

Persistence, dropout, and return to youth and adult education (EJA): a study in a social school in the Vale do Sinos/RS

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Abstract: This study analyzes the main reasons that lead to the permanence, abandonment, and return to youth and adult education of individuals from a Social College, located in Vale do Sinos/RS. To this end, qualitative research of a descriptive and exploratory nature was carried out,

Resumo: Este estudo analisa as principais razões à permanência, abandono e retorno à EJA de indivíduos de um Colégio Social, localizado no Vale do Sinos/RS. Para tanto, realizou-se pesquisa qualitativa de natureza descritiva e exploratória, por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, durante o

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using semistructured interviews, during the second half of 2023, involving 9 participants. The responses obtained were categorized into three axes, using thematic analysis. It was possible to conclude that, among others, the need to work is the main reason that makes students stay, or leave school to provide for their family, or even return to qualify in search of better opportunities.

Keywords: youth and adult education; permanence; school dropout; return to school; learning.

segundo semestre de 2023, envolvendo 9 participantes. As respostas obtidas foram categorizadas em três eixos, utilizando-se a análise temática. Foi possível concluir que, entre outros, a necessidade de trabalhar é o principal motivo que faz com que o estudante permaneça, ou que abandone a escola para prover o sustento da família, ou, ainda, que retorne para se qualificar em busca de melhores oportunidades.

Palavras-chave: EJA; permanência; abandono escolar; retorno à escola; aprendizagem.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the educational modality known as Youth and Adult Education (EJA), whose primary objective is to provide access to and continuity in education for many young people and adults who, for various reasons, were unable to complete their studies in regular education. This modality seeks to address both the pursuit of personal fulfillment and the creation of new professional opportunities.

It is important to emphasize that many of these young people and adults embark on this journey but, unfortunately, end up abandoning the opportunity once again. On the other hand, there are those who return to their studies, motivated by different reasons, seeing in EJA an alternative to finally complete their educational trajectory.

Teles and Soares¹ assert that these individuals begin seeking school again as they recognize that society is in constant transformation, demanding qualified professionals not only for the labor market but also for social life, so they may fully exercise citizenship or fight for that right.

It is worth recalling that, according to Ferreira², EJA emerged in the educational sphere as a mechanism to restore hope to young people and adults living on the margins of society. It offers the opportunity to dream, to recognize one's own potential, and to ensure the full exercise of one's rights and responsibilities, instead of being treated as mere objects of exploitation. In a world considered intellectualized, these individuals, with little or no formal education, frequently become targets of prejudice and discrimination.

School dropout is a broad and complex phenomenon influenced by various personal, social, and institutional factors. These elements may result in a temporary interruption of school attendance—referred to as “temporary dropout”—or in a permanent departure, which characterizes “school dropout” in the *strict sense*³.

1 TELES, Damara Araújo; SOARES, Maria Perpétua do Socorro Beserra. Educação de Jovens e Adultos: desafios e possibilidades na alfabetização. **Revista de Educação e Emancipação**, São Luís, v. 9, n. 1, p. 80-102, jan./jun. 2016. <https://doi.org/10.18764/2358-4319.v9n1p80-102>

2 FERREIRA, Rosely dos Santos. **A política de formação dos professores da educação de jovens e adultos de Mato Grosso** (2003-2014). 2017. 180 f. Thesis (Master's Degree in Education) – Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso, Rondonópolis, 2017. Available at: <https://ufr.edu.br/ppgedu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ROSELY-DOS-SANTOS-FERREIRA.pdf>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

3 BRANCO, Emerson Pereira et al. Evasão escolar: desafios para permanência dos estudantes na educação básica. **Revista Contemporânea de Educação**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 15, n. 34, p. 133-155, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.20500/rce.v15i34.34781>

According to the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep)⁴, there is a technical distinction between these terms: “temporary dropout” refers to the situation in which the student leaves school but returns in the following year, whereas “school dropout” indicates a definitive departure, with no return to the school system. In this study, the term “temporary dropout” is of particular interest, as students in EJA often stop attending classes but return in the following school year.

The Federal Constitution of 1988⁵ establishes the right to education for the entire population, including those who did not have access to schooling at the appropriate age, during childhood, or adolescence. Thus, it is the duty of the Federal Government, as well as of states and municipalities, to guarantee the provision of free and public schooling for young people and adults. However, despite this constitutional provision of rights and duties, more than 30 years later, national statistics leave no doubt about the challenges the country faces in ensuring education for all, particularly for this population.

According to data from the Basic Education Census⁶, the illiteracy rate among people aged 15 years and older was estimated at 6.6% in 2019 (11 million illiterate individuals). In 2018, this figure was 6.8%. This 0.2% reduction corresponds to a decrease of just over 200,000 illiterate people in 2019. Among Black and Brown individuals, the illiteracy rate was 8.9%, more than double that observed among White individuals (3.6%). The EJA population is composed primarily of students under the age of 30, accounting for 62.2% of enrollments. Within this age group, male students are the majority, representing 57.1% of enrollments. Among students over 30 years old, however, female students prevail, representing 58.6% of enrollments.

In the 21st century, 21.7% of Brazilians are still illiterate; nevertheless, there remain alarming numbers of people excluded from the literate world, which reinforces social exclusion (*apartação*)⁷. The denial of this fundamental right is associated with the denial of other basic social rights, stemming from an unequal and unjust social structure. It is worth highlighting that among the structural goals of the National Education Plan (PNE) to guarantee the right to quality basic education is the goal to “offer at least 25% of Youth and Adult Education enrollments at the Primary and Secondary levels, integrated with Vocational Education,”⁸ thus reducing the rates of illiteracy and functional illiteracy, while strengthening the connection with Vocational Education.

It is within this context that the present study was developed, with the general objective of analyzing the main reasons for persistence, dropout, and return to EJA. The research was conducted in a Social School located in the Vale do Sinos/RS. To achieve this objective, the following specific aims were established:

- Identify and analyze the main difficulties encountered in the learning and retention process;
- Identify and analyze the main causes of dropout;
- Identify and analyze the primary factors contributing to students’ return; and

4 Apud CAVALCANTI, Meirelucy Rocha. **A prática profissional do supervisor escolar e os desafios sobre a evasão e o abandono na educação de jovens e adultos em Fortaleza**. 2018. 112 f. Dissertation (Master’s degree in education) – Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, 2018. Available at: https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/37817/1/ulfpie053283_tm.pdf. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

5 BRASIL. [Constitution (1988)]. **Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil**. Brasília: Senado Federal, 1988. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Constituicao/Constituicao.htm. Accessed in: 29 May 2023.

6 BRASIL. Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). **Censo da Educação Básica 2019: Resumo Técnico**. Brasília, 2020. Available at: https://download.inep.gov.br/publicacoes/institucionais/estatisticas_e_indicadores/resumo_tecnico_censo_da_educacao_basica_2019.pdf. Accessed in: 10 Jan. 2024.

7 A term proposed by Cristóvam Buarque, which refers to a process whereby the other is designated as a being “apart” (*apartar* is a term used to separate cattle), that is, the phenomenon of separating the other, not only as unequal, but as “unlike,” a being expelled not only from the means of consumption, goods, services, etc. but from the human race. Apud NASCIMENTO, Elimar Pinheiro do. Hipóteses sobre a nova exclusão social: dos excluídos necessários aos excluídos desnecessários. Cadernos CRH, Salvador, n. 21, p. 29-47, 1994. <https://doi.org/10.9771/ccrh.v7i21.18772>

- Propose actions for the inclusion and retention of EJA students, creating strategies aimed at addressing school dropout.

It should be noted that there is a gap in information regarding EJA in the researched region. However, according to data from the Foundation of Economics and Statistics⁹, only the municipality in which this study was conducted presents an illiteracy rate of 3.36% among individuals aged 15 years or older, within a population of 254,190 inhabitants.

Considering the assumptions above, the scope of this research is defined as identifying and analyzing the main reasons for persistence, dropout, and return among EJA students at a Social School in the Vale do Sinos/RS, during the period from 2017 to 2022. The central research question is: what are the main reasons for persistence, dropout, and return to EJA among a group of individuals attending a Social School?

2. TRAJECTORIES AND FUNCTIONS OF YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, Brazil experienced a significant shift in the theorization of youth, as a concept producing “youths” as they are currently understood¹⁰. Young people ceased to be considered merely as individuals transitioning to adulthood or simply as a cohort defined by age. Instead, youth began to be understood in its diversity, so much so that the plural term “youths” replaced the singular and has been widely adopted. The use of the plural reflects the critique that, in more traditional approaches, young people were thought of as members of a homogeneous youth culture.

Experiencing youth(s) concurrently may lead young people from different social and cultural contexts to share languages, styles, feelings, practices, and common values. However, the way they experience what identifies them as young differs according to the specific situations in which they find themselves, particularly their social group, ethnicity, gender, territoriality, religion, and other factors.

Age limits are not fixed. For those denied childhood, youth begins earlier. At the other extreme—due to increased life expectancy and changes in the labor market—some extend the so-called “youth period” into their thirties. Thus, regardless of the defined age range, young people of the same chronological age may experience unequal forms of youth¹¹.

According to Grabowsky¹², contemporary young people constitute a social category marked by constant change, transience, diversity, and multiplicity as subjects. Society, educational institutions, and educators must exercise wisdom and discernment in providing an education that prepares young people for life as a whole. Moreover, as the author notes, the function of education within a

8 BRASIL. **Lei nº 13.005, de 25 de junho de 2014.**

Approves the National Education Plan (PNE) and makes other provisions. Brasília: Presidência da República, 2014. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2014/lei/l13005.htm. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

9 FUNDAÇÃO DE ECONOMIA E ESTATÍSTICA SIEGFRIED EMANUEL HEUSER. **Município: Novo Hamburgo.** Porto Alegre: FEE, 2010. Available at: <https://arquivo.fee.rs.gov.br/perfil-socioeconomico/municipios/detalhe/?municipio=Novo+Hamburgo>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

10 PERONDI, Maurício et al. (org.). **Infâncias, adolescências e juventudes na perspectiva dos direitos humanos: onde estamos? Para onde vamos?** Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2018.

11 NOVAES, Regina. Os jovens de hoje: contextos, diferenças e trajetórias. In: ALMEIDA, Isabel Mendes de; EUGENIO, Fernanda (org.). **Culturas jovens: novos mapas do afeto.** Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2006. p. 105.

12 GRABOWSKI, Gabriel. **A desconstrução do futuro: juventudes, reforma do ensino médio e retrocessos das políticas educacionais.** Porto Alegre: Carta, 2019.

capitalist economy is primarily to prepare children, adolescents, and youth for the labor market and for consumption, training them for a consumer society.

For authors such as Oliveira¹³ and Ramos and Stella¹⁴, young people, even when facing difficulties, return to EJA in pursuit of certification, social recognition, and the possibility of a better life. Theoretically, this allows them to enter the labor market, secure their place in society, regain self-esteem, and be seen as ordinary citizens. In doing so, they hope that entering the workforce will provide better living conditions, as well as the potential to form their own families and serve as role models for their children. Adults already integrated into the labor market bring with them longer personal histories and accumulated reflections on the external world.

In accordance with the Opinion of the National Education Council and the Chamber of Basic Education (CNE/CEB) 11/2000¹⁵, an adult is defined as a human being who is fully grown, and the adult stage (adulthood) includes both the elderly and young adults aged 30 years and older. According to the Youth Statute¹⁶, a young person falls within the age range of 15 to 29 years. Meanwhile, the elderly, also considered adults, are legally defined under Bill 5628/19¹⁷, which raises the age of legal adulthood for elderly status from 60 to 65 years, thus including them within the adult stage. Within this context, the terms “youths and adults,” as cited in the Opinion, emphasize that there is no fixed age or specific period for a student to become capable of developing their knowledge, skills, and competencies.

According to Santos¹⁸, EJA enables students, upon completion of Basic Education, not only to access greater employment opportunities but also to exercise full citizenship and social inclusion. Furthermore, Gouveia and Silva¹⁹ note that this educational modality represents a promise to facilitate the development of individuals of all ages. Within EJA, adolescents, youths, adults, and the elderly can update their knowledge, demonstrate skills, exchange experiences, and envision possibilities for transforming their futures.

Another significant point is that, according to the most recent data from the School Census²⁰ provided by the Inep, EJA currently enrolls approximately 2,774,428 students. This figure reflects a decline compared to previous years, which is believed to result primarily from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by ongoing violations of fundamental rights in Brazil and the lack of effective educational policies. EJA experienced the steepest decrease in enrollment among all educational modalities, with an 8.3% reduction compared to 2019, corresponding to nearly 270,000 fewer students. Additionally, the Census indicates that 1.5 million students aged 14 to 17 no longer attend school.

The School Census also reports that, from 2019 to 2020, approximately 230,000 students from the final years of Elementary School and 160,000 from High School migrated to EJA, representing students with histories of grade retention seeking pathways to complete Elementary and Secondary Education. There is also a noted migration to EJA starting from the 6th grade, accompanied

13 OLIVEIRA, Marta Kohl de. Jovens e adultos como sujeitos de conhecimento e aprendizagem. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, Rio de Janeiro, n. 12, p. 59-73, 1999. Available at: http://anped.tempsite.ws/novo_portal/rbe/rbedigital/RBDE12/RBDE12_06_MARTA_KOHL_DE_OLIVEIRA.pdf. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

14 RAMOS, Ellen Taline de; STELLA, Claudia. Significados da escolarização para alunos da educação de jovens e adultos. **Psicologia: teoria e prática**, São Paulo, v. 18, n. 2, p. 189-207, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.15348/1980-6906/psicologia.v18n2p189-207>

15 BRASIL. Ministério da Educação e do Desporto. Conselho Nacional de Educação. **Parecer CNE/CEB nº 11/2000, aprovado em 10 de maio de 2000**. Brasília: CNE/CEB, 2000. Available at: http://portal.mec.gov.br/cne/arquivos/pdf/PCB11_2000.pdf. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

16 **Id. Lei nº 12.852, de 5 de agosto de 2013**. Establishes the Youth Statute and provides for the rights of young people, the principles and guidelines of public policies for youth, and the National Youth System (SINAJUVE). Brasília: Presidência da República, 2013. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2013/lei/12852.htm. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

17 **Id. Câmara dos Deputados. Projeto de Lei 5628/2019**. Amends Law No. 10,741, of October 1, 2003, and Law No. 10,048, of November 8, 2000, to redefine the age of classification as an elderly person to 65 (sixty-five) years. Brasília: Câmara dos Deputados, 2019. Available at: <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2226619>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

18 SANTOS, Ilza Paula Soares. A evasão escolar na EJA. **Olhares & Tri-lhas**, Uberlândia, v. 20, n. 1, p. 61-72, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.14393/OT-2018vXX.n.1.61-72>

19 GOUVEIA, Daniele da Silva; SILVA, Alcina Maria Testa Braz da. Os jovens da EJA e o trabalho: repensando a prática a partir das expectativas e representações sociais. **Revista Educação e Cultura Contemporânea**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 14, n. 37, p. 319-342, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.5935/2238-1279.20170051>

20 BRASIL. Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira. **Censo Escolar 2022**: divulgação dos resultados. Brasília: Inep, 2022. Available at: https://download.inep.gov.br/censo_escolar/resultados/2022/apresentacao_coletiva.pdf. Accessed in: 23 May 2023.

21 *Id.*, 2000.

22 *Id.* Ministério da Educação e do Desporto. Conselho Nacional de Educação. Parecer CNE/CEB nº 4/1998, aprovado em 29 de janeiro de 1998. National Curriculum Guidelines for Elementary Education. Brasília: CNE/CEB, 1998. Available at: http://portal.mec.gov.br/cne/arquivos/pdf/1998/pceb004_98.pdf. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

23 *Id.*, 2000.

24 MACHADO, Jeferson Ventura; FISS, Dóris Maria Luzzardi; Educação de jovens e adultos: encantamento e permanência na escola. **Arquivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas**, Tempe, v. 22, 61, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n61.2014>

by a high dropout rate in the 1st year of High School, which, together with elevated repetition rates, has contributed to increased enrollment in EJA.

CNE/CEB Opinion No. 11/2000²¹ is a fundamental document for understanding the specificities of EJA as the recognition of a right historically denied to the population over 15 years of age. The considerations presented in this opinion have guided the implementation of public policies and changes in perceptions regarding EJA, in addition to legitimizing the National Curriculum Guidelines for this modality. The opinion establishes a dialogue with the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, framing it as a mechanism of State accountability in providing schooling to broad social segments, and defines the functions of EJA as reparative, equalizing, and qualifying.

According to the opinion, the reparative function of EJA entails not only reintegration into the sphere of civil rights through the restoration of a previously denied right—such as the right to a quality education—but also the recognition of the ontological equality of every human being. This denial, historically evident in Brazil, results in a loss: the deprivation of access to a socially and symbolically significant good. The pursuit of a less unequal and more just society remains a goal to be achieved in countries such as Brazil. This reparative function aligns with the demands of countless individuals who have experienced inadequate age-to-grade correspondence in their educational trajectories and have lacked the opportunity to continue their studies.

It is important, however, not to confuse the notion of reparative action with that of mere supplementation. As stated in CNE/CEB Opinion No. 4/1998, “nothing is more meaningful or important for the construction of citizenship than the understanding that culture would not exist without the socialization of human achievements. The anonymous individual is, in truth, the great artisan of the fabric of history.”²²

Moreover, according to CNE/CEB Opinion No. 11/2000²³, formal education, within its limits, creates a democratic space for knowledge and civic development, contributing to a less unequal society. It can assist in eliminating discrimination and, in doing so, open avenues for broader forms of freedom through the recognition of oneself, self-esteem, and the acknowledgment of others as equals.

For this reason, it is necessary to conceive a pedagogical model for EJA that generates meaningful learning situations and addresses the educational needs of young people and adults. As Machado and Fiss²⁴, assert, teacher engagement in the educational context is of fundamental importance for the creation of new knowledge and the development of students’ sense of belonging. Furthermore, Farias²⁵ and Zabala²⁶ emphasize the student-teacher relationship and teaching as a shared, meaningful, and autonomous process, which is essential for the success of this learning.

According to CNE/CEB Opinion No. 11/2000²⁷, the equalizing function of EJA aims to provide educational access to workers and other social segments, including homemakers, migrants, retirees, and incarcerated individuals. The reintegration into the educational system of those who have experienced forced

interruptions—due to grade repetition, dropout, unequal opportunities for continuity, or other adverse conditions—should be recognized as a corrective, albeit belated, reparation of outdated structures. This reintegration enables individuals to gain new opportunities within the labor market, social life, aesthetic spaces, and channels for participation. To achieve these goals, additional school placements are necessary for these new students, who are seeking renewed opportunities for equalization.

Campos²⁸ states that the reasons for school dropout in this modality are primarily related to survival conditions, in which students leave school to work, the precariousness of access and safety conditions, and the incompatibility of schedules with assumed responsibilities, making it difficult to balance work and study time. Cardoso and Ferreira²⁹ add that, beyond the aforementioned reasons, personal factors may also contribute to dropout.

This perspective is supported by Paixão *et al.*³⁰, regarding socioeconomic status, who assert that students often prioritize work over study, relegating education to a secondary role. Similarly, Gadotti³¹ emphasizes that young people and adults engaged in the labor market face a continuous struggle to improve their living conditions, including housing, food, transportation, and employment.

Moreover, according to CNE/CEB Opinion No. 11/2000³², EJA represents a promise of life qualification for all individuals, across all ages—including adolescents, youths, adults, and the elderly—enabling them to update knowledge, demonstrate skills, exchange experiences, and gain access to better working and cultural conditions.

As the opinion further indicates³³, the qualifying function of EJA aims to provide lifelong opportunities for knowledge updating. Beyond a mere function, it constitutes the very essence of EJA, grounded in the notion of the human being as inherently incomplete, whose potential for development and adaptation can be realized in both formal and non-formal educational contexts.

At the core of the concept of human potential lies the capacity to qualify oneself, requalify, and explore new fields of action as a form of self-fulfillment. Personal achievement is neither closed nor finite. When activated, the qualifying function can serve as a pathway to such discoveries. According to Libâneo³⁴, it is essential to consider the multiple constraints surrounding school dropout in this modality, as these constraints often prevent students from accessing favorable conditions for equality and educational quality, contradicting legal provisions.

Furthermore, CNE/CEB Opinion No. 11/2000³⁵, emphasizes that the qualifying function also constitutes a call to educational and research institutions to produce adequate teaching materials as an evolving process, adaptable in content and contemporaneous in the use and access to electronic communication media. The terms “youths and adults” indicate that, at any age and stage of life, it is possible to pursue education, develop, and acquire knowledge, skills, competencies, and values that transcend formal schooling spaces and lead to self-fulfillment and recognition of others as autonomous subjects.

25 FARIAS, Creuzinete Miranda. **Estudantes de EJA: motivações e sentidos para a permanência nas escolas estaduais no município de Cuiabá-MT**. 2022. 92 f. Thesis (Master's Degree in Education) – Universidade de Cuiabá, Cuiabá, 2022. Available at: <https://repositorio.pgsscogna.com.br/handle/123456789/48090>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

26 ZABALA, Antoni. **A prática educativa: como ensinar**. 2nd ed. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2010.

27 BRASIL, 2000.

28 CAMPOS, Edna Lúcia Ferreira. **A infrequência dos alunos adultos trabalhadores, em processo de alfabetização, na Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais**. 2003. 186 f. Thesis (Master's Degree in Education) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2003. Available at: <http://ejatrabalhadores.sites.uff.br/wp-content/uploads/sites/296/2017/12/campos-edna-lucia-ferreira.htm>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

29 CARDOSO, Jaqueline; FERREIRA, Maria José de Resende. Inclusão e Exclusão: O retorno e a permanência dos alunos na EJA. **Debates em Educação Científica e Tecnológica**, Vila Velha, v. 2, n. 1, p. 61-76, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.36524/dect.v2i01.26>

30 PAIXÃO, Edmilson Leite *et al.* Transição escola-trabalho e perfis de estudantes evadidos e diplomados na educação profissional técnica no Brasil. In: DORE, Rosemary *et al.* (org.). *Evação na educação: estudos, políticas e propostas de enfrentamento*. Brasília: IFB/CEPROTEC/ RIMEPES, 2014. p. 315-342.

31 GADOTTI, Moacir. **Boniteza de um sonho: ensinar-e-aprender com sentido**. São Paulo: Editora e Livraria Instituto Paulo Freire, 2008.

32 BRASIL, 2000.

33 *Ibid.*

In this regard, Freire³⁶ highlights the importance of understanding the concept of hope as an active verb, “to hope,” which refers to struggle and the development of student autonomy, promoting a pedagogy of dialogue, listening, and democracy.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to achieve the objectives outlined in this research, a qualitative approach was adopted as the methodological framework. From this perspective, the qualitative approach embraces the environment itself as a generator of data, while the researchers position themselves as observational instruments.

The present research is situated within the qualitative paradigm and has a descriptive-exploratory nature. The descriptive approach is grounded in the collection, analysis, and organization of data, preserving its integrity while revealing the frequency, nature, characteristics, causes, and correlations of events without manipulation by the researcher.

This study employs a non-probabilistic sample, selected based on convenience, including nine participants. Among them, three are students who remained in EJA until completion (EP1, EP2, and EP3); three abandoned their educational trajectory and did not return (EA1, EA2, and EA3); and three individuals resumed their studies (ER1, ER2, and ER3), all enrolled in EJA at the Elementary and Secondary Education levels. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 years and were profiled during the period from 2017 to 2022 at a Social School located in the Vale do Rio dos Sinos region, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

The following inclusion criteria were adopted for participant selection:

- a) Enrollment in Elementary and/or Secondary Education at the institution referred to as the Social School, located in the Vale do Sinos region, during the period from 2017 to 2022;
- b) Attendance in Elementary and/or Secondary Education at the Social School within the same region and timeframe;
- c) Age equal to or greater than 18 years, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual orientation;
- d) Consent to participate through the signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF).

This research adhered to ethical principles governing investigations in the Humanities and Social Sciences, as established by Resolution No. 510/2016³⁷ of the National Health Council. Participants signed two copies of the FICF, ensuring full protection of the information shared, as well as guaranteeing their freedom and security in contributing their narratives, perceptions, and experiences without fear of identification.

Data collection instruments included semi-structured individual interviews conducted with the selected students, aimed at interpreting and delineating the

34 LIBÂNEO, José Carlos. **Democratização da escola pública**: a pedagogia crítico-social dos conteúdos. 8. ed. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1989.

35 BRASIL, 2000.

36 FREIRE, Paulo. **Pedagogia da esperança**: um reencontro com a pedagogia do oprimido. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992.

37 BRASIL. Conselho Nacional de Saúde. **Resolução nº 510, de 07 de abril de 2016**. Brasília: CNS, 2016. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/conselho-nacional-de-saude/pt-br/acao-a-informacao/atos-normativos/resolucoes/2016/resolucao-no-510.pdf>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

investigated context. The interviews, scheduled in advance, took place in pre-determined locations and were recorded, subsequently undergoing transcription.

According to the school's website, the EJA currently serves approximately 400 students, organized into classes from the 7th grade of Elementary School to the 3rd year of Secondary Education, supported by a team of approximately 45 educators who work daily to build knowledge and educate citizens committed to human values. On August 11, 2023, the school celebrated its 26th anniversary, having transformed more than 10,000 lives through education.

For data analysis, thematic analysis was adopted, grounded in the theoretical frameworks proposed by Bardin³⁸ and Minayo³⁹. The interviews conducted in this study were processed using the Atlas.ti software, version 23.

Following this analytical framework, three thematic axes emerged, each comprising a main category. One of these categories further unfolds into a specific subcategory, the presentation and analysis of which are reserved for the next chapter.

4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1. Category 1 – Retention: future perspectives and motivation for continuing studies

When seeking to understand the meanings behind student retention in EJA within school settings, listening to the participants' narratives and life stories reveals the weight of responsibility inherent in contributing to change in a context that is often unfavorable to their educational journey⁴⁰.

As reported by the interviewees:

At the time I made the choice, it was to help my son, who was in the 9th grade at a State School... but since I completed the 9th grade first, I could not help him, and he failed. In the following semester, I was able to assist him because I was already in the 1st year of Secondary Education (EP1, our translation).

I plan to graduate in 2024 as a social worker, and my projects are precisely to help other women understand that it is possible... achieving them requires study, dedication, and preparation, knowing that the labor market for older adults is not easy, but having a differentiating factor [...] (EP2, our translation).

As a father, the first thing is to dedicate ourselves to our family, and by dedicating ourselves, the family looks at us and encourages us to seek better options [...]. I intend to become the administrator of the company I work for and later, eventually, open my own business (EP3, our translation).

It is evident that participant EP1 described the motivation behind their educational choice, initially made to assist their son, albeit unsuccessfully, in the 9th grade of a state school. Alongside EP3's statement, it illustrates the significance of education within the family and how educational decisions can affect

38 BARDIN, Laurence. *Análise de conteúdo*. 4. ed. Lisboa: Edições 70, 2010.

39 MINAYO, Maria Cecília de Souza. *O desafio do conhecimento: pesquisa qualitativa em saúde*. 12. ed. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2010.

40 FARIAS, *op. cit.*

not only the individual but also their relatives. EP2's narrative also reflects the enduring impact of learning in EJA and the achievements in higher education derived from knowledge acquired in this modality: "I liked all the teachers, all the subjects, and I appropriated this knowledge. As I said, even today, thanks to God, my dissertation grades at university are always ten because I remember every lesson I had."

4.1.1. Subcategory 1 – Retention: challenges faced in adult educational journeys

As reported by participant EP1, one of the initial challenges in joining EJA was facing a classroom populated by students of varying ages, ideas, and life experiences: "I thought it would be more difficult because of the range of ages in the classroom; I had classmates from 18 to 60 years old [...] I really had to learn things I had never learned in regular schools" (EP1, our translation).

The transfer of knowledge and construction of learning is continuous, as illustrated in the following excerpt: "I had never taken Philosophy or Entrepreneurship, and I didn't even know what they were... Some subjects were difficult, but I think they were not difficulties per se, just obstacles that we can overcome" (EP1, our translation).

Participant EP2's statement, "Usually balancing family, studies, and work," expresses the challenge of managing multiple responsibilities, highlighting the importance of family, livelihood, and the struggle against exclusion from rights.

Balancing professional duties, study, and family life constitutes a challenge for any individual. The formation of a family, especially with the arrival of children, requires negotiation, organization, a support network, time, equilibrium, and persistence to pursue adult life goals. In parallel, there is the concern for livelihood secured through work and the pursuit of qualifications to improve living conditions.

4.2. Category 2 – Abandonment: causes of school dropout – commitments, personal and professional demands

In this category, participants highlighted external pressures, such as urgent family needs, household responsibilities, and work demands, as key factors influencing school abandonment. For instance, the necessity to care for sick family members, particularly elderly individuals or children, was cited as a primary reason for interrupting studies.

I was supposed to graduate this year, in the third year of high school, but I could not because I had to stop to take care of my grandmother. It was a difficult time—she was hospitalized, then discharged, returned home, fell ill again, and went back to the hospital. It was a very complicated period (EA2, our translation).

Moreover, the necessity of working to support one's family emerged as a decisive factor. This category highlights how personal challenges and responsibilities outside the educational context affected the continuity of studies. For instance, participant EA1 reported the need to work and the difficulty of reconciling school schedules with professional duties. In the case of EA3, additional factors included age (life stage) and total study time beyond scheduled classes.

According to Oliveira and Eiterer:

The reasons for school dropout include material survival conditions, in which the student leaves school to work; the precariousness of access and safety conditions; and schedule incompatibility with assumed responsibilities⁴¹.

In this scenario, Almeida⁴² notes that students pursuing EJA often seek a way to work during the day and study at night; however, with long work hours, many distance themselves from school due to difficulties in balancing work and study. Cardoso and Ferreira⁴³ further emphasize that EJA students may abandon courses due to work, family, or personal reasons, later returning only to leave again for the same reasons.

Participants highlighted that professional and family obligations, combined with incompatible schedules, hinder regular attendance. This lack of time and flexibility negatively impacted their ability to maintain equilibrium between personal responsibilities and academic requirements. Accordingly, this category underscores the importance of flexibility and accessibility in adult education programs.

Additionally, Fritsch and Vitelli⁴⁴ note that in evening classes, school failure is linked to labor market pressures, which require enrollment without considering attendance, as well as the age-grade mismatch of many students. Beyond these factors, school quality, teacher motivation, and the effectiveness of public policies significantly influence outcomes. This illustrates the complexity of retaining young adults in formal education and highlights the need for holistic approaches and effective policies to combat dropout and ensure access to quality education.

4.3 Category 3 – Return: motivations for returning to EJA – pursuit of personal and professional development

Exploring the pursuit of better professional opportunities and the overcoming of obstacles reveals a multifaceted portrait of the underlying reasons for returning. Intrinsic motivation to enhance one's career path and the desire for personal growth intertwine, outlining a complex panorama of aspirations and challenges shaping adult reentry into EJA.

The interviewees highlighted their reasons for returning to studies:

To achieve a better profession (ER2, our translation).

41 OLIVEIRA, Paula Cristina Silva de; EITERER, Carmem Lúcia. **"Evasão" escolar de alunos trabalhadores na EJA**. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Faculdade de Educação, Belo Horizonte, 2011.

42 ALMEIDA, Joceli Carla de. **A evasão na educação de jovens e adultos**. 2014. 14 f. Monograph (Specialization in Educational Coordination) – Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, 2014. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1884/53309>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

43 CARDOSO; FERREIRA, op. cit.

44 FRITSCH, Rosângela; VITELLI, Ricardo Ferreira. **Evasão escolar, a escola e o mercado de trabalho: o que dizem os jovens do Ensino Médio de escolas públicas**. Reunião Científica Regional da ANPED, Curitiba, 24-27 jul. 2016. Available at: http://www.anpedsul2016.ufpr.br/portal/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Eixo-2_ROSANGELA-FRITSCH-RICARDO-FERREIRA-VITELLI.pdf. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

The desire and will to advance in life and provide a better life for my daughter through education. I believe we can have a better life, with more job opportunities and higher pay (ER3, our translation).

In ER3's statement, the need for survival is prominent, while also reflecting the reality of many women who provide household support, care for children, and must balance study, work, and family. Often, due to a lack of support networks, women must prioritize work and child-rearing, postponing studies until their children are older and support systems are in place, enabling them to pursue personal and professional fulfillment. Women also face persistent prejudice and inequality in the labor market regarding positions, salaries, and harassment.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic posed major challenges, including remote learning, which again excluded many EJA students. Remote classes were conducted asynchronously via Facebook groups created by the school, but many students lacked internet access or compatible devices, which discouraged them from pursuing their goals. Many students still prefer in-person classes, which allow for greater attention and focus.

ER3's statement underscores the importance of completing studies for better professional opportunities, confirming the reparative, equalizing, and qualifying functions of EJA:

Nowadays, if we do not have a complete high school education, there are very few professional opportunities available. Therefore, completing high school is essential to qualify for technical courses and advance professionally (ER3, our translation).

Frequently, EJA provides students not only with the opportunity to complete their studies but also with a flexible curriculum, guidance, and encouragement from teachers to pursue their Life Project. Supporting this perspective, Santos⁴⁵ asserts that EJA enables students, upon completing Basic Education, to access not only greater equality in employment but also citizenship and social inclusion.

The interviewees also identified internal school factors that prompted their return to EJA, such as limited study time, the desire to complete high school, and external factors including access to better employment, prospects for a brighter future, enrollment in technical or higher education programs, preparation for the labor market, aspirations to work in a bank, or to succeed in public service examinations.

According to Silva *et al.*⁴⁶, when a school succeeds in fostering students' belief in their potential, it fulfills a role far beyond mere academic instruction, assisting in the development of individual emancipation within society.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is possible to affirm that the research objectives were achieved, as the interviewees provided sufficient insights to address the research questions.

45 SANTOS, *op. cit.*

46 SILVA, Rita de Cássia Santos da et al. As causas da evasão escolar na EJA: uma concepção histórica. **Revista EJA em Debate**, Florianópolis, v. 8, n. 13, p. 1-18, 2019. Available at: <https://periodicos.ifsc.edu.br/index.php/EJA/article/view/2546>. Accessed in: 7 Nov. 2023.

Regarding persistence in EJA, the interviewees highlighted future perspectives and motivation to continue their studies. Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors were evident in their statements, including personal, familial, and professional reasons that encouraged them to persist in their education, reflecting their aspirations and future goals. These motivations may also have been shaped by life events, prior experiences, and individual needs, as each participant carries unique histories, experiences, setbacks, and achievements, all united by a desire to recover lost time.

Concerning dropout in EJA, participants mentioned difficulties in managing work, family, and studies simultaneously. Personal commitments and responsibilities often impact the ability to continue studies, leading some students to temporarily withdraw and return later in pursuit of personal and professional fulfillment.

Regarding the motivations for returning to EJA, participants emphasized the pursuit of personal and professional development. This includes completing high school, continuing studies to qualify for higher-level positions, accessing better labor market opportunities, and achieving improved financial conditions through dignified employment and higher wages.

It is evident that work obligations influence students' decisions across all scenarios: prompting them to qualify and remain in school, causing temporary withdrawal to support their families, or motivating their return to seek better professional opportunities and salaries.

From this study, it is possible to propose actions to foster inclusion and persistence among EJA students, addressing school dropout. The school may integrate into its strategic planning initiatives aimed at student retention, including surveys or questionnaires for students beginning their studies, those who persist and graduate, dropouts, and those who return. Further recommendations include mapping institutional strengths and weaknesses, maintaining semianual contact with former students to encourage reentry, and continuing to provide transportation, meals, uniforms, integration activities, student leadership opportunities, and home visits to understand students' realities. Additionally, curriculum and assessment frameworks should be tailored to EJA specifics, alongside enhancing teachers' pedagogical practices to ensure the processes of equalization, remediation, and qualification.

This study reaffirms that EJA's function extends beyond equalizing, remediating, and qualifying students. It shapes individuals in (re)construction—protagonists, citizens with rights—seeking inclusion in a society that has often excluded them. It is the responsibility of society, education professionals, and students to demonstrate that schooling is essential and brings hope for transforming these realities.

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