessening of the authoritarian aspects of the constitution.

In matters of education, Article 2 Section 10 of the Additional Act granted the provinces the right to legislate all matters on primary and secondary schooling. The Act, however, maintained the right of the Imperial Government to legislate on matters related to basic education in the in Rio de Janeiro and gave it authority over all superior institutions and courses in the Empire. The constitutional amendment prohibited the provinces from interfering in the governance of the juridical courses, faculties of medicine, the military and naval academies, and other higher education institutions located within their jurisdiction. This separation of powers among the three levels of education would endure until 1889 when the Empire would be transformed into the Republic of Brazil.

The impact of the Constitutional Amendment on the development of secondary education can only be appreciated in light of the nature of post-primary schooling in Brazil in the 1830s. At the time of the Additional Act, secondary instruction prepared young men for advanced studies
at the University of Coimbra, in Portugal. The origin of these propaedeutic studies had been determined centuries earlier by Jesuit missionaries who had established schools throughout the colonies.

The first contingent of Jesuit missionaries, educated at the College of Coimbra, accompanied the armada of Tomé de Sousa and his expedition to Brazil in 1549. More Jesuits arrived in successive expeditions and, under the inspiration of the Padres Nobrega and Anchieta, founded colleges, all along the coast, in what are now the States of Bahia, Pará, Paraíba, Maranhão, Paraná, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The colleges were similarly organized and managed; they all followed the directives of the Jesuit educational manifesto, the *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu* ("The Official Plan for Jesuit Education"), which prescribed administrative and teaching practices, and the contents and organization of school curricula.

The program of studies in the Jesuit colleges was known as the Course of Humanities. The curriculum consisted of the progressive study of Latin. Protracted readings of celebrated Latin and, occasionally, Greek authors also exposed students to topics of Geography and History.
embedded in literary texts and taught as an extension of the classical commentaries. At the end of their studies students were expected to express themselves freely and eloquently in poetry and verse and demonstrate erudition in history, archeology and other related areas of knowledge. The Course of Humanities was intended to prepare students for university studies in Philosophy, i.e. the Arts, Theology and, in some institutions, Law and Medicine.

Reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with the Company of Jesus in Europe, in 1759 the Marques de Pombal, the Prime Minister of Dom José I, King of Portugal, expelled the Jesuit Order from Portugal and the colonies and expropriated its lands, buildings, industries and other possessions. The royal decree was intended to reduce the Order’s influence in affairs of state.

Its impact on secondary education in the Portugal and the colonies was swift and injurious. In Brazil, the edict resulted in the exodus of 590 members of the order, 316 of whom were ordained priests involved in some capacity in the educating the Indians and colonists. When the Company departed from Brazil it abandoned 25 parochial houses and 30 missions. It
also left behind 17 colleges and seminaries that provided colonial youth access to the University of Coimbra.

**Aulas Regias and Aulas Avulsas**

The stillness that followed the Company’s departure was deafening. Brazilian colonists no longer could send their children to Jesuit colleges as a prelude to advanced studies in Lisbon. By 1772 the Portuguese Crown acknowledged the educational needs of the Brazilians and responded by creating a number of *aulas regias*, or royal courses, in the colony. The *aula regia* was an academic subject taught by one professor, in one local and financed by the government. The Crown financed 27 courses distributed in different parts of the country.

![Aulas Regias](image)

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The *aulas regias* embodied the Metropole’s version of secondary instruction that prepared colonial youth for superior studies in Portugal. However, unlike the highly-organized Jesuit colleges, each course was independent from every other; they did not constitute nor were part of an organized curriculum. This network of courses, now referred to as *aulas avulsas*,
persisted during the rest of the colonial period and remained a permanent fixture during most of the Empire.

On the eve of the Additional Act, a survey of public secondary education in the provinces conducted by the Minister of the Empire, Chichorro da Gama, identified courses in Latin, rhetoric, philosophy, French, geometry, commerce, agriculture and music scattered throughout the four corners of the Empire. In his report to the Legislative Assembly, the Minister identified at least a hundred independent courses operating in the Court and the provinces.

First Provincial Lyceums

Local fervor generated by the Additional Act led several northern States to establish the first public secondary schools: Rio Grande do Norte in 1835, and Bahia and Paraiba in 1836. Although these institutions represented themselves as “schools” they were, in reality, locals where a number of aulas avulsas were offered under one roof. By mid-century public establishments called “lyceums,” “colleges” or “athenaeums” could be found in a number of the provinces.
In an 1870 report, the Minister of the Empire, Paulino de Souza, noted that there was a “provincial lyceum” in Amazonas, Maranhão, Piauí, Alagoas, Bahia, Espirito Santo, Rio Grande do Sul, Pará, Rio Grande do Norte and Pernambuco. Non-public secondary establishments also proliferated in the provinces. The extent of the penetration of private initiatives in secondary education is exemplified in the Province of Rio de Janeiro, where 58 private colleges and independent courses functioned, with only a handful sanctioned by the Court.

The glaring disparity between the number of available official and private institutions, overwhelmingly weighed in favor of the private schools and explains the high number of students counted in national surveys. In 1864 approximately 8600 secondary students were enrolled in public and private institutions and independent courses. By 1878 almost 11,000 students were enrolled in public and private secondary-level establishments and independent courses, and seminaries, in most of the provinces. However, only 25% of these students attended public schools; the remaining 75% attended private establishments and aulas avulsas.
While public and private secondary courses and schools proliferated during the Empire, the quality of instruction was far less than desired. The depth of the deficiencies plaguing secondary education was revealed in several surveys solicited by the Court. In 1849 the Brazilian parliamentarian and poet, Gonçalves Dias, issued a report on public and private education in seven northern provinces; and in 1851 Justiniano da Rocha, a councilman and the first Brazilian political journalist of his time, presented the results of study conducted in the provinces and the Municipality of the Court. Both documents pointed to severe problems with secondary instruction. Many of the lyceums were “schools” in name only, often located in houses and owned by the professor who taught there. There was a lack or absence of books and teaching materials. The instructors had little content knowledge and pedagogical background and thus were unprepared to teach. The establishments did not offer organized programs of study, or curricula. Also, there was no administrative oversight of their activities. The president of the province of Mato Grosso presents us with a stark description of the state of secondary institutions when he notes that there existed schools without desks, thus requiring students to write their lessons on the small rough benches on which they sat. In some edifices there were no
toilets; students were forced to bring their own water and leave the school premises to satisfy their physical necessities.

An 1866 survey by Minister Liberato Barroso of 18 secondary institutions -- lyceums, athenaeums, colleges -- confirmed the findings of the previous reports; little had changed in secondary education in the provinces. While there were a few private colleges that offered comprehensive curricula and staffed by competent administrators and instructors, the deficiencies noted earlier afflicted the vast majority of public and private secondary establishments during the 1870s and 1880s.

In the wake of the 1834 Constitutional Amendment the Imperial Court founded its own college in Rio de Janeiro. But unlike the establishments in the Northern provinces, the institution would be unique, an entity unlike any seen before in Brazil. In 1837 the Legislative Assembly approved a project submitted by the Minister of the Empire, Bernardo de Vasconcelos, to found the Imperial College Pedro II in the Municipality of the Court.
The College tended to the educational needs of the sons of the nobles and the functionaries of the Court. Its statutes contained numerous directives copied from the statutes of French lyceums, and its curriculum was comprehensive and hierarchically and sequentially organized, with distinct grade levels. The program of studies included the classical-humanistic studies taught in the *aulas avulsas*, and courses in modern languages, social studies, science and mathematics. A distinguishing characteristic of the college was that students who completed the sequence of studies were conferred the degree of Bachelor of Letters, which allowed them to be admitted to Brazilian superior institutions without taking the superior entrance examination.

The College was the focus of many debates about the nature of secondary education in the Empire. Under the reign of the monarch Pedro II, the Court viewed its mission as one of unifying the interests of the central and provincial governments. Even after the Additional Act had minimized the role of the Central Government in educational matters in the provinces, the Crown still perceived its mission as that of standardizing basic instruction throughout the realm. Through the prism of this grand purpose, the College Pedro II was conceptualized and organized as the exemplary institution of a great nation, and its program of studies was conceived as a
standard to be followed by secondary institutions throughout the country. From its founding in 1837 to the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, the College figured prominently in the Imperial Government’s efforts to exercise control over secondary education in the provinces.

Equivalência

The reports of Gonçalves Dias in 1849 and Justiniano da Rocha in 1851 confirmed that poor quality of secondary education in the provinces and alerted the Crown to the need to improve the quality of public and private education throughout the realm. The Imperial Government and the National Assembly sought various solutions to address the deficiencies in secondary education. It was, for example, suggested that the Court create secondary institutions in the provinces that were modeled after the College Pedro II and subordinated to a General Directorate of the Court. Financial and political considerations, however, made this solution impractical.

A second and more popular alternative authorized the Central Government to grant equivalency status to provincial lyceums that adopted the organization and course of studies of the College Pedro II. To this end the General Inspectorate of Instruction was created in 1854 to supervise basic and superior education in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, and to report on the state of education in the provinces as compared to that in the Municipality. As commented upon,
“present in these duties is the idea of the sovereign, and adopted by the Minister, to make the organization of public instruction of Rio de Janeiro a model for the provinces, and consequently, again attempt to form, by example, a national system of instruction and of education.” The Central Government attempted to promote “a model that could be consulted and followed for the benefit of national unity.”

The College Pedro II was essential to the concept of equivalency. Its curriculum, course contents and textbooks, administrative procedures and teacher qualifications were to be the standards against which the provincial lyceum would be judged.
Minister Carlos Leôncio de Carvalho expressed this view in 1870 when he stated that there would be given “the prerogatives that the Imperial College Pedro II enjoyed to those establishments of secondary education that adopted the same program of studies and, having functioned regularly for seven years, presented at least 60 graduates who would receive their Bachelor of Letters.” He further noted that graduates of these provincial schools would be allowed to enroll in superior institutions without being required to take entrance examinations, just as their counterparts in the College Pedro II. It was a measure that did not infringe upon the rights of the provinces with respect to basic education.
Equivalency was periodically debated by the National Assembly. Proposals for standardizing secondary education through this mechanism were advanced in 1840, 1843, 1851, 1871, 1882 and 1886. They were, however, rejected. Provincial factions were wary of ceding control of their schools to the Imperial Government. Also, the logistics of organizing institutions similar to the College Pedro II and the cost of maintaining their programs was financially prohibitive. With the turbulence preceding the abdication of the Emperor Pedro II and the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, no legislative action was taken on the proposals in the 1870s and 1880s.

Preparatórios

If the Imperial Government was unable to impose order on secondary education in the provinces through Equivalency, it was successful in influencing the content taught in the secondary establishments and independent courses. This it accomplished through its control over the entrance examinations to the superior institutions in Brazil. The first public post-secondary institutions appeared in the early 1800s. Their origins can be traced to 1808 when King João VI
transferred his government to Brazil after the Napoleonic army under Juneau invaded Portugal. Shortly after arriving in Rio de Janeiro, the Court created military and naval academies, medical faculties, and courses in law, commerce and pharmacy. During the empire, these institutions and courses evolved into medical, law and engineering faculties in major cities like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Bahia, Olinda, Recife and Ouro Preto. To be admitted to advanced studies candidates were required to pass the entrance examinations administered by the superior institutions. Later examining boards were created and active in cities throughout the empire.

Typical subject areas tested in the examinations were Latin, French, English, rhetoric, rational and moral philosophy, arithmetic, algebra and geometry, history and geography, and in the 1880s, natural sciences. The superior institutions, however, varied in the number and types of subjects tested.

The effect of the entrance examinations on secondary education in the Empire was profound. Students in the provinces sought out private or public courses that prepared them for the tests. The courses were known as preparatórios. The preparatory courses were offered
individually or as part of programs of studies in “preparatory schools” annexed to the faculties. The dearth of these courses resulted in the emergence of an educational industry that came to dominate secondary education in the provinces.

The private preparatorios in Rio de Janeiro were so numerous that in 1851, Justiniano José da Rocha, in his report to the Legislative Assembly concluded that there were so many houses of this nature, that one individual could not count them all.

Another effect of the entrance examinations on secondary education was that public and private provincial schools shunned subject areas that were not tested. They typically offered only the preparatorios that covered the examinations since students were interested in completing their preparatory studies as quickly as possible so that their admission to the superior schools would not be delayed. They were not interested in studying any subjects other than those covered in the examinations.

An example of the effect on the curriculum of schools that offered a wide range of studies was the Lyceum of Bahia, which in 1842 created chairs of physics, chemistry, and plant anatomy
and physiology only to eliminate them fifteen years later because of a lack of student interest. Similarly, the provincial lyceum of Pernambuco included science courses in its 1855 curriculum and expunged them in 1879, reducing the curriculum to the subjects of the ten preparatory examinations for the law faculties. The curricula of three lyceums in the Province of Rio de Janeiro were reduced to three aulas avulsas. As for the official lyceums that continued to function in the provinces, they were primarily agglomerates of these independent courses. Schools with comprehensive programs of studies saw enrollments plummet to critical lows. The severity of the problem is illustrated in the provincial Lyceum of Bahia whose enrollment dropped from 496 students in 1837 to 62 in 1882.

The same phenomena affected private schools. An 1867 survey of twelve private schools located in the Municipality revealed that not one institution offered a science course. The experience of the prestigious Aquino College of Rio de Janeiro serves as an example. In 1869 the College offered classes in chemistry, botany and zoology, but by the end of the century they were eliminated due to the pressures of the entrance examinations.
The Court was cognizant of these harsh realities and searched for ways to induce change in provincial education without violating the Constitution. Since, the Additional Act of 1834 prohibited the Government from directly intervening in provincial secondary education, the Crown’s only means of affecting secondary instruction was through its management of the superior school examinations and the preparatory courses.

Several significant steps were taken by the Imperial Government to impose greater uniformity on independent courses and secondary establishments. In 1856, the Central Government passed legislation that required that the annexed preparatory courses adopt the syllabi and compendia approved for the College Pedro II. Also, examining boards for the preparatory studies were created and their responsibilities and procedures delineated. Later, Ministers Souza Ramos in 1862 and Costa Pereira in 1884 proposed tighter restrictions for this requirement, again stressing that the course and examination syllabi be the same as those of the College.
An important measure was implemented in 1873 when Minister João Alfredo created examining boards in the Provinces where there were no faculties. The decree made the entrance examinations accessible to all aspirants, regardless of where they lived. Often, youths aspiring to superior studies would begin their studies in provincial lyceums, but soon abandon them and continue their studies in the cities where the entrance examinations were administered. The decree provided relief for the candidates by incentivizing the development of secondary studies in the provinces. The legislation was a great stimulus to the creation of public and private secondary establishments in the provinces. And since the examinations were based on the official content and compendia approved by the Imperial Government for the College Pedro II, the new establishments were subject to the content requirements established for the examinations. It was an indirect but effective method of influencing not only the expansion of secondary schools, and also of defining the content of the program of studies. It was an indirect by effective method of influencing not only the expansion of secondary schools, but also of determining the content that should be taught.

Retrospect

Summary of Indirect Power

- Required Entrance Examinations
- Dictated Contents of the Examinations
- Established Examining Boards in Provinces
- Converted Aulas Regias in Aulas Avulsas
- Instituted Cursos Preparatórios
- Founded the College Pedro II
- Proposed similar provincial colleges to CPII
- Proposed equivalency
- Dictated contents/compendiums of the courses and programs of the Preparatórios

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References


