

## THE AGRARIAN REFORM IN GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION: PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF BARRAS - PI

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## ABSTRACT

Brazil presents one of the largest land inequalities in the world, reflected in the concentration of land and related social conflicts. This research investigates how the theme of agrarian reform is approached in Geography education in the municipality of Barras-PI, considering the importance of this theme for critical and citizenship-oriented education. The main objective was to analyze the pedagogical practices and teaching materials used in Geography education, evaluating how they promote critical reflections on the local reality and contribute to students' understanding of agrarian reform. The methodology adopted a mixed approach, including bibliographic research and the application of questionnaires to Geography teachers in the final years of elementary school in rural schools, in addition to the analysis of the textbooks used. The results pointed to significant challenges, such as the superficiality of content in textbooks, the lack of specific training on the topic, and the predominant use of traditional methodologies. Despite this, complementary practices, such as debates and visits to settlements, stood out as strategies to connect students to the local reality and promote engagement with the topic. It was concluded that, although there are structural and pedagogical barriers, there is potential to improve the teaching of agrarian reform through investments in teacher training, the adoption of contextualized teaching materials, and the diversification of methodologies. These changes can strengthen the transformative role of Geography education in the formation of critical and engaged citizens.

**Keywords:** Geography education; Agrarian reform; Textbook; Teaching practice.



## INTRODUCTION

Brazil is widely recognized as one of the most unequal countries in the world, and this inequality is a structural feature of its reality. It manifests in various forms, such as the sharp concentration of wealth in the hands of a small portion of the population, land concentration, violence, housing deficits, hunger, and many other situations that reflect the country's social and economic disparity.

Stédile (1997) emphasizes that the distribution of land in Brazil, initiated during the colonial period with the hereditary captaincies and the sesmaria system, and consolidated by the enactment of the Land Law of 1850 (Law No. 601), constitutes the structural basis of underdevelopment, social inequalities, poverty, and the various forms of exclusion that characterize Brazilian society.

While countries currently considered developed, such as those in Europe and the United States, adopted an opposite path, access to land was more democratic. Stédile (1997) highlights that, in the case of the United States, it was sufficient for each family to occupy and cultivate the land to guarantee the right of possession, with a limitation of up to 100 acres per family.

According to Veiga (1981), "[...] the modification of the agrarian structure of a country or region with a view to a more equitable distribution of land and agricultural income is the most common definition of agrarian reform." In this sense, when fully implemented, agrarian reform emerges as an instrument with the potential to confront and overcome inequalities and social injustices in Brazil.

Geography, as a critical discipline with a transformative role, must address this theme in depth, fostering a more critical perspective among students. This enables them to understand the importance and role of effective agrarian reform as an instrument to break with inequalities and address social issues. Penteado (2010) asserts that Geography plays a fundamental role in shaping critical citizens, as it aids in understanding the society in which one lives, recognizing oneself as a social agent, and identifying and understanding the processes that influence and shape social organization.

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) establish guidelines for teaching in basic education schools in Brazil, defining content and pedagogical approaches for various subjects. Regarding Geography, the PCNs present in thematic axis III, called "The Countryside and the City as Socio-spatial Formations," guidelines for addressing agrarian reform, aiming to promote reflection on the relationships between rural and urban spaces and their transformations throughout history. Meanwhile, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) does not treat agrarian reform as a specific theme but incorporates related issues within the context of citizenship education and sustainable development.

In this context, the present research seeks to investigate how agrarian reform and its impacts on rural settlements are addressed in Geography education in Barras-PI. This municipality, marked by a history of numerous land tenure conflicts, currently has 39 rural settlements in the 21st century. However, little progress and success have been observed in the projects developed in the region. Thus, it is expected



that Geography teachers, as far as possible and in accordance with their critical role, contextualize the problems of students' reality and explore this theme in depth, promoting a more consistent and transformative reflection. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that teachers should not bear this responsibility alone.

The main objective of this research is to analyze how the theme of agrarian reform is addressed in Geography education in the municipality of Barras-PI, with an emphasis on the use of teaching materials and teaching practices. The specific objectives of the research were: (I) to identify the pedagogical practices of Geography teachers; (II) to examine the quality and contextualization of teaching materials. This analysis seeks to understand how Geography teachers in the municipality contextualize the local reality and how this is reflected in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, the research also aims to identify the limitations and potentialities of the teaching materials used, as well as the critical stance adopted by teachers when addressing social and spatial issues related to agrarian reform.

Therefore, this research is of great relevance, considering the historical background of land inequality in Brazil, which is reflected in various social and economic spheres. The country has one of the highest concentrations of land in the world, generating conflicts and perpetuating poverty in many regions, especially in rural areas such as Barras. It is hoped, therefore, to contribute to a more meaningful pedagogical practice in this context, capable of awakening in students a critical view of the reality in which they live and the transformative role of agrarian reform in combating social inequalities and injustices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is descriptive and exploratory in nature, grounded in an approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods. It was complemented by the use of data collection techniques, with emphasis on bibliographic research. According to Prodanov and Freitas (2013), bibliographic research is developed from materials already published, encompassing sources such as books, journals, scientific articles, newspapers, bulletins, monographs, dissertations, theses, cartographic materials, and online content. This provided a more consistent theoretical foundation.

Questionnaires were also administered to six Geography teachers who teach in the final years of elementary school (6th to 9th grades) in schools located in rural areas of Barras-PI. Among these schools, four are situated in settlements resulting from agrarian reform. The questionnaires were designed to understand how Geography teachers address the theme of agrarian reform in their pedagogical practices, as well as to identify the challenges faced and the strategies adopted in teaching in rural areas. The questions sought to explore relevant aspects such as teacher training, classroom methods, and available resources. Among the questions were: how teachers assess their training to address topics related to

agrarian reform, how they approach this theme in their classes, and whether the textbooks used include content on agrarian reform.

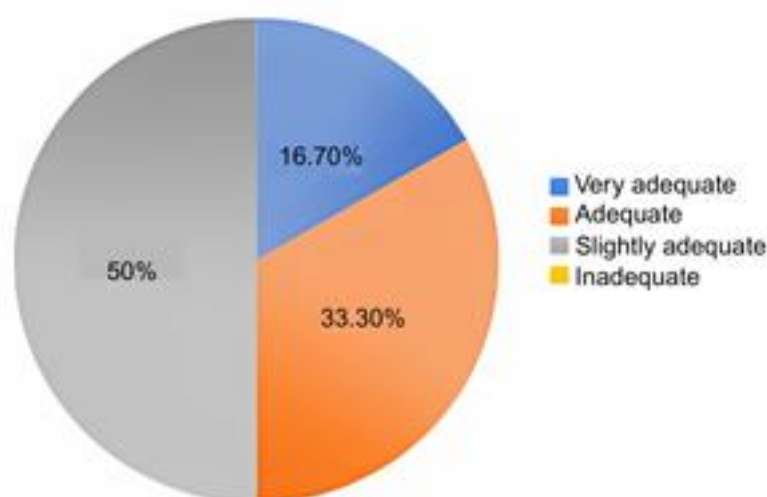
In addition, an analysis was conducted of the Geography textbooks used in the final years of elementary education (6th to 9th grades) in the schools surveyed. It was identified that the adopted collection is *Jovem Sapiens*, published by Editora Scipione and organized by Bruna Migotto Barbieri Estruzani. Through this analysis, the study sought to understand how the theme of agrarian reform is addressed in these materials, evaluating the depth of the content and its relationship with the reality of students in rural areas.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### TEACHING PRACTICES AND AGRARIAN REFORM

The data collected through the questionnaire applied to six Geography teachers working in the final years of elementary education in Barras-PI revealed information about teacher training, pedagogical practices, and challenges in teaching the topic of agrarian reform. Half of the teachers hold a degree in Geography, while the other half complemented their education with postgraduate studies in the field. This training is important; however, even so, teachers' self-assessment regarding their preparation to address the topic of agrarian reform is moderate. While 50% consider their training "slightly adequate," 33.3% classify it as "adequate," and only 16.7% as "very adequate," as shown in Graph 1.

Graph 01: Teachers' perception of their training to address agrarian reform in Geography education



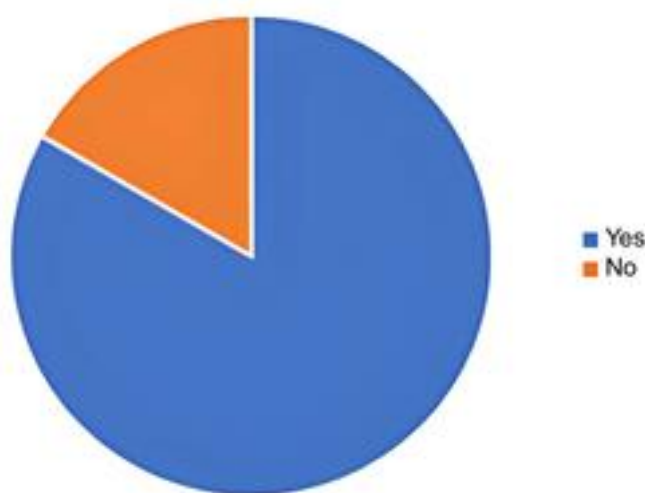
Source: Author, 2024

The data show that although no teacher considers their training completely inadequate for teaching agrarian reform, 50% consider it slightly adequate and only 16.7% see it as very adequate. This indicates weaknesses in both initial and continuing education, suggesting the need for greater investment in including this topic in curricula and pedagogical practices.

In summary, these findings demonstrate that although there is basic training in the field, there may be a lack of specific depth on the topic of agrarian reform. Menezes and Kaercher (2015) emphasize that teachers, as social agents and promoters of change, need training that enables them to deal with a constantly globalized world full of complex and diverse issues. While the importance of teacher training as a social agent and promoter of change is recognized, it is crucial to question whether this training is truly sufficient to address the complexity of a globalized world. Training must go beyond the basics, addressing contemporary issues in depth. It is widely agreed that preparation is essential, but it is also necessary to ensure that this training is robust and practical.

Regarding the second question, of the six teachers surveyed, one (16.7%) reported never having addressed the topic of agrarian reform in the classroom. The omission, neglect, or simple act of “skipping” such an important subject for understanding our reality can perpetuate a knowledge gap in students’ lives, causing future harm in exams and limiting their critical view of the context in which they live, as shown in Graph 2.

Graph 02: Teachers who have addressed the topic of agrarian reform in their classes



Source: Author, 2024

A Geography teacher must have the ability to connect the subject’s content with real-world and current events. This ability can undoubtedly transform the way students perceive Geography, both as a

school subject and as a way of understanding the world. On the other hand, the absence or denial of certain content can compromise the education of an entire generation of critical, conscious, and active citizens. Kimura (2008) stresses that it is essential for the teaching of geographic knowledge to be developed in a contextualized manner, offering students different perspectives on a specific issue and proposing problems for analysis.

In terms of pedagogical practices, 83.3% of teachers use lectures and promote debates or discussion circles to address the topic, and 50% complement these with the analysis of local cases, especially those related to agrarian reform settlements in the region. These strategies show efforts to contextualize the content to students' daily lives, but the predominance of traditional methodologies, such as lectures, indicates the need to diversify approaches to foster greater engagement and active participation by students. Libâneo (2008) emphasizes that traditional teaching, based exclusively on verbal transmission of information and learning as mere accumulation of knowledge, is no longer sufficient. It is essential for the teacher to act as a mediator, promoting an active relationship between the student and the content addressed. This process must consider students' experiences, meanings, cognitive potential, abilities, interests, and ways of thinking and working.

Regarding teaching materials, 50% of teachers indicated that the textbooks used address the topic superficially, while 33.3% stated that the topic is not covered. Only 16.7% believe that the books provide detailed content on agrarian reform. Teachers reported that this limitation is partially mitigated by the use of supplementary materials, such as articles and videos, which are used by half of the teachers. This reliance on additional materials points to the need to improve the textbooks adopted, making them more aligned with the local reality and the topic in question. According to Castellar and Vilhena (2010), the textbook remains an essential resource in teaching but should be used as support to enrich content with other activities and texts. Thus, it is important for teachers to understand their pedagogical objectives and relate them to everyday life, making learning more meaningful.

According to teachers' responses, 50% used the textbook as the main resource in their classes. The others were equally divided among supplementary materials such as articles and videos (16.7%), practical activities such as visits and debates (16.7%), and other unspecified methods (16.7%). Castellar and Vilhena (2010) highlight that when used inappropriately, focusing only on memorization, the textbook limits the potential for deepening and expanding students' knowledge.

Regarding student interest, 50% of teachers reported that students show engagement with the topic but also acknowledged that many have little familiarity with the issue of agrarian reform. This information points to the need to further contextualize teaching, using local examples and promoting activities that connect academic content to students' experiences. The inclusion of visits to rural settlements, considered important by 100% of teachers, can significantly enrich the teaching-learning



process. In this context, field classes in these rural spaces present themselves as a highly interesting alternative to promote content contextualization, especially because students are directly inserted in this environment. According to Piaget (1993), knowledge is constructed through interaction with the environment, which reinforces the importance of field classes as a tool for understanding both the environment and scientific content, as these are intrinsically linked to geographic space and the relationships that develop within it.

The challenges identified by teachers include the lack of adequate teaching materials (100%), insufficient time to work on extracurricular topics (33.3%), lack of interest from some students (33.3%), and the absence of specific training on the subject (33.3%). Despite these difficulties, teachers acknowledged the transformative potential of teaching about agrarian reform. They noted that addressing this topic stimulates reflections on social inequalities, connects content to local reality, and contributes to students' civic education—these aspects were considered essential by 83.3% of teachers.

In this scenario, school Geography assumes a transformative role by contributing to critical and civic education. For Esteves (2006), Geography should go beyond memorization and the location of isolated facts, adopting the analysis of reality as a starting point. This approach enables students to understand more complex and distant phenomena while developing a critical capacity for analysis.

## THE APPROACH TO AGRARIAN REFORM IN TEXTBOOKS

The municipal education network of Barras-PI uses the Geography textbooks from the Jovem Sapiens collection, published by Editora Scipione and organized by Bruna Migotto Barbieri Estruzani. This collection aims to align with the guidelines of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), addressing the general skills and competencies expected for each stage of elementary education. However, the analysis of how the topic of agrarian reform is treated in the volumes intended for the final years (6th to 9th grades) reveals considerable variation in depth and contextualization, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 –Textbooks from the PNLD Jovem Sapiens Collection



Source: Editora Spicione, 2024

For the 6th grade, the textbook does not address the topic of agrarian reform. This absence may be understandable within curricular guidelines but reflects a missed opportunity to introduce, in a simple and adapted way, fundamental concepts about land structure and rural space. Introducing this topic, even superficially, could prepare students for more in-depth discussions in later years. According to Vygotsky (1988), from a sociocultural perspective, concept formation in education occurs through the interaction between students' everyday knowledge and the systematized knowledge offered by the school environment. Thus, in Geography teaching, it is necessary to adopt a sequential and progressive approach that respects students' contexts and promotes the connection between content and lived reality.

In the 7th grade, the textbook addresses agrarian reform in a moderate way. The content includes explanations about Brazil's land structure, land concentration, and the impacts of this reality, such as deforestation and agrarian conflicts. It also discusses social movements, such as the MST, and government actions related to agrarian reform. The proposed activities encourage debates and reflections, connecting the topic to concrete problems such as land inequality and underutilization. Despite this approach, the content lacks deeper critical and historical analysis, limiting itself to a basic exposition of facts.

The inclusion of graphs, such as the distribution of rural establishments by size, can be considered a positive point, as it provides concrete data for analysis. However, the absence of practical activities that promote greater interaction with local reality, such as visits to rural settlements or specific case studies, may limit student engagement. In this sense, Santos (1996) highlights the importance of promoting a critical understanding of the relationships between society and space, considering factors such as culture,



economy, politics, and the environment. The author advocates overcoming descriptive approaches in Geography, emphasizing the analysis of socio-spatial inequalities, power relations, and urban and rural dynamics, with the aim of encouraging students to understand the impact of these aspects on their lives and communities.

In the 8th grade, the textbook addresses agrarian reform within the historical and geopolitical context of the Cuban Revolution, mentioning it as one of the transformative actions carried out by the socialist government after 1959. The content briefly discusses how poor land distribution generated social movements demanding agrarian reform in Latin American countries, including Brazil. Additionally, there is a proposal for contextualization, encouraging students to identify rural settlements in their region.

This approach presents an interesting perspective by connecting the topic to an international context but lacks a more in-depth analysis of Brazilian specificities and the contemporary challenges of agrarian reform in the country. According to Ferreira (2023), an adequate organization of Geography teaching helps students understand the interactions between the global and the local, as well as the socioeconomic inequalities and globalization processes that impact different regions of the world.

In the 9th grade, the textbook does not address the topic of agrarian reform, as the BNCC also does not include it in this grade. However, this absence represents a missed opportunity to revisit and deepen discussions on the topic, as students are more prepared for critical and complex reflections. The process of assimilation and retention of content is continuous; in this sense, Kimura (2008) emphasizes that learning facilitates the assimilation of new information, as it integrates into a constantly evolving cognitive framework, serving as a reference for future incorporations. This process occurs actively, through interaction between the individual and the environment.

## CONCLUSION

Agrarian reform, despite its importance as a social and political issue, still faces barriers to being properly incorporated into Geography education in the final years of elementary school in the municipality of Barras-PI. The research revealed that teachers encounter challenges such as the absence of specific teaching materials, lack of time to address extracurricular topics, limitations in teacher training, and textbooks that are poorly suited to the specificities and daily realities of students. Nevertheless, the efforts of teachers who seek to contextualize the topic using complementary methodologies and activities that connect content to students' realities are noteworthy.

The research objective—to analyze how agrarian reform is addressed in Geography education—was achieved by identifying both the potentialities and the gaps in pedagogical practices and the materials used. The findings show that while some pedagogical practices succeed in fostering critical reflections, the predominance of traditional methodologies may limit student engagement. Furthermore, the



superficial treatment of the topic in the textbooks used in the schools studied highlights the need for adaptations that promote greater depth and connection with local realities.

The study also revealed that the absence of content on agrarian reform in certain grades, such as the 6th and 9th, represents a missed opportunity to prepare students for broader and more critical discussions. However, the complementary practices implemented by teachers, such as discussion circles and visits to rural settlements, demonstrate the potential of this topic to develop a civic and critical perspective among students.

In short, Geography education in Barras-PI presents structural and pedagogical limitations that need to be overcome for the topic of agrarian reform to be addressed in a meaningful and transformative way. To achieve this, it is necessary to invest in continuing teacher education, adopt more contextualized teaching materials, and expand the use of active methodologies that promote student interaction with their reality. In this way, Geography education can contribute more effectively to the formation of critical citizens capable of understanding socio-spatial inequalities and acting in the construction of a fairer and more equitable society.



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