

The gender gap reversal in the Brazilian education in the XX century

José Eustáquio Diniz Alves¹
Kaizô Iwakami Beltrão²

Key-Words: Gender Gap, education, women, gender

Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl's full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality...
World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000)

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015...
Millennium Summit (New York, 2000)

Extended Abstract:

The reduction of the gender gap and the greater access to education among women are the explicit objectives of the IV Women's Conference (1995), of the World Education Forum (2000), and the Millennium Development Goals (2000). All the international conferences promoted by United Nations in the last 10 years, departs from the principle that in order to have a fair and prosperous world it is mandatory to eliminate discrimination against women in all areas of activities, specially in education, which brings more status and autonomy, that is, more women empowerment. Traditionally, in the majority of countries women always have more difficulties in the access to education. Some countries have achieved eliminating educational disparities in gender, but many others still have a large battle ahead. The gender gap and women educational deficit were the Brazilian reality along more than 450 years. Nonetheless, women have eradicated and reverted this gap in the second half of the XX Century. This paper has the purpose of analyzing how and when the reversal of gender gap in education took place in Brazil, examining demographic censuses data from 1960 to 1996, by schooling and educational degrees, broken down by sex and birth cohorts. This approach will allow evaluating the gender gap from cohorts born from 1890 to 1990.

To illustrate, Graphic 1 presents the average years of schooling for men and women from 1960 t 1996. Average schooling is growing for both sex, but women are achieving it in higher pace. In 1960, average schooling of Brazilian men was 1.9 years and for women it was 1.7 years. In 1996 these figures were, respectively, 5.8 and 6.1 years. The difference was then 0.2 years in favor of men and 0.3 in favor of women in 1996. Looking at the aggregated data, the reversal of gender gap in education occurred in the 1980 decade. However, an analysis by cohorts will show

¹ National School of Statistics (ENCE) of the Brazilian Bureau of Census (IBGE). E-mail jedalves@ibge.gov.br

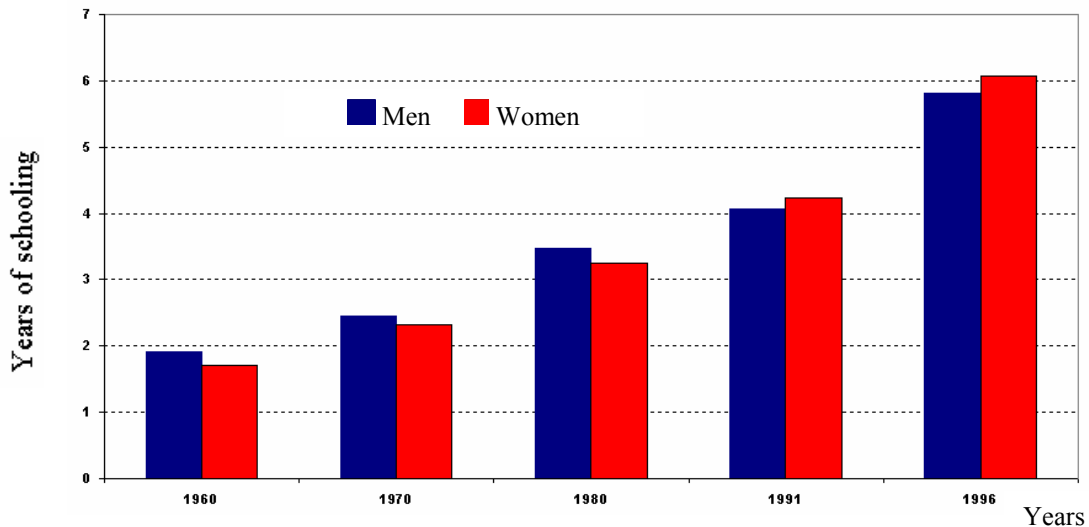
² National School of Statistics (ENCE) of the Brazilian Bureau of Census (IBGE). E-mail kaizo@ibge.gov.br

³ We choose to utilize data from the 1996 population counting, instead of the 2000 census, because the last present methodological problems that underestimates the volume of people in higher education levels.

that younger women have begun to present higher rates of average schooling than men many decades before the 80's.

Graphic 1

Average years of schooling among 5 years and older population according to sex.
Brazil, 1960-1996



Source: IBGE, Demographic Censuses, Brazil, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991, and 1996.

Graphic 2 shows the same information as Graphic 1, although it presents desegregation by birth cohorts⁴. Each line of graphic 2 represents the data for each census by sex, and the cohorts are represented in the abscissas. Following vertical lines we can observe information for a given cohort in various censuses (and consequently a same cohort in various stages of life cycle). For instance, the cohort born between 1951 and 1955, in the first census that we can observe it, 1960, has 5-9 years old and an average of 0.20 years of schooling for men and 0.22 for women. In the 1970 census, 10 years later, the same cohort has 15-19 years old and average years of schooling 3.4 for men and 3.54 for women. In 1980, the same cohort belongs to the 25-29 years old age group and presents average years of schooling, respectively, 5.02 and 5.03 for men and women. In the 1991⁵, men of 35-39 years old have higher average years of schooling (5.63) than women (5.58). In the population counting in 1996, the same cohort of men has on average 6.44 years of education and the cohort of women has 6.33 years.

When we observe the cohort born 10 years earlier, that is, between 1941 and 1945, the 1970 census show that for the age group of 25 to 29 years old, men already had higher average years of education than women: 3.43 compared to 3.15 year. On the other hand, when analyzing the 1960 census, women of this same cohort, with 15-19 years old by 1960, presented in average

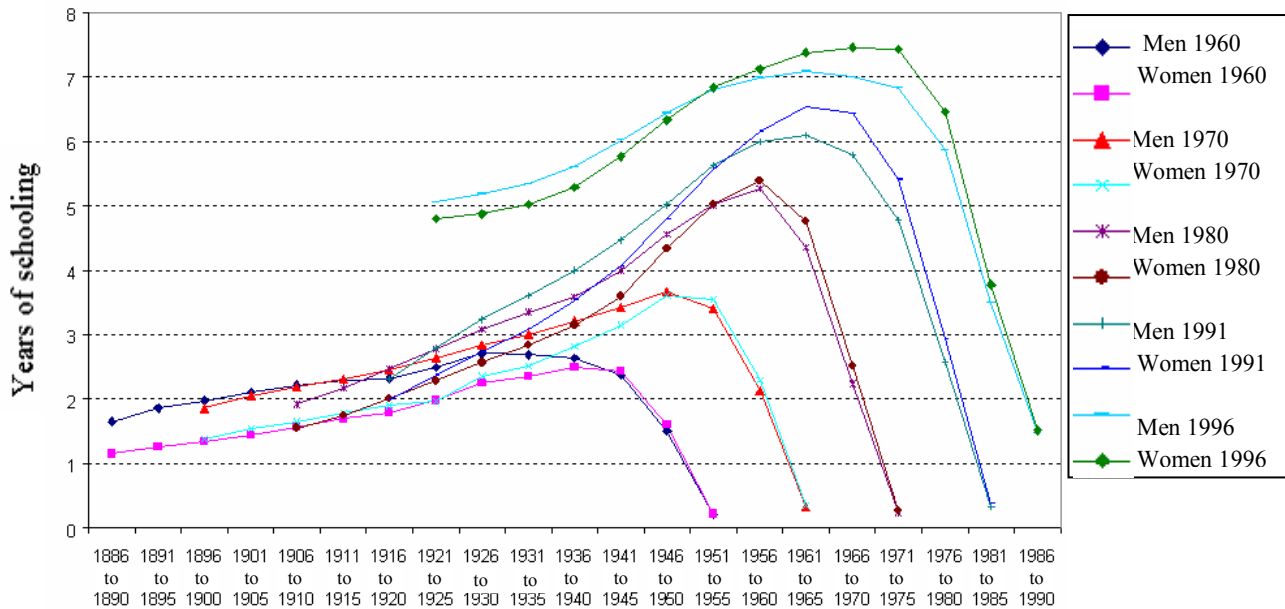
⁴ We consider 5-years birth cohorts, compatible with the 5-years age groups available in the publication of the censuses. For instance, in the data of the 1980 census, the youngest cohort corresponds to the age group of 5-9 years old, which has born between 1971 and 1975.

⁵ The 1991 and 1996 cohorts, utilizing the published data are not exactly compatible with the previous censuses; however, we overlook the differences since it is only one year apart.

more years of schooling than men. For all cohorts, women in the 5-9 years old age group present, in average, higher levels of education than men.

Graphic 2

Average years of schooling among 5 years and older population according to sex and birth cohort. Brazil, 1960-1996



Source: IBGE, Demographic Censuses, Brazil, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991, and 1996.

Following the horizontal direction from the older birth cohorts to the youngest, we can observe that, in each census, the gender gap that use to be in favor of women starts decreasing up to reach a point of inflexion and became positive in favor of women. For example, the cohort born between 1916-20 who had 4-45 years old by the 1960 census, presented average years of schooling of 1.9 for women and 2.32 for men. The same age group in the 1970, 1980, and 1991 censuses had average education, respectively, of 2.36, 3.15 and 4.8 for men and 2.84, 3.53 and 5.02 for women. In 1996, these figures were about the same for men and women in this age group (40-45 years old).

In general terms, data show that for the older age groups (above 40 years old) men kept higher gender gap compared to women. Nonetheless, the picture changed totally for the younger cohorts. By taking the 10-14 age group as an example, we can observe that since the 1960's, the educational gender gap has had a reversal in favor of women: men aged 10-14 years old in 1960 had on average 1.5 years of schooling, by 1970 had 2.13, by 1980 had 2.24, by 1991 had 2.57, and by 1996 had 3.5 years of education, while women had 1.60, 2.30, 2.52, 2.93, and 3.78 respectively in the 5 censuses.

Summarizing, on the one hand, while we follow from the older age groups to the youngest, women reduce the difference in relation to higher male education, and from another hand, following the youngest age groups, women had increased the difference of schooling in favor to themselves.

Qualitative analysis shows that the reversal of the gender gap in education in the Brazilian history is a recent female conquest. During the colonial period (1500-1822), Brazilian women were excluded from the scarce formal educational system existent in the country. During the period of the “Empire” (1822-1889), legislation had extended rights of primary education to women, but indeed, they have had much less access to primary school than men at that time. The scenario had improved a little during the old Republic period (1889-1930); nonetheless, the most significant advances in the female education occurred after the “revolution of the 1930’s”, when women had obtained the right to vote (1932). During the period called “Populist Pact” (1954-1964) took place an expansion of the coverage in primary education in response to the process of economical modernization. Regarding to higher degrees of schooling, the bills of the Brazilian Education in 1961 (“*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases*”-LDB) had warranted equivalences of all median degrees existent in the country. Hence, opening the opportunity of women who had taken teaching profession (*magistério*) to be able to take the exam to enter undergraduate schools (*vestibular*), which was not allowed before. Therefore, it was after the 1960 that Brazilian women have had higher chances of having college degrees. During the military regime (1964-1985) occurred a general expansion of the Brazilian educational system. The redemocratization process in the country, which had began in the primary stage of the “New Republic” (1985-), and the legal advances obtained with the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, allowed women to give a step ahead and to enlarge the differentials, already accomplished for some degrees, compared to men.

The approach applied in the example above, will be implemented to all levels of education (primary and secondary cycles of elementary schooling, high school and college degrees). This exercise will allow to show when the reversal of gender gap in education have occurred in the several levels of education. Data analysis together with the reconstitution of the Brazilian history of education, especially, of female education, will allow us to create the sceneries of women’s growing insertion in the different levels of education in Brazil.