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Paradigm of school education: A reflection on children's access to primary education in Angola

Paradigma de la Educación escolar: Una reflexión sobre el acceso de los niños a la educación primaria en Angola



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Abstract

Universal access to education means that all individuals have equal educational opportunities, regardless of social class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, or physical or mental disability. This study reflects on the factors that affect access to primary education in Angola, through a bibliographic, documentary, exploratory, and qualitative approach. The results reveal a discrepancy between the values established in the Angolan Constitution and international educational treaties, and their effective implementation. It is noted that 22% of school-aged children do not attend school. The main factors limiting access include socioeconomic conditions, geographic location, health and hygiene problems, child labor, and early pregnancy, especially in rural areas. Further research is recommended to compare findings and generate new scientific contributions aimed at improving educational access in the country.

Keywords: Access, Primary education, Angola, Factors.

Resumen

El acceso universal a la educación implica que todas las personas tengan igualdad de oportunidades educativas, sin distinción de clase social, raza, género, sexualidad, origen étnico o discapacidad. Este estudio reflexiona sobre los factores que afectan el acceso a la educación primaria en Angola, mediante una investigación bibliográfica, documental, exploratoria y con enfoque cualitativo. Los resultados muestran una discrepancia entre los valores establecidos en la Constitución angoleña y en los tratados internacionales sobre educación, y su efectiva implementación. Se destaca que el 22% de los niños en edad escolar no asisten a la escuela. Entre los principales factores que limitan el acceso se encuentran las condiciones socioeconómicas, la ubicación geográfica, los problemas de salud e higiene, el trabajo infantil y el embarazo precoz, especialmente en zonas rurales. Se recomienda realizar nuevas investigaciones para comparar resultados y generar aportes científicos que contribuyan a mejorar el acceso educativo en el país.

Palabras clave: Acceso, Educación primaria, Angola, Factores.

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Introduction

Education is the act of educating, instructing, and disciplining. Education refers to the means by which the habits, customs, and values of a community are transferred from one generation to the next (Adolfo, 2014).

According to Queiroz (2025), referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26—corroborated by Angolan legislation in Law No. 162/23, which establishes compulsory and free primary education for all, regardless of age—every person may access education and literacy, thereby revoking Laws No. 32/20 and 17/16. Universal access to education is the ability for all individuals to have equal opportunities in education, regardless of their social class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, or physical or mental disability. Such access broadens horizons, transforms lives, and enables the development of critical and moral thinking.

According to Nobre (2022), it is through knowledge that individuals drive their lives, guide their trajectory, develop ethical values, and fully exercise their citizenship, understanding their rights and duties. The main indicators of primary education include: the average number of students per class, the average number of instructional hours per day, the age–grade distortion rate, the percentage of teachers with higher education, the adequacy of teacher training, teacher regularity, teaching effort, and the complexity of school management.

In Angola, the public school system—expected to serve as the main instrument for democratizing education—faces serious structural, financial, and human resource limitations. Added to these challenges are insufficient infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and inadequate teaching resources (Santana, 2025).

Thus, according to Article 2, paragraph 1, of the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System (Law 17/16) of October 7, amended by Law 32/20 of August 12, education is a planned and systematized process of teaching and learning aimed at preparing individuals holistically for the demands of individual and collective life. It develops within human coexistence, with the purpose of addressing the main challenges of society, particularly in the consolidation of peace and national unity, and the promotion and protection of human rights, the environment, and the scientific, technological, social, and cultural development of the country (Chikela, 2019).

According to Adolfo (2015), formal teaching in Angola began in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, long before the current territory was unified, during the presence of the Kingdom of Kongo. Within the framework of Angola's governmental policies for reconstruction and development, education assumes crucial importance, serving as a strategic vector in combating poverty and illiteracy, promoting health, and reducing social and gender inequalities.

Regarding access to education, private schooling in Angola has ceased to be a privilege and has become a necessity due to the public system's inability to absorb the student population within its current 8,137 public general education schools. Even low-income families are often forced to enroll their children in private schools, where access is frequently hindered by parents' inability to continue paying tuition fees. School access inequalities between urban and rural areas are substantial. The net enrollment rate in primary education is 78% in urban areas and 59% in rural areas (Chilumbo, 2019).

According to Paxe (2019), Angola currently has 103,599 classrooms, of which 61% belong to public

schools, 33% to public–private partnership schools, and 6% to private schools, grouped into 13,238 institutions. Regarding access to education, 22% of school-age children are outside the education system. Only 11% of children aged 3–5 have access to preschool education (Unicef, 2025).

This research seeks to conduct a bibliographic inquiry into access to primary education in Angola, a country located in Sub-Saharan Africa, and to identify the factors contributing to the high exclusion of children from the public education system, offering suggestions to help mitigate such effects.

Materials and Methods

The research is bibliographic, exploratory, and documentary, with a qualitative approach, seeking to evaluate aspects related to access to primary education in Angola based on the analysis of documents and data found in the aforementioned sources. Bibliographic research is conducted using available records derived from previous studies, found in printed documents such as books, articles, theses, decrees-laws, etc. (Siena et al., 2024).

The inclusion criteria for the works selected in this research were the contemporaneity of the study, the relevance of the topic addressed, the significance of the problem, and the feasibility of obtaining the content present in them. All publications, articles, and periodicals that did not meet the conditions established in the inclusion criteria were excluded. All variables used in this study were qualitative. The research results were analyzed qualitatively. The ethical limitations of this study were noted in the cross-referencing of data found in the studies, particularly those of Angolan authors, as well as in the assumptions of the various decrees-laws addressing the subject matter.

Results and Discussion

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Education is a social phenomenon that, in principle, serves the function of socializing and integrating generations. With regard to access to primary education, its objectives allow students to acquire basic literacy and numeracy, as well as elementary knowledge in Science, Geography, History, Mathematics, and other Social Sciences. The priority given to its provision is the subject of intense political and pedagogical debates.

From [Santana's \(2025\)](#) perspective, access to education is influenced by environmental, economic, social, emotional, psychological, and family-related factors. In the Angolan context, the main problem inherent to access to primary education is intrinsically linked to the shortage of school infrastructure, despite the efforts made by the State to expand the school network and broaden access not only to primary education but also to other subsystems. Added to this are socioeconomic and geographic constraints, health and hygiene problems, child labor, and early pregnancy—an especially concerning factor that contributes to school dropout, particularly in rural areas.

A comparative analysis of the Constitution of Angola and the recent Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System (Law No. 17/16 of October 10), as cited by [Chikela \(2019\)](#), reveals a gap between the ideal and everyday educational practice. That is, although there is legislation supported by programs designed to promote and ensure broad and inalienable access to primary education, the daily reality and the situation observed at the beginning of each school year contradict this well-intentioned effort by the State.

It should also be noted that the armed conflict Angola experienced for nearly three decades triggered a population exodus toward major cities, causing significant overcrowding. This placed an alarming

burden on the State regarding the educational supply, which, in many cases, has not been proportional to this demographic phenomenon.

As can be observed, there is a certain overlap between universal factors and local realities, which may be intrinsically tied to the socioeconomic and political circumstances of each region or geographical area. However, David's (2022) study on social inequality and the teaching–learning processes of early childhood education highlights factors associated with school access, such as social, economic, racial, and gender disparities; interactions between children and educators; material and infrastructural conditions; teacher training and working conditions; and cooperation between school and family.

This reflection is supported by Chilumbo (2019), who, in his study on the Angolan educational system and its adaptation to the cultural context of rural areas in Huambo, concluded that education is very weak, as it lacks deeper reflections on the implementation of public policies related to social, economic, and geographic factors. This situation has led families to prioritize food security, resulting in children attending school appearing sad and malnourished, which demands a certain degree of pedagogical flexibility to address the deficiencies identified in their daily reality.

The situation of children's access to primary education in Angola, according to Chikela (2019), requires urgent reforms to significantly reduce existing barriers. These include supportive family environments where parents engage in their children's education; adequate physical and mental health conditions; the quality of education provided by schools; and accessible school infrastructure. Other important factors include economic and social support, qualified teachers, and a positive school culture that fosters learning.

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These elements are corroborated by Luís (2021), who, in his study on access to education in Angola, states that access to schooling continues to be a State priority regardless of circumstances. Therefore, States must promote, through public policies, conditions that facilitate participation in and access to public education, emphasizing that access to primary education is a subjective right of every citizen and thus deserves and requires due respect.

According to the report from the National Institute of Statistics (2025), released on November 25 of this year as part of the presentation of the results of the 2024 population and housing census, Angola currently has five million school-aged children outside the education system, representing 22% of all Angolan children in this age group. This highlights a major challenge not only for the Ministry of Education but also for the need for a multidisciplinary approach to this phenomenon, given that it concerns an inalienable fundamental right and an issue of citizenship.

Final considerations

Education is a social practice aimed at the development of the human being, their potential, skills, and competencies. It can also be considered a duty of both the family and the State, inspired by the principles of freedom and the ideals of human solidarity, with the purpose of ensuring the full development of the learner, preparing them for the exercise of citizenship, and equipping them for the workforce. Therefore, education is not limited to the school environment.

The study highlights that there are many reasons why school-aged children and adolescents in Angola are out of school. These include limited educational opportunities due to a lack of available places in

schools, disinterest in attending school, illnesses that prevent regular attendance, violence of any kind, socioeconomic issues, conflicts with the law, adolescent pregnancy, prejudice and discrimination, as well as a shortage of qualified teachers.

This research demonstrates that universal access to education can be facilitated through public policy measures, evaluation and diagnosis of the educational situation, ensuring enrollment for all children and adolescents without any form of discrimination, providing structures that enable accessibility, and investing in teacher training. Regarding children's and adolescents' access to primary education, it is noteworthy that 22% of school-aged children in Angola are still out of the education system, and 48% of enrolled students do not complete primary education.

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that adopting strategies to promote greater inclusion of children and adolescents in primary education—thereby reducing the gap between the constitutional perspective that advocates for compulsory primary education and the current reality—is increasingly urgent. Education is a right for all and aims at the full development of the human being through the teaching–learning process.

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