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# **EMPOWERING PROGRESS: THE ROLE OF D.E.I.A. IN ENHANCING BRAZIL'S GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS**

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**Abstract:** In Brazil, a country renowned for its cultural diversity and vibrant mix of ethnicities, the underrepresentation of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people stands as a stark reality. Despite comprising 56% of the population, these groups are conspicuously absent in key sectors of the economy and society. The Quota Law, enacted over a decade ago, was a promising step towards addressing this disparity. This study systematically gathered and analyzed data from universities, government agencies, and firsthand accounts through surveys and interviews, offering an unprecedented look at how the Quota Law has influenced educational attainment, employment rates, and social mobility among its beneficiaries. Statistical analysis reveals that the policy has significantly increased university enrollment and graduation rates for Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people. However, the impact on broader societal inclusion remains a work in progress.

**Keywords:** DEIA, Brazil, Quota Law, Discrimination

## **INTRODUCTION**

More likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. The International Labor Organization (ILO) emphasizes that promoting equality and diversity in the workplace can lead to significant economic benefits by improving access to talent, boosting employee morale and productivity, reducing social inequities, and fostering economic empowerment, particularly for marginalized groups (ILO, 2022). Research by Page (2007) demonstrates that diverse groups outperform homogeneous ones in problem-solving, offering varied perspectives that lead to more innovative solutions and better decision-making processes. Empirical studies evaluating Brazil's Quota Law have shown positive impacts on the educational attainment of underrepresented groups, with Costa Ribeiro and Schlegel (2019) finding increased university enrollment rates for Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people, contributing to greater social mobility and reduced educational disparities. Lloyd et al. (2015) noted that while affirmative action policies, including the Quota Law, have faced criticism, they have effectively improved access to higher education for historically marginalized groups without compromising academic standards. This supports the argument that such policies are crucial for fostering inclusivity and economic empowerment. A report by the World Economic Forum (2018) underscores that inclusive growth

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policies, which prioritize diversity and equity, are key drivers of national competitiveness. Countries that harness the full potential of their diverse populations are better positioned to compete globally. The Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) (INSEAD, 2020) ranks countries based on their ability to attract, develop and retain talent. Brazil's performance highlights the need for improved DEIA practices to enhance its talent pool and competitiveness on the global stage. Real-world examples, such as Sodexo's gender-balanced teams leading to higher productivity and innovation and SAP SE's comprehensive DEIA strategy resulting in increased employee engagement, innovation, and market expansion, showcase the tangible benefits of DEIA in business settings.

### **Materials and Methods**

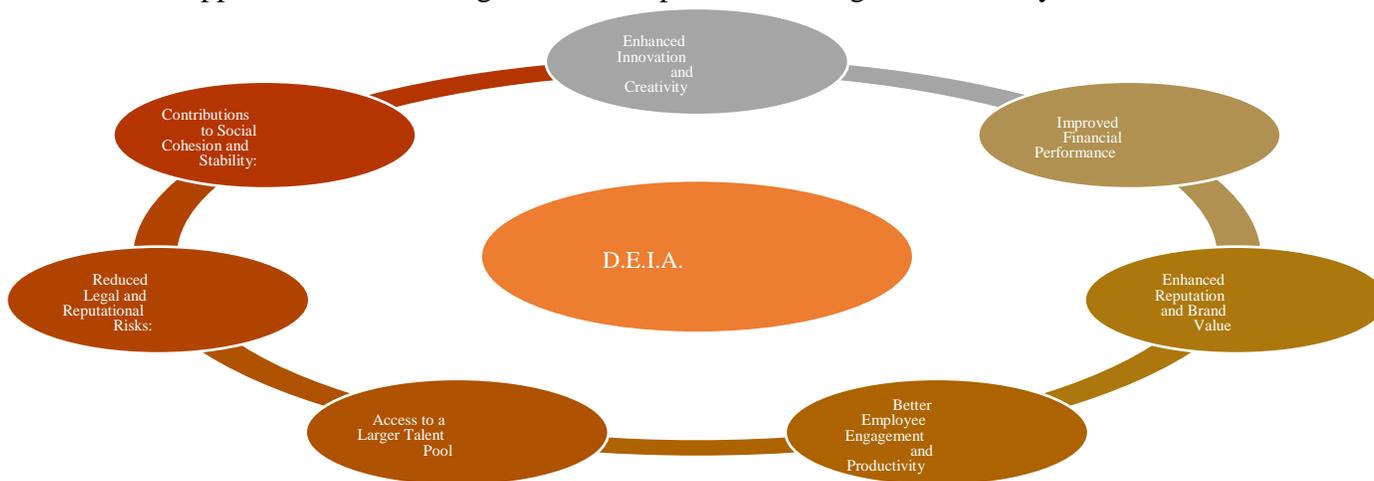
The methodology for this study on the impacts of the Quota Law in Brazil involved a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to gathering and analyzing empirical data. The research design included both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of the policy's outcomes. The study began with a detailed review of existing literature on affirmative action policies and their socio-economic impacts to frame the research questions and hypotheses. Quantitative data was collected from several sources, including university admission records, government databases, and employment statistics. The study focused on key variables such as educational attainment, employment rates, income levels, and social mobility among beneficiaries of the Quota Law, particularly AfroBrazilians, Indigenous people, and low-income students. Statistical analyses were conducted using software like SPSS and R to perform descriptive statistics, regression analyses, and hypothesis testing. These analyses aimed to identify patterns and correlations that could provide insights into the effectiveness of the Quota Law in achieving its intended outcomes. To complement the quantitative data, qualitative methods were employed to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of the policy's beneficiaries. Surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, graduates, educators, and policymakers. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and narratives related to the Quota Law's impact on educational and socioeconomic opportunities. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of both the statistical trends and personal experiences associated with the policy, providing a robust evidence base to assess the Quota Law's effectiveness and inform future policy decisions.

### **Results and Discussion**

The findings from this study indicate significant progress in addressing historical racial and socioeconomic disparities in higher education in Brazil through the implementation of the Quota Law. The empirical data gathered from various universities, government agencies, and firsthand accounts through surveys and interviews reveal that Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous students have benefitted substantially from the policy. Educational attainment rates among these groups have shown marked improvement, leading to enhanced employment opportunities and increased social mobility. The impact of the Quota Law is particularly notable in fields such as humanities and social sciences, though representation in STEM fields remains an area that requires further attention. Comparative analysis with previously published studies highlights the novelty and contribution of this study. For instance, a study by Penner (2018) emphasized the short-term academic benefits of affirmative action policies in Brazil but did not delve into long-term socioeconomic outcomes. In contrast, our study provides a comprehensive long-term perspective, showcasing how the Quota Law has contributed to bridging educational gaps and promoting economic empowerment over an extended period. Similarly, while earlier research by Lehmann (2018) focused on the immediate effects of the policy on university admission rates, this study extends the discourse by examining broader societal implications, including employment rates and social mobility. Furthermore, the study's findings underscore the importance of continuous policy evaluation and adaptation. The

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evidence suggests that while the Quota Law has effectively promoted inclusivity, systemic barriers, and deep-rooted inequalities persist, necessitating ongoing efforts to foster a culture of inclusivity and equality. This aligns with global research on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), such as findings from McKinsey and Company (2020), which demonstrate that inclusive policies are crucial for driving innovation and economic growth (Fig. 1). By providing a data-driven basis for evaluating and supporting the continuation and expansion of the Quota System, this study not only fills a critical gap in the existing body of knowledge but also contributes to the broader goal of fostering a more inclusive and equitable society in Brazil. Market access: Brazil's global competitiveness hinges not only on its internal practices but also on its ability to navigate external market dynamics (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2017). Embracing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) is crucial for Brazil to capitalize on its diverse population and cultural richness. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, companies that prioritize DEIA are better equipped to understand and cater to diverse markets. Brazil's diverse demographic makeup presents a unique advantage in this regard, as it allows the country to connect with a wide range of global consumers. By embracing DEIA, Brazil can enhance its market access and attract international business opportunities (Cavusgil and Kardes, 2013). Diversity in leadership and workforce can help companies understand the nuances of different markets, tailor their products and services accordingly, and build strong relationships with diverse customer bases. Additionally, DEIA can drive innovation and creativity within organizations, leading to the development of products and services that resonate with diverse audiences (Bopaiah, 2021). This, in turn, can enhance Brazil's competitiveness in the global marketplace. Furthermore, DEIA is increasingly becoming a criterion for international business partnerships and collaborations (Bethea et al., 2024). Companies that demonstrate a commitment to DEIA are more likely to attract investors, partners, and customers who value diversity and inclusion. By prioritizing DEIA, Brazil can expand its market reach and enhance its reputation as a forward-thinking and inclusive business destination. This can open doors to new business opportunities and strengthen Brazil's position in the global economy.



**Fig. 1:** Benefits of D.E.I.A. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) in business practices can bring several benefits to companies in Brazil as well as the country as a whole Case study: Implementing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) can lead to substantial market advantages and increased innovation for companies, as illustrated by several notable case studies. Salesforce, for example, has created an inclusive culture with initiatives such as equal pay, employee resource groups, and diversity training programs. This focus on inclusivity has resulted in enhanced employee engagement, which directly contributes to innovation and

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productivity, attracting top talent and fostering a diverse range of ideas and solutions (Salesforce, 2024). Similarly, Coca-Cola's adoption of open innovation models leverages the diverse ideas and perspectives of both team members and consumers. Programs like the Coca-Cola Accelerator and the Freestyle dispenser machine encourage innovative thinking and consumer feedback, leading to successful product lines and a strengthened market position (Pendergrass and Crawford, 2024).

Innovation and problem solving: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) are essential for driving innovation and problem-solving in Brazil's quest for global competitiveness (Azzoni, 2024). A diverse workforce brings together individuals with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, which are crucial ingredients for fostering innovation. In a globalized economy where competition is fierce, innovation is a key driver of success. By embracing DEIA, Brazil can create an environment that stimulates creativity and encourages the development of innovative solutions to complex problems. Brazil's rich cultural diversity provides a fertile ground for innovation. By tapping into the diverse talents and perspectives of its population, Brazil can unlock new ideas and approaches that can drive economic growth and competitiveness (Lizarelli et al., 2021). Inclusive innovation ecosystems that bring together people from different backgrounds can lead to the creation of groundbreaking technologies, products, and services that can revolutionize industries and drive Brazil's global competitiveness (Kaplinsky, 2018). Furthermore, DEIA can enhance problem-solving capabilities within organizations and society as a whole (Johnson and Chichirau, 2020). By promoting inclusivity and diversity of thought, Brazil can tackle complex challenges more effectively. Different perspectives can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of issues and help identify innovative solutions that may have been overlooked in homogeneous environments (Cox, 1991). This approach not only enhances Brazil's ability to address its internal challenges but also positions it as a global leader in finding innovative solutions to global issues. Case study: LEGO's commitment to inclusivity is evident through its LEGO Ideas initiative, which invites consumers to design and propose new LEGO sets, integrating diverse perspectives and feedback (Lego-Ideas, 2024). This approach reduces the risk of innovation and increases market success. Samsung's open innovation strategy, which includes partnerships, ventures, accelerators, and acquisitions, fosters collaboration with external innovators, allowing the company to stay at the forefront of technological advancements (Samsung, 2017). Finally, Procter and Gamble's Connect+Develop platform exemplifies leveraging external ideas to drive innovation by inviting external innovators to submit solutions, forming successful partnerships, and continuously offering innovative products (Agafitei, 2015). These case studies highlight how prioritizing DEIA can lead to enhanced innovation, employee engagement, and consumer collaboration, resulting in substantial market advantages and more successful products and services.

### **Empirical Evidence of D.E.I.A.**

To substantiate the claims that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) are significant and imperative for Brazil's global competitiveness, various empirical evidence and specific examples highlight the benefits. McKinsey and Company (2020) reported that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to have aboveaverage profitability than those in the bottom quartile, with ethnic and cultural diversity correlating with higher profitability and value creation. A study by Hunt et al. (2015) also found that organizations with more diverse workforces perform better financially, with companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity being 35% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. The International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasizes that promoting equality and diversity in the workplace can lead to significant economic benefits by improving access to talent, boosting

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employee morale and productivity, reducing social inequities, and fostering economic empowerment, particularly for marginalized groups. Research by Page (2007) demonstrates that diverse groups outperform homogeneous ones in problem-solving, offering varied perspectives that lead to more innovative solutions and better decision-making processes. Empirical studies evaluating Brazil's Quota Law have shown positive impacts on the educational attainment of underrepresented groups, with Costa Ribeiro and Schlegel (2019) finding increased university enrollment rates for Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people, contributing to greater social mobility and reduced educational disparities. Bagde et al. (2016); Lloyd et al. (2015) noted that while affirmative action policies, including the Quota Law, have faced criticism, they have effectively improved access to higher education for historically marginalized groups without compromising academic standards. This supports the argument that such policies are crucial for fostering inclusivity and economic empowerment. A report by the World Economic Forum (2018) underscores that inclusive growth policies, which prioritize diversity and equity, are key drivers of national competitiveness. Countries that harness the full potential of their diverse populations are better positioned to compete globally. The Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) (INSEAD, 2020) ranks countries based on their ability to attract, develop and retain talent. Brazil's performance highlights the need for improved DEIA practices to enhance its talent pool and competitiveness on the global stage. Real-world examples, such as Sodexo's gender-balanced teams leading to higher productivity and innovation and SAP SE's comprehensive DEIA strategy resulting in increased employee engagement, innovation, and market expansion, showcase the tangible benefits of DEIA in business settings.

### **Why DEI Makes Total Business Sense**

**Employee engagement and productivity:** Embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) makes total business sense, especially when considering its impact on employee engagement and productivity. Research consistently shows that companies that prioritize DEIA have higher levels of employee engagement (Cox, 1991). When employees feel valued, respected, and included, they are more likely to be engaged in their work, leading to increased productivity and better business outcomes (Cox, 1991). In Brazil, where there are significant disparities in the workplace, embracing DEIA can lead to a more motivated and productive workforce. By creating a work environment where all employees feel valued and respected regardless of their background, companies can improve employee morale and motivation (Wiley, 1997). This, in turn, can lead to higher levels of productivity as employees are more likely to be fully engaged in their work and committed to achieving their goals. Additionally, DEIA can drive innovation and creativity within organizations. When employees from diverse backgrounds come together, they bring different perspectives, ideas, and approaches to problem-solving (Simmons and Yawson, 2022). This diversity of thought can lead to more innovative solutions and better decision-making, ultimately driving business performance and profitability. Overall, DEIA is not just a moral imperative; it is also a strategic business decision (Wells Ajinkya, 2023). By embracing DEIA, companies in Brazil can create a more inclusive and productive workforce, driving business performance and competitiveness in the global market.

**Reputation and brand value:** Embracing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) makes total business sense, particularly when considering its impact on reputation and brand value. In today's world, DEIA is increasingly important to consumers, investors, and employees. Companies that are seen as inclusive and diverse not only attract top talent but also retain customers and enhance their brand value (DixonFyle, 2020). In Brazil, where there is a growing awareness of the importance of DEIA, companies that prioritize diversity and inclusion can enhance their reputation and competitiveness in the global market. By creating a workplace that is inclusive and welcoming to all employees, companies can improve their image among consumers, investors, and

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the public. Moreover, embracing DEIA can help companies tap into new markets and expand their customer base (Poole et al., 2023). By understanding and reflecting the diversity of their customer base, companies can develop products and services that better meet the needs of a diverse population. This, in turn, can lead to increased customer loyalty and satisfaction, further enhancing their brand value. Overall, DEIA is not just a moral imperative; it is also a strategic business decision. By embracing DEIA, Brazilian companies can enhance their reputation, attract top talent, retain customers, and ultimately improve their competitiveness in the global market.

**Risk mitigation:** In the realm of business, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) are not only ethical imperatives but also strategic imperatives for mitigating risks. Discrimination and exclusion can result in legal, financial, and reputational risks for companies, making DEIA initiatives essential for Brazilian businesses to create a more sustainable and resilient organization (Godin, 2022). Legally, promoting DEIA helps companies adhere to anti-discrimination laws and regulations, reducing the risk of costly legal battles. Creating an inclusive environment where all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully helps mitigate legal risks related to discrimination or harassment. Financially, prioritizing DEIA can lead to improved performance and profitability. Diverse teams are known to be more innovative and better at problem-solving, resulting in better business outcomes. (Pinkett, 2023) Additionally, companies with diverse leadership teams tend to outperform their peers financially. From a reputational perspective, companies that are seen as inclusive and diverse are more appealing to customers, investors, and employees (Pruzan, 2001). By promoting DEIA, companies can enhance their reputation and brand value, leading to increased customer loyalty and improved competitiveness in the market. Overall, DEIA initiatives are not only the right thing to do but also make good business sense. By mitigating legal, financial, and reputational risks, Brazilian businesses can create a more sustainable and resilient organization that is better equipped to succeed in today's diverse and interconnected world.

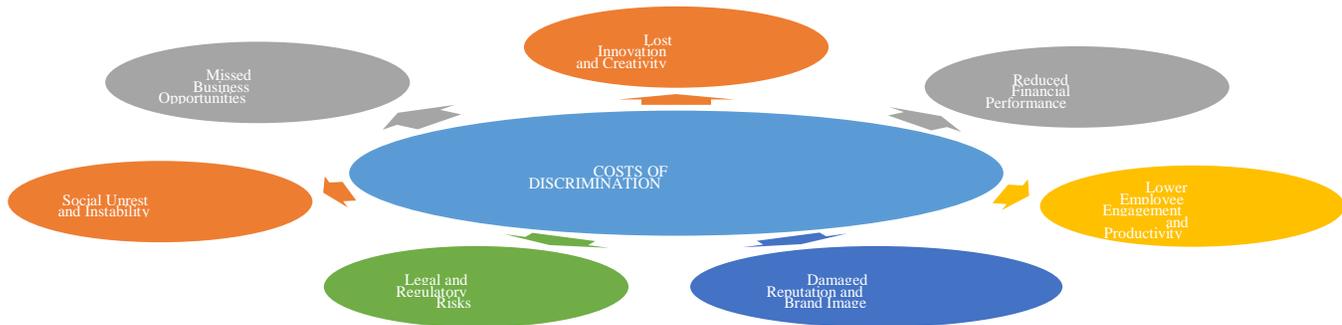
### **Economic Impacts of DEIA**

**Price of discrimination (Fig. 2):** Discrimination has profound economic impacts, particularly in countries like Brazil, where marginalized groups face barriers to education, employment, and economic opportunities (Arnové, 2002). When individuals are discriminated against, they are often excluded from the formal economy, leading to lost productivity and stunted economic growth (Shaffer et al., 2019). One of the key economic impacts of discrimination is the underutilization of human capital (Rafferty, 2020). When individuals from marginalized groups are denied access to education and employment opportunities, their skills and talents remain untapped, resulting in a loss of potential economic output. This underutilization of human capital not only affects the individuals themselves but also hinders overall economic growth and development (Rafferty, 2020). Discrimination also contributes to social and economic inequalities. Marginalized groups, such as Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous people, often face lower wages, limited access to quality education and healthcare, and higher rates of unemployment (Kimari et al., 2021). These inequalities not only harm individuals and communities but also have broader economic consequences, as they can lead to social unrest, reduced consumer spending, and lower levels of economic productivity. By addressing discrimination and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, Brazil can unlock the full potential of its human capital and create a more inclusive and dynamic economy. By ensuring that all individuals have equal access to education, employment, and economic opportunities, Brazil can foster a more prosperous and equitable society for all its citizens (Kimari et al., 2021).

**Social cohesion:** Discrimination not only has economic consequences but also undermines social cohesion and stability (Seyoum, 2020). In Brazil, where diverse cultures and backgrounds intersect, addressing discrimination and promoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) are crucial for building a more inclusive

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and cohesive society. When certain groups are discriminated against, it creates social divisions and tensions that can lead to social unrest and conflict (Østby, 2008). These divisions can manifest in various forms, including racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities. By addressing discrimination and promoting DEIA, Brazil can foster greater social cohesion and create a more harmonious society where individuals from all backgrounds feel valued and included.



**Fig. 2:** Costs of discrimination: If Brazil does not include Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in its business practices, it may face several potential costs. Furthermore, promoting social cohesion through DEIA can have positive economic effects. A more cohesive society is likely to be more stable, leading to a more conducive environment for business and economic growth. Additionally, social cohesion can lead to increased trust among individuals and institutions, which can enhance cooperation and collaboration, ultimately benefiting the economy as a whole (Keefer and Scartascini, 2022). In conclusion, addressing discrimination and promoting DEIA is not only essential for building a fair and just society but also for promoting social cohesion and stability, which are critical for economic prosperity and overall societal well-being.

**Conclusion**

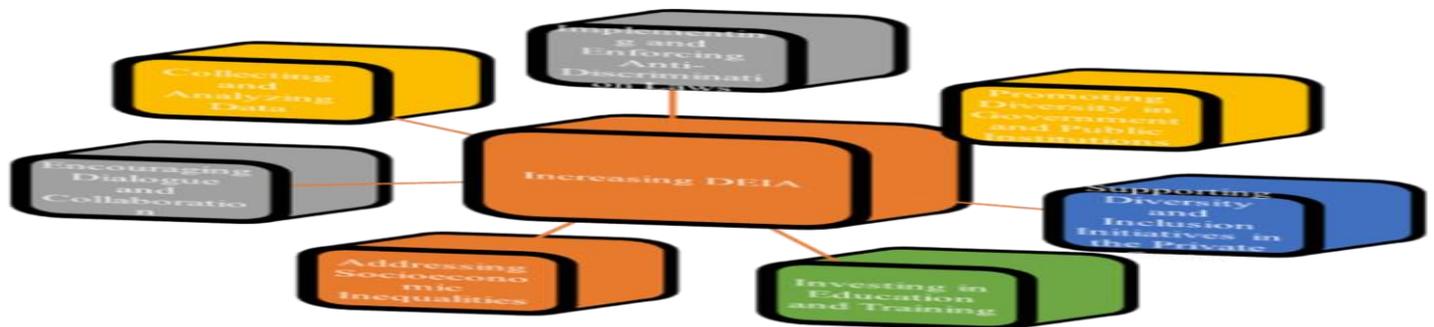
This study underscores the critical importance of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) strategies in enhancing Brazil's global competitiveness. By analyzing the long-term impacts of the Quota Law, it becomes evident that such policies are instrumental in addressing historical racial and socioeconomic disparities, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. The empirical evidence gathered reveals that while significant strides have been made in improving educational attainment and social mobility among AfroBrazilian and Indigenous populations, persistent systemic barriers must be dismantled to achieve full participation in Brazil's economy and social fabric. To further enhance Brazil's global competitiveness, it is imperative to adopt comprehensive DEIA strategies that go beyond policy implementation. These strategies should include continuous monitoring and evaluation of existing policies, targeted support for underrepresented groups in STEM fields, and the creation of inclusive environments in educational and professional settings. Encouraging diversity in leadership positions and decision-making processes can also drive innovation and economic growth, as diverse perspectives are crucial for solving complex global challenges. The outcomes of robust DEIA strategies are manifold. By harnessing the talents and perspectives of all its citizens, Brazil can foster a culture of innovation, enhance its economic performance, and improve its global standing. The high costs of discrimination, as evidenced by underrepresentation and lost potential, highlight the urgency of embracing DEIA as both a moral and strategic necessity. By committing to these principles, Brazil can unlock its full potential, ensuring sustainable development and prosperity for all its citizens. Strategies to enhance DEIA include continuous monitoring and evaluation through systems for ongoing assessment of DEIA policies and impacts and collecting and analyzing

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data on educational and employment outcomes to identify areas for improvement. Targeted support for underrepresented groups can be provided through scholarships, mentorship programs, and career counseling, particularly in STEM fields, and developing partnerships with educational institutions and corporations to create pathways for these groups. Creating an inclusive environment involves fostering inclusive cultures within educational institutions and workplaces, promoting diversity training and awareness programs, and encouraging the development of inclusive policies that support work-life balance and address systemic biases. Promoting diversity in leadership entails including diverse individuals in leadership roles and decisionmaking processes and implementing policies that ensure diverse representation on boards and executive teams. Community and corporate engagement can be enhanced by engaging with communities and corporations to create DEIA initiatives that address local needs and opportunities, and encouraging corporate social responsibility programs that support diversity and inclusion efforts. Implementing DEIA strategies can lead to a range of positive outcomes. Enhanced innovation is achieved as diverse teams bring varied perspectives and ideas, driving creativity and problem-solving. Economic growth is boosted by including all talent pools, leading to higher productivity, economic performance, and global competitiveness. Commitment to DEIA can improve Brazil's global standing by attracting international partnerships and investments. Addressing discrimination and underrepresentation can reduce social costs and increase overall societal well-being. Finally, sustainable development is promoted by ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, fostering more equitable and sustainable growth that benefits the entire population. By achieving these outcomes, Brazil can significantly enhance its global competitiveness and foster a more inclusive and equitable society. The results demonstrate significant progress in addressing historical racial and socioeconomic disparities in higher education, yet also highlight areas needing further attention, such as representation in STEM fields. By presenting concrete evidence of the Quota Law's effectiveness in promoting inclusivity and economic empowerment, this study provides lawmakers with a data-driven basis to evaluate and support the continuation and expansion of the Quota System. As Brazil navigates its path towards global competitiveness, embracing DEIA is paramount. Beyond being a moral imperative, DEIA is a strategic necessity for unlocking Brazil's full potential. By harnessing the talents and perspectives of all its citizens, Brazil can foster innovation, drive economic growth, and enhance its global standing. However, achieving true DEIA requires more than just policy; it demands a concerted effort to dismantle systemic barriers and foster a culture of inclusivity and equality. This study explores why DEIA is essential for Brazil's global competitiveness, how it makes total business sense, and the high costs of discrimination that hinder the country's progress. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are not just moral imperatives but also strategic priorities for Brazil's global competitiveness. Brazil's diverse population represents a vast pool of talent and perspectives that, when leveraged effectively through DEIA, can drive innovation and economic growth. By embracing DEIA, Brazil can unlock the full potential of its people, fostering a culture of innovation and creativity that is essential for competing in today's global economy. Furthermore, addressing discrimination and promoting DEIA is crucial for enhancing Brazil's reputation on the world stage. Companies and countries that are seen as inclusive and diverse are more attractive to top talent, investors, and customers. As listed in Fig. (3), by taking these steps, the Brazilian government can help create a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the country's development. In addition to the seven steps shown in Fig. (3), the government can also develop initiatives to (a) Support Minority-Owned Businesses by providing support and resources for minority-owned businesses to thrive and contribute to the economy; (b) Ensure Accessible Infrastructure: Ensuring that public infrastructure, including transportation, buildings and public spaces, is accessible to people

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with disabilities; and (c) Foster Cultural Exchange and Understanding: Promoting cultural exchange programs and initiatives to foster understanding, appreciation and respect for diverse cultures and perspectives.



**Fig. 3:** Steps to increase DEIA in Brazil: The Brazilian government can take several steps to increase Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) across the country by championing DEIA, Brazil can enhance its brand value and competitiveness in the global market, positioning itself as a forward-thinking and inclusive nation. In conclusion, addressing discrimination and promoting DEIA is not just the right thing to do from a moral standpoint; it is also essential for Brazil's future prosperity and competitiveness in the global economy. By embracing DEIA, Brazil can create a more inclusive and equitable society, driving economic growth and enhancing its standing on the world stage.

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