

To what extent does the news media address school funding? A case study in Texas/USA¹

Em que medida a mídia jornalística aborda o financiamento educacional? Estudo de caso no Texas/EUA

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how television news media deals with the financing of basic education, with the aim of tracing theoretical and methodological elements for analyzing how the media can influence public opinion about schools and, consequently, underpin legislative debates and the implementation of educational policies. With an approach based on critical discourse analysis methodology, this paper originated in a quantitative and qualitative study of news media data in five cities in the state of Texas (United States of America). The data comes from these cities' primary TV channels and local newspapers, which was used to create a historical database capable of revealing the topics of greatest journalistic coverage regarding school funding. This article presents aspects of the materials and methods used in this larger research project, focusing on the study's quantitative results about television news coverage. The paper aims to contribute to the debate about the ideological matrices that permeate the socially constructed symbolic representation of public education and its financing through the journalistic media.

Keywords: Educational policy. School funding. News media. Critical discourse analysis.

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RESUMO

O trabalho investiga como a mídia jornalística televisiva trata sobre o financiamento da educação básica, com o objetivo de traçar elementos teórico-metodológicos capazes de analisar como os meios de comunicação podem influenciar a opinião pública sobre a escola e, conseqüentemente, balizar os debates legislativos e a implementação de políticas educacionais. Com abordagem baseada na metodologia da análise crítica do discurso, a pesquisa original realiza estudo quantitativo e qualitativo em cinco cidades do estado do Texas (Estados Unidos da América), utilizando como fonte as notícias de seus principais telejornais e jornais impressos locais, criando um banco de dados em série histórica, capaz de revelar os tópicos de maior cobertura jornalística no tocante ao financiamento da educação. No presente artigo, são apresentados os materiais e métodos utilizados pela pesquisa, enfocando os resultados quantitativos quanto à mídia televisiva. O trabalho visa contribuir com o debate sobre as matrizes ideológicas que permeiam a representação simbólica construída socialmente, por meio da mídia jornalística, acerca da educação pública e seu financiamento.

Palavras-chave: Política educacional. Financiamento educacional. Mídia jornalística. Análise crítica de discurso.

Introduction: educational policies and their relationship with media discourse

The research project from which the present article is derived was developed by the authors in the state of Texas, having as background studies related to the area of educational policies and, more specifically, public education financing. The following research question was the primary driver of this study: how and to what degree does the journalistic media address the financing of basic education in its coverage?

This project explores the hypothesis that the discourse that prevails in the media about basic education influences public opinion about public schools and, consequently, guides the discussions that permeate the legislative agenda and debate in the formulation and implementation of public education policies.

The larger research project from which this article is derived focuses on using local and regional newspaper and television news sources in the state of Texas to analyze media representations of a controversial American school

financing system created in 1993, nicknamed “Robin Hood”². The central idea of this school finance system in Texas was to transfer financial resources from economically rich districts to poor districts.

The contribution of this article is constituted mainly in theoretical-methodological terms, as it represents a model that can be adapted to carry out similar studies of media representations of various educational policies in other countries. The central focus that guides the work can serve as a reference to study the role of the media in representing public opinion in other contexts, about various aspects related to the construction of the image of the public school, its projects, its financing, its social relevance, and so forth.

In the Brazilian context, it is possible to glimpse what would be the predominant discourse in the television and/or newspaper media on various topics related to the financing of education and educational policies: for instance, the debates around investing 10% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Brazilian education during debate of the National Education Plan (Plano Nacional de Educação, PNE) 2014 – 2024; the approval of Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 (amending the 1988 Federal Constitution by imposing a ceiling on social spending, including education, for twenty years); the approval of the Secondary School Reform and the National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular, BNCC), which despite controversy and an interrupted process was approved in 2018; the results of national and international student performance exams; the theme of the “School with no political parties” Project (or “Escola Sem Partido”); or the militarization of public schools, among other topics. Media discourse can powerfully direct public opinion and influence the political agenda and the legislative debate.

Below we present the main question driving this work, as well as theoretical guiding aspects which direct the specific objectives of the research, its hypotheses and methodological possibilities.

Tyack and Cuban (1995), when dealing with the history of the diverse educational reforms in the USA, affirm that such reforms are intrinsically political. Tyack and Cuban (1995) explain that groups involved in education policy organize and compete with each other to express their values and guarantee their interests within public schools. There are inequalities of power

² According to the *Intercultural Development Research Association*, *Robin Hood* is the “name erroneously given to the school finance system that requires wealthy school districts to share their locally-generated property tax money with the state of Texas to help pay for public education for all children. The name is a myth because the finance system does not “take from the rich and give to the poor,” rather it spreads the funds from property taxes across more than 800 poor, average and some above average wealth school districts around the state. The recapture system benefits more than 90 percent of students” (IDRA, 2009, p. 17).

between these groups, with agents of greater or lesser social influence – such as those who manage the economy, who have privileged access to the media and political agents, and who generally share a common vision of management and organization of the educational system. These powerful groups control organizations of various types, gaining disproportionate authority over the approval of educational projects and policies in relation to other social groups.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) claim that there are economic, regional, racial and gender disparities that profoundly affect social inequality but are ignored to the detriment of other more widely dispelled and valued matters in the dominant culture of society.

According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), people's opinions about what a school is (or how a school should be) change over time – they make this argument citing surveys developed in the 19th century that demonstrate different impressions of the public school image, citing examples from magazines and newspapers such as *Look*, *Life* and the *New York Times*, publications of great reach and prominence in the USA – which already described schools of that time as “failures”, as schools of the past belonging to better “golden times”, in addition to conducting and disseminating polls about “how good is your school?”, with a questionnaire for parents to answer about what they considered to be of excellence or precariousness. These publications widely disseminated restricted surveys without methodological scientific basis, affecting the representation of common sense about public schools. The tendency of these speeches can motivate feelings of depreciation, discredit, discouragement and disbelief about public school, its agents, projects, financing and its own social function.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) “many school districts and professional associations added publicity departments to persuade citizens that the reforms were worth the money” (p. 21), in reference to legislative clashes over possible increases in property taxes, for example, to finance public schools. Based on this statement, we are faced with some questions: how could advertising departments persuade citizens to support certain politicians and their projects? Do these departments have contact with editors and producers of local media, such as newspapers and news programs? Do the districts and school associations have connections with political power capable of influencing the way the media dispels news, chooses themes, edits languages and approves public school content, to be broadcast for the population?

Mehta (2013) explores another theme that corroborates this discussion, the construction of a “political paradigm”, which would be like “a definition of a problem”, explaining that the way a social problem is defined, and a paradigm is constructed, is part of a particular way of understanding reality, and therefore, “the way this problem is framed has significant implications for the types of policy solutions that will appear desirable” (MEHTA, 2013, p. 29).

According to Mehta (2013), a large part of the political argument, referring to the educational projects proposed and debated in the legislative houses, is still held at the level of “problem definition”, that is, when it is still in the stage of establishing the subject in question, building the paradigm. When the problem definition is mostly accepted, then it can be called a “political paradigm”, that is, when dominant views prevent further disagreements. Mehta explains that, when an idea or a representation is constructed by the dominant views, it constitutes an intersection of specific and general ideas at the same time, becoming an analytical matter, “for the purpose of understanding the evolution of a substantive domain, the problem definition or the political paradigm is the critical unit of analysis” (MEHTA, 2013, p. 29).

When a matter is constituted as a political paradigm, it can also be studied as a critical unit of analysis, capable of being epistemologically focused, in order to understand its constitutive evolution and investigate how it has become a socially accepted and consolidated idea. This is a guiding aspect of this research: how socially accepted ideas were built, how the process of defining these problems took place and how the media discourse affects this process. In dialogue with these authors, we understand that it is in the phase of defining a political paradigm that the influence of the media in public opinion comes into play, constituting the basis of political support for certain projects and educational policies, to the detriment of others.

The definition of the paradigms that takes over the debate about educational policies is constituted according to a dominant view, which directs public opinion through advertising agents and the media. Such paradigms can be investigated, in order to understand about the elements that integrate the constitutive pattern of the social representation of a problem.

In the methodological option of this research, the problem focused on here is the financing of the public school and policies for the transfer of financial resources to schools, as part of the field of political dispute regarding the “solution” of economic and social issues. According to Mehta (2013):

Much as reformers today seize upon international comparisons or national commission reports as evidence of the need for reform, early reformers drew upon the work of muckraking journalists, who exposed the worst aspects of the existing system. The way the problem was defined delimited the terms of the debate, motivated new actors to join in the crusade to reform schools, built public support behind the reforms and marginalized critics whose views were not in step with the dominant narrative (MEHTA, 2013, p. 64).

Such journalists, who “exposed the worst aspects of the existing system”, affected the “problem definition” process in the course of the legislative debate on educational reforms and policies, as the author explains, insofar as they encouraged or discouraged agents in relation to the school policy reforms, building or deconstructing public support, as prioritized dominant views, isolating critical or opposing arguments to these views.

This process can occur through the selection of sources, the people chosen to be interviewed, clippings of statements, data editions and events, with preference, intentionally or unconsciously, to convey elements that align with the ideological vision of the communication vehicle, omitting or ignoring divergent perspectives, revealing discourse trends through speech, writing, especially opinionated columnists, photographs and/or illustrations.

The concept of “symbolic power” brought by Pierre Bourdieu (1989, 1997) elucidates the production of symbolic systems, built as instruments of domination: ideologies, as a collective and collectively appropriate product, according to particular interests that tend to present themselves as common interests to the group as a whole (BOURDIEU, 1989, p. 13). The ideological symbolic system is structural and structuring, created by a body of specialists, or rather, by a relatively autonomous field of production and circulation, with instruments of knowledge and language, which form and inculcate a social “*habitus*”, as symbolic representations, socially and historically recognized and legitimate behaviors, according to the construction of a subjective and objective world, through the reproduction of dominant cultural patterns of actions and forms of communication.

Although Bourdieu deals with the instruments of symbolic systems as being mainly art, religion and language, he also makes reference to the journalistic field and the mass media as elements of power reproduction and instruments for the maintenance of the symbolic order, constituted by the political field, specially considering the approach brought up by the author in the text “On Television” (BOURDIEU, 1997), in which the author discusses how television programs, such as news broadcast on television news, seek audience, with editions and decisions about what is going to be on television or not, being configured as products of permissions and censorship, conscious or unconsciously, through the use of language, hiding or prioritizing themes according to the interests of agents in the economic and political field, which interfere in the journalistic field. In this way, it is understood that the journalistic field, in turn, can also interfere in the economic and political fields.

Herman and Chomsky (2003) carry out a study on the large controlling groups of the media corporations and their financial information, exposing the “filters” that the information conveyed by the media goes from the process of

orienting profits and audience, to advertisements between the interval times, until the choice of sources, the coverage locations, the edition of the material that will be consumed, according to the ideological guidelines of the owners of these media, suggesting that the free market does not generate a neutral system, because the final buyer's choice is a deciding factor, as advertisers' options influence media survival.

In this perspective, the mass media serves as a system to communicate messages and symbols to the population in general, with the function of amusing, entertaining, informing and instilling in people the values, creeds and codes of impressions, behavior or attitudes that will integrate them into the institutional structures of society.

Based on the minimally elucidated theoretical approach, the materials and methods proposed by this research will be presented, without losing sight of the discussion brought by the authors in question, about the symbolic power that permeates the journalistic discourse, as well as the agents that transit in this field, understood as elements that influence the (re)construction of social paradigms and representations about reality, defining demands and, therefore, permeating the debate on educational policies.

Methodological aspects

Baker (2012) carries out a critical literature review about the theme "Does money matter in education?", bringing studies by authors with different views on this issue, as well as speeches given by political figures in comments on this subject, analyzing the methodological appropriation that supports these arguments (or that tries to support them, with more or less rigor and empirical consistency, according to the author), for or against the increase of financial investments as a fundamental aspect for the improvement of the educational system.

Some comments from political figures are like the governor of Florida: "We're spending a lot of money on education, and when you look at the results, it's not great" (BAKER, 2012, p. 9). Also, like the speech of a legislative representative from Virginia: "Socrates trained Plato in on a rock and then Plato trained in Aristotle roughly speaking on a rock. So, huge funding is not necessary to achieve the greatest minds and the greatest intellects in history [sic]" (BAKER, 2012, p. 9).

Such comments, widely disseminated in the news media, spread ideas that "a lot of money is already spent on education"; "we can cut and make spending

more efficient”; without mentioning the amount of money they are referring to and without making simple comparative features, such as: how “huge” and concerning what, or to what reality? After all, they are comments on the discrepancy between the amount spent and the “bad results”, as if there was a direct causal effect with a simple analysis on this, without considering other variables that interfere in the indicators and without reflecting on the various limitations of the tests in which these results are based on, for example. The statements suppose, like that of the Virginia lawmaker, that a large amount of funding is not necessary to “achieve the greatest minds”, as if for teachers like Socrates (and giving attention to one Plato at a time), it would not be necessary to ask: how much would it cost to train and pay for highly educated teachers? How much would it cost for each teacher to teach one student at a time?

Without making simple critical questions like these, those statements pass as important arguments in legislative debates and are also supported by academic arguments, of dubious methodological consistency, based more on the economic point of view than on the point of view of the social complexity that involves the area of education. According to Baker, “The growing political consensus that money doesn’t matter stands in sharp contrast to the substantial body of empirical research that has accumulated over time, but which gets virtually no attention in our public discourse” (BAKER, 2012, p. 2).

Baker concludes that the scientific evidence leaves little doubt: sufficient financial resources are an underlying condition necessary to provide education quality. Baker (2012) recognizes that more money alone is not a comprehensive solution to improve the quality of the school, as it states that money can be spent poorly and have little influence on its quality (depending on what is considered educational quality), on the other hand, money can be well spent and have a substantive positive influence. However, he concludes: “money that’s not there can’t do either” (BAKER, 2012, p. 28). Besides, he also affirms that the discourses of “efficiency” (linked to quality versus quantity, for example) and those of “educational innovations” (about technology and distance education), when unaccompanied by speeches about increased investment, should be suspected because they also demand research and great financial expenditure.

Baker explains that the Department of Education of the United States, which would be equivalent to the Ministry of Education in Brazil, created a website on “how to improve educational productivity”, with the specific intention of reporting on government policies and local practices, “the sources listed on the site’s ‘resources’ page are speculative think tank reports and related documents that do not include or even cite the types of analyses that would need to be conducted to arrive at their conclusions and policy recommendations” (BAKER, 2012, p. 23 *apud* BAKER; WELNER, 2011).

Given Baker's contribution and the statements presented above, this work points to the knowledge of critical discourse analysis as an epistemological field, which consists of examining the structure of a text, or of a speech, to understand the ideological matrices that constitute it.

Based on the elaborations on the meaning of the discourse, Fairclough (2001) and Gee (1999) construct a methodology for discourse analysis that focuses on the power relations between the participants (or listeners) and the forms of discourse. This methodology, called critical discourse analysis (GEE, 1999; FAIRCLOUGH, 2001; VAN DIJK, 2001), is used for examining the implicit meanings and assumptions inherent in discursive interactions, which reveal the ideologies and social structures that inform them. This methodology based the present work from the beginning, since the purpose of the research is to try to reveal the ideologies and assumptions of the media discourse, and then to see what influence these ideologies have in the common thought about education financing. Even though the present article focuses on a quantitative study on the level of coverage that the television media does for the financing of education in Texas, the work is situated in a larger research project, based on these concepts of critical discourse analysis.

Foucault (2007, 2010) deals with the discourse as a representation culturally constructed by reality, conceptualized as a social construction due to the power relations in society, based on political and social practices and contexts, (re) producing power and knowledge. In this sense, every element that is part of a discourse is linked to the social characteristics of a given context and to the power relations between the sender, receiver and the meaning attributed to a given question, paying attention to the complexity of factors that permeate the statement, which crosses the language and constitutes a network of meanings.

On Foucault's contributions to discourse analysis, Revel (2011) points to the dominant control of large political and economic devices, such as the media, over discourse:

Foucault's analyzes sought to focus, in particular, on the characteristics of our own regime of truth. This regime, in fact, has several specificities: the truth is centered on scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it; it is permanently used by both economic production and political power; it is widely disseminated, both through educational institutions and through information; it is produced and transmitted under the dominant control of some major political and economic devices (university, media, writing, armed forces); it is the form of "ideological struggles" (REVEL, 2011, p. 148-149, free translation).

The previous section shows how society's "truth regime" is produced and transmitted, according to the power relations in the political and economic fields, with the media being an example of the means of its production and diffusion.

According to Fischer (2001), Foucault teaches researchers a way to investigate the enunciator, that is, the author, the speaker, the source of his speech, the position of the inciting subject and producer of knowledge, how he/she relates hierarchically to other powers besides his/hers, not only from the perspective of analyzing "what is between the lines" of texts and documents, nor "what was meant by that", but seeking to describe what are the conditions of existence of a given discourse, treating it inside a network of relationships in which it is immersed, making it possible to raise various statements, with singular events, and ask: after all, why does this singularity happen there, in that place, and not in other conditions? (FISCHER, 2001, p. 221).

Having in mind the theoretical and methodological guidance on critical discourse analysis, this research was able to develop some questions, used to trace the materials and sources that would be necessary to carry out the proposed work:

- a) which actors are identified in the news about financing the education?
- b) what are the characteristics that constitute, configure and maintain the means of communication that will be used by the research as a source of news?
- c) what contextual factors are identified in the news collected?
- d) what observations can be made about the choice of words, expressions and connotations used by the authors/journalists/editors?
- e) how do the matters raised by the discourse analysis change or remain throughout the research's historical framework?

Materials and methods

In order to answer the questions raised above and investigate how the media refers to the financing of education in Texas, the original research elected five main cities in the state, in economic and population terms, seeking to cover their most recognized media, from television news, and local printed newspapers, in the cities of: 1) Austin (Texas capital city); 2) Houston; 3) San Antonio; 4) Dallas and 5) El Paso.

The first step was the selection of sources, or which TV news and newspapers would be used, electing five main news broadcasters and their local affiliated representatives, one in each of the five chosen cities, according to their popularity: 1) ABC; 2) CBS; 3) FOX; 4) NBC and 5) PBS. The original survey also chose printed newspapers, choosing five main ones, with regional coverage:

1) Fort Worth Star-Telegram; 2) Dallas Morning News; 3) D Magazine; 4) Dallas Observer and 5) Community Impact. Three other major newspapers which cover the state as a whole: 1) Texas Monthly; 2) Texas Observer and 3) Texas Tribune. A proposal for the Brazilian context would be the choice of television news broadcasters and printed newspapers according to their national scope, or with the geographic region of the country, or even according to popularity, based on circulation or audience index, for example.

The selection of news (videos and articles) was carried out by searching for three keywords in the search and filter toolbars, found in the menu of the websites of each television channel and newspaper selected.

The keywords were: school finance, school funding and Robin Hood. Robin Hood was chosen because it refers to a funding policy for public education, considered controversial and in constant legislative debate since its creation in 1993, whose original proposal would be to allocate financial resources from the richest districts to the poorer ones, according to the collection of property taxes, having undergone several changes over the years. Thus, the disputable character of this policy would reflect an important contribution to the analysis of how the media approaches an educational policy like this, investigating in a historical series since its creation if there are trends in the journalistic discourse and repercussions in the political agenda.

In the Brazilian context, the choice of keywords would depend on the specific objectives of the research, being able to search for terms such as “10% of GDP for education”, “EC 95/2016”, among other issues disclosed by the media about educational financing and/or educational policies in general, as suggested in the introduction of this paper.

Another point defined by the research is the historical period covered, that is, the time frame to be investigated, which depends on the objectives of the study and the availability of data sources. Due to the choice of the Robin Hood system as a keyword, the original research opted for the time frame beginning in 1990 – looking for printed newspaper articles that were already broadcasting the initial discussions of this system even before its approval – until January/2019 (period until when the data collection phase was extended), allowing the elaboration of a comparative historical series with a database corresponding to the period of almost thirty years.

As for television channels, unfortunately, most do not have a historical archive prior to 2012³. In addition, the search for television news detected an

3 Some of the TV channels surveyed kept news from only two previous years, which limited the study and prevented the achievement of its objective of complete temporal analysis. However, this happened only in relation to news programs, since the archive of access to the oldest news in the printed newspapers covered dates back to even before 1990.

excessive amount of irrelevant results brought by the search tool of the websites of each newscast (even considering that the majority of them presented news only from the year of 2012 on), as the tool filters all keywords displayed on any other link of the website, including ads, other headlines, related topics, etc. (for example: out of nearly 30 thousand results, only a little more than a thousand were in fact relevant to the research).

Data collection took place with registration in tracking reports, as follows: the creation of a table with the number of news selected in each research source (website of each channel, television news or printed newspaper searched), annotation of titles and general descriptions of each news item, in order to register in a file called “tracker” only those that were actually related to the topic in focus.

This way, a tracker was created for each source, in order to organize the collected material according to: a) Date of publication; b) Link to the news; c) Author/journalist/editor who signed it; d) Summary of headline/keyword/main subject brought by the news. In this way, the tracker enabled the creation of a more visually practical database for organizing and systematizing the collected news. Each article/piece of news was saved in a digital file (in .pdf format), using the date of publication as the file title, in a shared folder, divided by city and channel/newspaper.

The tracker’s news was recorded in numerical sequence, but not in chronological order, as only some of the sites offered the option to organize the results by date or by relevance, being displayed at random. However, the files end up being organized by date automatically in the folder where they are saved (due to the use of the date as the name given to each file).

The data collection of the original research aimed to perform an exhaustive search of the sources and articles related to the three keywords chosen, making it possible, as the availability of the sources allowed, to create a database since the year 1990 (related to printed newspapers), which will be used as a basis for future work, configuring itself as a material capable of revealing the topics of greater journalistic coverage in terms of financing education in the last thirty years and highlighting the ideological matrices that permeate symbolic representation socially constructed about public education in Texas and its financing, making the methodological proposal of this study a reference for development in other contexts.

Results and discussion: TV news coverage on the topic (2012 to 2019)

According to the observation of the database referring to TV news, it is possible to present some quantitative results of the proposed investigation, corresponding to a statistical analysis of the news about educational funding transmitted by the investigated TV channels (from the period 2012 to 2019).

Chart 1 shows the number of results found by the search tool on the news websites, according to the three keywords used by the research in each city, as well as the number of articles collected (those that were in fact relevant to the theme), separated by city and channel.

The first column of Chart 1 refers to the difficulty reported previously, about the number of results brought by the sources (total of 29,860) compared to the number of articles collected, which were actually relevant for the research (total of 1,181).

We can verify a difference in television coverage, depending on the channel and city, identifying that some cities had a greater amount of news transmitted about education funding, such as Houston and Dallas, with 347 articles (29% of the total collected) and 332 (28%), respectively. Austin and San Antonio accounted for 18% and 15%, respectively. The city with the least television news on education funding was El Paso, with only 10% of the total articles collected.

By dividing the total news for each city according to the seven years of the analyzed period, an average of 50 pieces of news per year is obtained in Houston, 47 in Dallas, 29 in Austin, 26 in San Antonio and 17 in El Paso. In decreasing order, it is clear that NBC was the one that most addressed educational financing, with 371 news items (31% of the total), or an average of 53 per year, followed by ABC, PBS, FOX and, finally, the CBS (with 91 news items, 8% of the total, or an average of 13 per year).

Chart 1 demonstrates that the news and the cities surveyed have different amounts of news on the topic, which brings about the question: why did some local TV channels comparatively cover the topic on financing education more or less than other major metropolitan areas? This is the case of Houston and Dallas, with more news compared to other cities and with a prevalence of news from the same TV channels, with PBS first and then NBC. However, in the cities of San Antonio and El Paso, these channels are not the main ones to deal with this theme, since the broadcaster that presented the most news about financing education in these cities was ABC. In Dallas, there was no news from ABC and in Austin (the state capital, where the legislative assembly is located) it was a minority. Why do some broadcasters seem to be more interested in this topic in certain cities and not others?

This research has sought to identify the reason for these findings, looking for information about the journalists' background⁴ and the people who make up the editorial body of these media, as well as more details about the institutions that finance them.

CHART 1 – TELEVISIVE COVERAGE ON FINANCING EDUCATION, BY CHANNEL AND CITY (2012-2019)

City	N. of results brought by the search tool	N. of pieces of news collected by each TV channel							
		ABC	CBS	FOX	NBC	PBS	Total	%	Average (2012-2019)
Austin	14.551	14	24	57	79	32	206	17%	29
	49%	7%	12%	28%	38%	16%	100%		
Dallas	4.560	0	55	18	134	125	332	28%	47
	15%	0%	17%	5%	40%	38%	100%		
El Paso	3.098	72	12	15	17	0	116	10%	17
	10%	62%	10%	13%	15%	0%	100%		
Houston	6.792	87	0	24	130	106	347	29%	50
	23%	25%	0%	7%	37%	31%	100%		
San Antonio	859	133	0	14	11	22	180	15%	26
	3%	74%	0%	8%	6%	12%	100%		
Total	29.860	306	91	128	371	285	1.181	100%	169
	100%	26%	8%	11%	31%	24%	100%		
Average (2012-2019)	4.266	44	13	18	53	41	169		

SOURCE: Elaborated by the authors.

The study also began the qualitative analysis of the database referring to television news, seeking to identify the statements that compose the network of meanings of the media discourse in focus, as suggested by the theoretical and methodological orientation of the research, listing topics that had greater presence in the collected material and evidencing excerpts in which possible positions and trends can be found in the journalistic discourse, which helps the research to draw lines of interpretation for the intended critical analysis.

⁴ In order to seek answers to the questions raised by the quantitative results, a survey was prepared for the journalists who most often signed the news about education funding, creating a small questionnaire and sending it electronically to five of them. The questions deal with the graduation and backgrounds of journalists, their interests when addressing the topic and opinions on the results of the research – constituting material to compose the analysis proposed by the original research.

The general image conveyed by the news and videos broadcast on the news is that the public education system in the USA and/or, more specifically, in the state of Texas, is decadent, mostly presented with “bad news”, with education funding being treated as a difficult, conflicting issue, without agreement, corresponding to characteristics that are identified due to the prevalence of news that conveys a negative idea of the public school and a tense and controversial impression about its funding.

From the preliminary qualitative analysis of the material, it is possible to list ten main subjects:

- a) The image of school funding on TV appears to be commonly associated with the discourse of political figures. The speech of civil society is used in the figure of “tax-paying” parents and families, to exemplify that citizens are not willing to pay more taxes for more investments, citing, for example, comments from people who pose against the tax increase, saying that’s because they do not have children;
- b) Reform of the school financing system as conflicting and controversial. The lack of resources for education seems to be more socially acceptable than the possibility of generating revenue by changing the tax collection system;
- c) Other possible sources of revenue for educational financing, which are not derived from property taxes, for example, are rarely addressed and have little space for disclosure, but a reasonable amount of news is identified in reference to tax collection or taxation on internet sales (from major chains such as *Amazon*), casinos and lotteries, or the regulation of the production, industrialization and commercialization of *Cannabis*;
- d) The controversy about wealthy districts complaining about the Robin Hood system, with a neoliberal view that has changed the characterization of this famous character to a different plot, since this system was considered unconstitutional in the state of Texas, undergoing several changes over the years, setting precedents for the fund to transfer resources even to districts above the economic average, which generates many controversial debates, widely disseminated by the media;
- e) Protests and strikes by teachers for better salaries: not only in Texas, but in other states like Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington and Oklahoma (without a salary raise for more than ten years), causing schools to close for a few days, generating negative repercussions among the speeches of the families, since the emphasis observed in the news was on the days when the children would be without classes, due to the strike, instead of the emphasis on the teachers’ social depreciation and the salary issue;

- f) About the attractiveness of the teaching work: lots of news about teachers who need to look for complementary jobs in supermarkets to pay for their living costs, or even to buy school supplies “out of their own pockets” for working with their students, with lines and statements from teachers who raffle on the internet to help finance their educational projects;
- g) About spending on school security and mental health, after episodes of shooting in public schools, including legislative proposals on weapons possession for teachers within schools, with news that deal with this proposal both as an exaggeration and as a solution;
- h) Vouchers, charter schools and the school choice discourse⁵: recurrent emphasis on the statements of families who claim that it is unfair to enroll their children in public schools that they consider to be of low quality, preferring to seek changes from the private administration. On the other hand, there is also news about the precariousness of schools administered by the private sector, concerning the lack of infrastructure and even cleaning issues, in addition to questions about mistrust regarding teacher selection processes and scandals involving the use of (public) money to finance private schools;
- i) Cut spending on meals, heating and transportation: schools in cold cities without heaters in classrooms during winter, causing the cancellation of some school days; cold snacks replacing children’s lunch; alerts about the precariousness in maintaining school buses;
- j) Political clash over the use of public resources to renovate bathrooms that do not discriminate against gender identity at school, which generated long legislative sessions, bringing more focus and publicity on this topic than on the topic of school financing reform as a whole, which would be debated as part of the agenda during the same sessions, but was left out due to the controversy raised by certain legislators regarding “transgender restrooms” in schools.

5 “Vouchers” are part of a public policy in which the State transfers financial resources directly to families, from the taxes that compose the budget revenue allocated to public schools, so that they choose private schools for their children and can pay for tuition. A policy that, on one hand, benefits the private sector greatly with public resources that could be applied in public schools, on the other hand, allows families to have the option of choosing other schools for their children. Charter Schools, or “contracted schools” are private schools, managed by the sector and by the private logic, but financed with public resources, following different organizational and financial inspection rules than those required for public schools. For more information: ALLEN; CANDAL; EDEN (2017), who are in favor of these policies, and CHAPMAN; DONNOR (2015), who are opposed.

The analysis categories illustrate the quantitative results presented previously and bring a perspective of the discussions on the qualitative dimension of the research, serving as a basis for comparing the results with the legislative agenda in each location, guiding the paths to be taken as future developments of the original research.

Conclusions

Having in mind the theoretical and methodological aspects elucidated by this paper, the approach presented by the research hopes to be able to contribute to studies that seek to identify the ideological structures conveyed in the media of different contexts, through the analysis of the journalistic media discourse, tracing capable paths to reveal the influence of printed and television newspapers in the formation of public opinion on the public school and, more specifically, on its financing, clarifying how these issues relate to the demand for public education, to legislative debates and to the formulation and implementation of educational policies.

The limitations of the research are understood and the need for adaptations due to the different contexts is in question. The objective of this work is not to carry out a comparative study between the USA and Brazil, assuming that other theoretical and methodological approaches should be used to a comparative proposal.

However, the methodological aspects, discussions and data presented by this work – especially on the coverage of selected newspapers, the amount of news on the topic in each location and the predominant discourse in the preliminary qualitative analysis of television news – hope to have shown itself relevant to help understand how the construction and (re)production of public opinion about education can define problems and constitute social paradigms, which, in turn, generate demands that require concrete solutions – to be contemplated by government measures – and predispose the political agenda, with greater or lesser weight, intended by different agents – with different interests and ideological positions – in legislative debates that decide on the planning, approval and implementation of laws that determine and sustain the public school system.

Understanding the statements and meanings that involve the critical analysis of the journalistic discourse also reinforces the indispensability of the democratization of the media, so that the media do not predominantly depend on

financial resources – and, therefore, on the interests – of the private sector. This is a necessary path for the realization of social control and democracy, which depend on access to information and independent journalism, capable of giving space, voice and visibility to the arguments that can bring a balance of forces in the debate on educational policies and education financing.

Finally, the discussion aims to contribute to the constitution of a paradigm on educational financing, from its formation in public opinion to its definition as a social demand (understanding the media as one of the devices for controlling and building this paradigm), in which the financing of education could be seen by society as an essential and indispensable element, because without it, it is not possible to realize the right to education quality, a social quality, one that goes beyond professional training, based on the project of citizen and emancipatory education, which is at the same time scientific, technological, artistic and, essentially, human.

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