
Difficulties, expectations, and characteristics of returning to school in PROEJA students

Dificuldades, expectativas e características do retorno às aulas em alunos do PROEJA

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ABSTRACT

This study is exploratory research with a qualitative-quantitative approach and demonstrates the socioeconomic characteristics, educational aspects, difficulties and expectations of students who are 40 years old or older in the group of the Technical Course in Accommodation – PROEJA at IFPA - Campus Santarém. The research participants who met the criteria were selected from the enrollment list and later interviewed in person through a questionnaire containing 26 open and closed questions divided into two groups: I-Socioeconomic characterization, with 15 questions and II - Educational aspects, difficulties and expectations, containing 11 questions. The results include the totality of the interviewed population being female, married and separated, unemployed, considering their learning capacity as regular, and having as main difficulty during the classes, the understanding of the teachers' explanations.

Keywords: EJA; Amazon; Adult students.

RESUMO

Foi desenvolvido uma pesquisa de natureza exploratória com abordagem qualitativa-quantitativa para investigar características socioeconômicas, aspectos educacionais, dificuldades e expectativas de alunos com idade a partir de 40 anos da turma do curso Técnico em Hospedagem – PROEJA do IFPA - Campus Santarém. Os participantes foram selecionados a partir da lista de matrícula e, posteriormente, entrevistados de forma presencial através de um questionário semiestruturado contendo 26 perguntas abertas e fechadas divididas em dois grupos, quais sejam: I- Caracterização socioeconômica, com 15 perguntas e II - Aspectos educacionais, dificuldades e expectativas, contendo 11 questionamentos. Os resultados incluem a totalidade da população entrevistada do sexo feminino, separadas, desempregadas, com capacidade de aprendizado regular e tendo como principal dificuldade a compreensão das explicações dos professores.

Palavras-chave: EJA; Amazônia; Alunos adultos.

INTRODUÇÃO

The Education of Youth and Adults (Educação de Jovens e Adultos – EJA) It is a type of teaching guided by the principles of popular education, which offers the possibility of continuing studies to a part of society that could not have access to regular schooling at the appropriate age or did not conclude their studies due to numerous reasons, among them, those of a cultural, financial or personal nature. Its National Curriculum Guidelines indicate that it must consider situations, student profiles and age groups, and have the functions of repairing, in the sense of restoring a denied right, equalizing, in a way that enables individuals to enter the world of work and in social life, and qualifying because it is related to the potential for development and adaptation of the human being. Therefore, it integrates social, political, and professional training, and is shown to be in a constant process of construction, in which new social demands and needs of each historical context are grouped (SOARES, 1996; ARROYO, 2008; KLÜSENER, 2011; VILELA, 2015).

In this sense, its history in Brazil is associated with various moments of social, economic and political changes. Its outline began in the Colonial Period, when education had a more religious than educational aspect, through the catechization carried out by the Jesuits, which was not of great interest to the country's managers, since it did not contribute considerably to productivity, which caused a weakness in this type of education (SOARES, 1996; BRASIL, 1999; ARROYO, 2008).

Since then, many initiatives have been taken in various phases of Brazilian history, achieving some advances, but a noticeable lack of continuity and scarcity of public policies, especially with regard to literacy, when normally they resulted from individual decisions or isolated groups that they acted as collaborators of the State's determinations, resulting in short-term programs that did not ensure the continuity of the students' studies (MIRANDA; SOUZA; PEREIRA, 2016).

In this process, it is worth highlighting in the 1990s, during the presidente Fernando Henrique Cardoso government, the approval of the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDBEN – Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional) - Law 9.394/1996 (BRASIL, 1996) in which EJA came to be conceived as a modality of teaching, the creation of CNB/CEB No. 1, of July 5, 2000 (BRASIL, 2000) which established the national curriculum guidelines for youth and adult education, in addition to the implementation of the Solidarity Literacy program (STEPHANOU; BASTOS, 2005; ANTUNES, 2007).

In 2003, another point to be highlighted was the creation of the Brasil Alfabetizado program during president Lula Government, which involved three lines of essentially social origin for the EJA modality, such as the Escola de Fábrica, which provided professional training courses lasting minimum of 600 hours for young people between 15 and 21 years old; the National Youth Inclusion Program (PROJOVEM), aimed at the age group of 18 to 24 years old, with education

higher than the 4th grade (currently the 5th grade), without completing elementary school and disconnected from the formal job market; and finally, the Program for the Integration of Vocational Education into High School for Young People and Adults (PROEJA) aimed at technical professional education at the high school level (STEPHANOU; BASTOS, 2005; FRIEDRICH *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding the profile of the EJA target audience, the considerable presence of increasingly younger students can be seen, which transforms everyday life and the relationships established between the subjects who share the school environment (BRUNEL, 2008).

In this context, despite the increase in the number of younger individuals in the modality's school benches, there are still older people sharing these same spaces. This situation can lead to a lack of motivation for these students, which can cause school evasion and repetition, problems frequently faced by the modality, as seen in studies by Patto (1997), Ceratti (2008), Fortunato (2010), and Viana, Sanches and Miranda (2011).

It is understood that by identifying the way of life, adaptation difficulties and expectations of adult students when they return to school, it is possible to direct efforts and develop actions that mitigate or even eliminate possible evasions and school repetitions, which justifies carrying out of this research.

In view of this, the following questions arose: What is the socioeconomic reality of adults aged 40 and over belonging to the group entering the Technical Course in Accommodation - PROEJA of the Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Pará (IFPA) - Campus Santarém in 2021? How do you feel about most of the younger students in the class? What are your difficulties and expectations regarding your educational process?

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the socioeconomic aspects, difficulties, and expectations of respondents.

METHOD OF LITERATURE SEARCH

To achieve these objectives, the research was initiated through bibliographical research, whose elaboration is based on already organized material, where data collected from publications in digital media, documents, books and specific legislation on the subject were used. It also had a field study, which is characterized by the collection of data with individuals, seeking to study a group or community, in the sense of its social organization, highlighting the mutual influence between the subjects (FONSECA, 2002; GIL, 2006; JÚNIOR *et al.*; 2021).

SITE OF RESEARCH

The research site was the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Pará (IFPA) *campus* Santarém, a city located in the west of the state of Pará, in the mesoregion of the

Lower Amazon, which covers an area of approximately 722,358 km² and has a population of approximately 294,580 inhabitants (IBGE, 2010a; SEMMA - CIAM, 2013).

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

The Technical Course in Accommodation, in the form of Youth and Adult Education - PROEJA began to be offered in 2017, in the evening shift, with the objective of serving an audience made up of people who did not complete their studies in a timely manner and to encourage the region's market, which has a strong tourist vocation.

It has an annual serial regime, in face-to-face mode, obeys the Institutional Academic Calendar presented annually by the Pro-Rectorate of Education (PROEN) and approved by the Superior Council of IFPA. mandatory internship, totaling three years (FEDERAL INSTITUTE, 2015; PARÁ, 2018).

DATA COLLECT

Information was collected during the month of December 2021, in three meetings on the IFPA Campus, where face-to-face interviews were carried out using a questionnaire based on the models of Abreu (2008), Bastiani and Rovaris (2011) and Klüsener (2011), containing 26 open and closed questions divided into two groups: I - Socioeconomic characterization, with 15 questions and II - Educational aspects, difficulties and expectations, containing 11 questions. Subsequently, the data obtained were treated using the software Microsoft Excel.

TARGET PUBLIC OF THE RESEARCH

The target audience surveyed were students from the 2021 class of the Technician Course in Accommodation - PROEJA, male and female, aged 40 years and over. The class has 36 students, and after analyzing the data from the enrollment list, five students were identified who met the criteria of this study, composing the population of this research.

ETHICAL ASPECTS

As for the ethical aspects, the interviews were carried out with the permission of the interviewees through the Term of Free and Informed Consent based on Resolution n° 466, of December 12, 2012, of the National Health Council (BRASIL, 2012), which establishes the guidelines and regulatory norms for research involving human beings, maintaining their anonymity.

RESULTS PRESENTATION

This study was divided into topics that address information about who EJA students are, followed by concepts about adulthood and some characteristics of adult EJA students.

Then, the results and discussions of the data obtained by the research are shown, divided into socioeconomic characterization and educational aspects, difficulties, and expectations of the interviewed group.

Finally, the final considerations and references of the work are presented.

WHO IS THE EJA STUDENT?

The target audience of EJA is formed mainly by young people and adult workers, in addition to the elderly, and differs from the regular school audience mainly due to age or generational factors, in addition to historical-cultural issues. In this sense, they are subjects for whom educational opportunities were not made available at the appropriate age or had them in a deficient way, not reaching the necessary literacy and obtaining basic knowledge. These are people who collectively copy long histories of exclusion of rights, which resemble the trajectories of their parents and grandparents, and by their race, gender, ethnicity and social class (PAIVA, 1973; OLIVEIRA, 1999; FERRARI; AMARAL, 2011; SOUZA FILHO; CASSOL; AMORIM, 2021).

Originally, EJA was supposed to serve mainly adult students, but in addition to young people, teenagers, who benefited from pedagogical, political, structural, and legal factors, were also included in the modality. (BRUNEL, 2008).

In this respect, the publication of the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (BRASIL, 1996) corroborated this situation, which establishes the reduction of the minimum age for participation in supplementary exams (15 years for elementary school and 18 years for high school), a measure that aimed to adjust the school flow, in addition to making it possible to advance the completion of studies for young people who find it difficult to attend regular school due to their living conditions (RUMMERT, 2007).

Furthermore, Resolução n. 03/10 (BRASIL, 2010) was instituted, which also extended the minimum age established for enrollment in EJA. This measure led to a significant increase in the presence of young people from the age of 14 in classes at this level of education, which was identified and called by researchers as a phenomenon of youthfulness of EJA (CARRANO, 2007; RUMMERT, 2007).

This favored the aggravation of the indetermination of the target audience and the dilution of psychopedagogical particularities that are inherent characteristics of EJA as a teaching modality (HADDAD; DI PIERRO, 2000).

Juvenilization indices generate concern in the Brazilian scenario, as they demonstrate the failure of the regular school and include in the EJA students who have their own demand, and occasionally different from the experiences of adults, which has contributed to generate difficulties for teachers to assist, in the same space and time, different degrees of knowledge and learning progress, in addition to generational conflicts in the classes of that modality

(CARRANO, 2007; DAYRELL; NOGUEIRA; MIRANDA, 2011; FERRARI; AMARAL, 2011).

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE ADULT STUDENT OF EJA

Age is a gross variable that implies generativity and productivity in the family and at work. In this context, adult life represents the most dynamic and lasting phase in society. The adult individual has characteristics that are peculiar to him, having experienced his own life situations, and for the most part, producing and working for his survival, in any situation of social, economic, and cultural reality (MOSQUERA, 1982; SANTOS; ANTUNES, 2007).

Although there are still controversies regarding the age cycles that determine the periods of the average human adult life, the division can be made as follows: initial average adulthood, including individuals aged between 40 and 50 years old, full average adulthood that encompasses people aged between 50 and 60 and finally, subjects who are approximately 60 to 65 years old, who are part of the final average adult age, divided into smaller adversities, which affect people in their decisive moments in the face of their specific life projects and their relationships with others (MOSQUERA, 1982; MOSQUERA, 2006).

In this context, with all the difficulties typical of middle age, such as affective and sexual failures, fears, anxieties and anguish, in addition to the awareness of their temporality and mortality, there is still time for men and women to seek new vocational options, which, however, becomes more difficult as years go by, as they happen at a time in life when people should be stabilized in their activities (MOSQUERA, 1982; LIDZ, 1983).

Thus, when the adult individual returns to the school environment, he integrates a literate, scientific and technological society and has already experienced a part of school knowledge, however, only in adulthood does he have the real opportunity to access these teachings, and thus seeks a new chance. It has a very particular conception of the world, representing different human types, men and women who arrive at school with already formed beliefs and values, main characters of real stories and full of lived experiences.

They are male and female students with a variety of ways of life, origins, ages, professional experiences, school backgrounds, structures of thought and learning rhythms, who on their return to their studies expect to find the conventional model of school, where there is a predominance of classes lectures, subjects copied on the blackboard and emphasis on the teacher, who is configured as the sole possessor of knowledge and transmits contents that are passively received by them (COSTA; ÁLVARES; BARRETO, 2006; FRANZOI *et al.*, 2010; LEITE, 2013).

In this sense, EJA teachers highlight the respect for the hierarchy between teacher and student existing in the group of adult students, in addition to recognizing and valuing their efforts to learn and the daily effort to remain in the course, which differs from adolescents who

demonstrate lack of motivation, non-involvement in school tasks and inattention (FERRARI; AMARAL, 2011).

Adult students of the modality, on the other hand, see young people in a very critical way, considering that due to their way of acting, dressing and behaving, they are not serious about their studies and negatively interfere with learning. In turn, young students, most of the time, see the older student as a decadent person who should have already given up on pursuing goals in their lives (RIBAS, 2009; PAULA, 2009).

This plurality of sociocultural background of the students is a typical complexity of EJA, due to their generational belonging, where interactions occur between individuals of the same generation, as well as between those of different generations, in which tension occurs in diversity of experiences obtained by young, adult, and elderly individuals sharing the same place (RIBAS, 2009).

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERIZATION

The interviewed group consisted of five women (question 1), which reinforces data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE (2016), which indicate that in Brazil, women study more than men. According to Menezes (2005), in recent decades EJA has gradually become a space for women to seek to overcome exclusion from the school system.

The age of the interviewees (question 2) ranged between 44 and 53 years, with the majority (60%) born in Santarém (question 3).

When questioned about their race (question 4), the interviewees declared that most of them were white and brown with 40% each, and black, with a rate of 20%. On the subject, Kabeya (2008) states that for statistical purposes, considering the flexibility of color classification in Brazil, blacks and browns are considered by many researchers as a single category. Thus, adding up the percentages of black and brown self-declared by the interviewees, a total of 60% is reached, which is close to the studies by Melo et al (2015).

Regarding following a religion (question 5), all respondents said yes, the majority being Catholic (60%), followed by Evangelical (40%). The indexes achieved confirm the IBGE data (2010b), which demonstrate that despite the growth in the number of evangelicals, the Catholic religion is still the majority in Brazil. The issue of religiosity is an issue that crosses the daily lives of a large part of the popular classes, and thus also of public school students, showing itself as an essential factor of sociability, coexistence and coping with the difficulties of life (VALLA, 2001; SAINTS, 2016).

Regarding the marital status of the interviewees (question 6), the highest rates are represented by married and divorced with 40% each, followed by single ones (20%).

Regarding having children (question 7), all respondents (100%) said they had, and in relation to the number (question 8), the majority (40%) said they had 1 child (40%), and in their minority 2, 3, and 4 children with 20% each, which is close to the average reached by the IBGE (2010c) which demonstrates that the Brazilian woman has 1.9 children, being able to have two, three, or more children. The survey also informs that the number of children has been reduced in Brazil since the 1960s in all regions of the country.

Regarding the ownership of their homes (question 9), most declared living in their own house (60%), with 5 rooms (40%), followed by 3, 4 and 6 rooms with 20% each (question 10), and sharing the space, mostly with 2 (40%) and 3 (40%) people (question 11). Almeida (1997) states that the average number of rooms per Permanent Private Household (Domicílios Particulares Permanentes – DPP) is an indicator of housing quality, as the greater the number of rooms per home, the better the residence, and therefore the better the quality of life.

When questioned about whether they were working (question 12), most said they were not (60%). The result illustrates the statement by Lameiras et al (2019), where they demonstrate that those who suffer most from unemployment are women, people over 40 years old and those who did not complete high school.

The employed minority (40%) are cooks (20%) and store cashiers (20%) (question 13). Ferreira and Vitorino (2019) point out that it is characteristic of the collective served by the EJA to be unemployed or in unskilled jobs, and Costa, Álvares and Barreto (2006) add that, in general, these types of work are considered repetitive, exhausting and not very enriching.

It is important to mention that among the five interviewees, two (40%) declared that they had never worked, and the rest stated that they started working at 11 (20%), 15 (20%) and 18 years (20%) (question 14). In this regard, Méndez (2013) states that society in the 21st century prioritizes preparing people for the world of work throughout their lives and attributes professional success to individual merit and choosing the right opportunities. However, success or failure in the job market is a consequence of each individual's history, where the interference of social, cultural, political and economic issues shape their options.

In the specific case of women, Bruschini (2000) states that there is a continuous need to articulate family and professional attributions, which limits availability and, to a greater extent, prevents entry into the labor market.

Regarding the income achieved by the families of the interviewees (question 15), the majority (60%) reach up to one minimum wage, which demonstrates the low financial capacity of this group, as indicated by the study by Costa, Álvares and Barreto (2006), in which it is the realization that people who seek the EJA school belong to the same social class, where they generally have low purchasing power and consume only the basics for their survival: rent, water, electricity, food and medicine for their children, when they have them.

EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS, DIFFICULTIES AND EXPECTATIONS

When asked about the time they had not studied before starting their studies at PROEJA (question 1), the majority (80%) answered that it was more than five years ago, and about the reason for having a break their studies (question 2) the majority (60%) claimed to have been taking care of the family.

The result attests to what was exposed by IBGE (2016) which states that one of the biggest factors for women to leave school are domestic obligations. On the subject, Nader (2001) points out that from the moment they get married, women have the obligation to dedicate themselves to the family, receiving a load of responsibilities that lead them to give up other pretensions in their lives, having to change their behavior in a radical way, this being the condition for keeping happily married.

When asked about having failed a grade at school (question 3), the majority (60%) answered yes, and of these, most (40%) said they had failed only once (question 4). High repetition rates are among the most serious and lasting problems of Brazilian education, and in the case of EJA, whose student trajectory is marked by non-linearity caused by failure or school dropout, the difficulties in keeping up with other students increase (ARROYO, 2005; CORREA; BONAMINO; SOARES, 2014).

Regarding having the support and encouragement of the family to study (question 5), the majority (60%) stated that they did, while the minority (40%) answered that they had it in part. On the subject, Costa, Álvares and Barreto (2006) declare that the search for school by young people and adults in many cases is a difficult decision, which involves families, employers, distances between home and school and the financial capacity to pay studies, being a continuous process of admissions and withdrawals, configuring a challenge for these individuals.

When questioned about the reasons that led them to seek PROEJA to continue their studies (question 6), most respondents (60%) answered that it was to get a job in the job market, followed by monitoring their child's progress (20%) and by encouragement from relatives (20%).

According to Passos (2011), the family emerges along with school and work as one of the fundamental factors that lead students back to their studies. When talking specifically about the female students, Gonçalves (2014) states that the return of women to the school routine presents individual and distinct objectives, and among them are acquiring knowledge, staying at work, securing a better job, meeting new people, and seeking better living conditions for themselves and their families.

Perrot (2007) indicates that in the case of students who are mothers, continuing their studies, regardless of the difficulties, is a way of serving as a model for their children, thus encouraging them to study as well.

Regarding the main difficulty that the interviewees have during classes (question 7), most answered that it is understanding the teachers' explanations (60%), followed by adapting to changes in teaching (20%) and using telephone tools cell phone (20%).

EJA students have different life traits, professional experiences, school backgrounds, ways of thinking and learning rhythms, which in the case of adults can be slower, but compensated by a broader and more creative vision in some situations, caused by experience gained over the years (DA CRUZ *et al.*, 2021).

This fact can be configured in an educational richness if this range of differences is respected in the classroom, so that the teacher dialogues with these students and not only develops his classes through monologues (ARROYO, 2005; COSTA; ÁLVARES; BARRETO, 2006).

In view of this, institutions that work with EJA often find it difficult to understand these peculiarities of students, and the non-adequacy of the service offered can lead them to yet another process of exclusion in their lives (SOGLIA; SANTOS, 2012).

These issues are also valid in the case of technology, which, together with education, are essential factors for the transformation of society, but their benefits will only be generated if they are accompanied by inclusion, eliminating social inequalities where the student's reality should be prioritized and emphasized, thus enabling the modification of their local reality (SOFFNER, 2014; BATISTA; FREITAS, 2018).

When asked about how they felt about the age difference with most of their colleagues (question 8), the majority (80%) answered that they did not mind and 20% claimed to feel more confident when speaking.

The result obtained demonstrates that the interviewees feel safe on their return to school life, and do not declare any conflict in relation to younger colleagues, which is an exception to Paula's statement (2009), which says that intergenerational relationships EJA are often seen as problems. It also differs from the statement by Costa, Álvares and Barreto (2006), which points out that a constant characteristic of EJA students is their low self-esteem.

Regarding how they consider their learning ability (question 9), the majority (80%) declared it to be regular, followed by the minority (20%) who consider it good. EJA students have greater difficulty in relation to learning, and to overcome this problem, a teaching method must be adopted in which there is stimulation and appreciation of the knowledge already acquired. The adult student should not be treated as a teenager, but as a person who requires challenges, with the need for him to understand the practical importance of the subject to be studied, noting that this will make a difference and change his life (PERISSÉ, 2008; SANTOS; ALMEIDA, 2021).

On the question about what they expect in relation to the course in which they enrolled (question 10), the majority (60%) answered that it is to complete the course and get a good job in the area. This result collaborates with the statement by Silva, Ferreira and Ferreira (2017) in which

they indicate that the benefit of changing one's life, becoming literate, getting a better job or even the desired profession is what drives students of EJA to continue their school trajectories.

In the specific case of women, Oro, Weschenfelder and Stecanela (2010) state that their introduction into the labor market causes a change in the way in which they relate to education, because with the pressure to achieve equality related to positions and salaries, professional qualification is necessary, with at least the need to complete compulsory schooling.

When asked about expectations regarding their educational future (question 11), the majority (80%) stated that they are going to college, the same result observed in Santos and Almeida (2021). The result obtained fits the statement by Rieger and Jesus (2011), which points out that women seek more than the reproduction of ready-made content at school, wanting in addition to feel like active and participatory citizens, and in some cases, aiming to attend college.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Youth and Adult Education is an important inclusion alternative for people who did not have the chance to complete their studies at the right age. It is important to mention the issue of the massive presence of younger students in the class that was the subject of this research, confirming the trend shown in the issue of youthfulness in EJA.

Therefore, in relation to the socioeconomic aspects of the interviewed group, it is concluded that the majority is formed by women, aged between 44 and 53 years, born in the municipality of Santarém, self-declared white and brown, following the Catholic religion, married and divorced, with children, living in their own house with five rooms, sharing the space with two or three people, unemployed, and with a family income of up to one minimum wage.

As for the educational aspects, the interviewees pointed out that they had not studied for more than five years, having dropped out of school to take care of the family and failed once during the time they studied; they have family support to go back to school and look to PROEJA for an opportunity to complete their studies and get a job in the job market; they have difficulties understanding the teachers' explanations, they are not bothered by the age difference in relation to their peers and they consider their learning ability to be fair.

Regarding expectations with the Technical Course in Accommodation, the interviewees hope to complete it and get a good job in the area, and as for their educational future, they aim to go to college.

A point to be highlighted among the results was the difficulty that the students have in understanding the explanations of the teachers. In this sense, it is suggested that updates are made in the training of teachers who work with the said group, in the sense that the particularities inherent to the modality are contemplated, in addition to institutional support where there is a constant dialogue to encourage these students to face their difficulties, increasing the possibility of finishing their studies.

Based on this research, other studies can be carried out to identify which are the specific difficulties in understanding the subjects attested by the students, in addition to investigating whether there are other possible problems that hinder the permanence of this group until the completion of their studies, aiming at elaboration of institutional actions that minimize or even eliminate the possibility of evasion of this student body.

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