

A REVIEW OF THE CHALLENGES AND REALITY OF THE SUBJECTS OF EJA-EPT

Valéria Ribas Maia

PPGEPT, CTISM, Federal University of Santa Maria

ORCID ID: 0009-0001-4014-7782

Taiana Ávila Borges Figueiredo

PPGEPT, CTISM, Federal University of Santa Maria

ORCID ID: 0009-0008-7841-9115

Angela Isabel dos Santos Dullius

PPGEPT, CTISM Federal University of Santa Maria, Brazil

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6590-1112

Abstract

This research addresses Youth and Adult Education integrated with professional and Technological Education (EJA-EPT) as an educational policy aimed at the social inclusion and professional qualification of subjects historically excluded from the education system. This modality has the potential to promote transformations in the living conditions of these subjects by articulating schooling and work-related education. However, most subjects in Youth and Adult Education integrated with professional and Technological Education (EJA-EPT) are marked by profound social, economic, and educational inequalities. They often had to leave school prematurely to enter the labor market and contribute to family income, compromising their continuity and permanence in education at the expected age:

Keywords: Youth and Adult Education; Professional and Technological Education; EJA-EPT, student retention; school dropout; educational policies.

Introduction

Youth and Adult Education integrated with Vocational and Technological Education (EJA/EPT) constitutes an educational modality that articulates the expansion of the educational level of young people and adults who did not complete basic education at the regular age. It is based on the integration of work, science, technology, and culture, aiming not only at qualification for the labor market, but also at comprehensive human formation and the expansion of opportunities for the social, political, and economic inclusion of individuals. However, the vast majority of EJA/EPT students are affected by profound social, economic, and educational inequalities, in which access to and retention in education did not occur at the expected age. The main reasons for school abandonment and dropout include the need for exhausting working hours, the burden of domestic responsibilities, physical exhaustion, and school curricula disconnected from the reality of these individuals. EJA/EPT constitutes a space of dispute between different conceptions of education, in which, on the one hand, the neoliberal logic prevails, oriented toward the training of workers to meet market demands, while, on the other hand, an omnilateral education is advocated, which understands work as an educational principle and seeks to promote the autonomy, citizenship, and emancipation of individuals.

In this context, despite representing an important advance in the integration of Youth and Adult Education with Vocational and Technological Education, PROEJA faced several challenges, such as institutional resistance, insufficient teacher training, curricular fragmentation, and high school dropout rates. Furthermore, according to Andrighetto, Maraschin, and (Ferreira, 2021), Vocational and Technological Education (EPT) became oriented toward technical training aimed at meeting market demands. In this context, the creation of PRONATEC in 2011 expanded access to technical education through short-term courses, but also contributed to the weakening of EJA and of the proposal for comprehensive worker education. The present research is justified insofar as it is essential to analyze EJA/EPT in Brazil in order to understand not only its advances in terms of inclusion and student dropout, but also the limitations and challenges imposed by structural contradictions in the world of work. It is understood that an increase in the number of individuals enrolling in EJA/EPT may contribute to ensuring access to basic education integrated with vocational training, thereby expanding opportunities for social inclusion, human development, and critical participation in the world of work, while

encouraging the adoption of inclusive methodologies that are responsive to diversity. In this context, the central research problem guiding this study is how to prevent the disengagement of EJA/EPT students from educational institutions.

The implementation of educational policies that articulate work and education demonstrates efforts to promote educational opportunities for young people and adults. In subsequent years, other pieces of legislation began to influence the configuration of EJA integrated with Vocational Education. Among these, Brazilian Law No. 13,005/2014, which established the National Education Plan (PNE 2014–2024), stands out. In Goal 10, the PNE established that at least 25% of enrollments in EJA at the elementary and secondary education levels should be offered in an integrated manner with Vocational Education. However, these policies face longstanding challenges, including insufficient funding, school dropout, and other difficulties, and have failed to achieve the established target and intended objective, demonstrating the fragility of policies aimed at expanding this educational modality.

Literature

Brazil is known as a country of diversity due to the richness of its cultural, ethnic, social, regional, and environmental differences. The historical formation of Brazil resulted from the contributions of Indigenous, African, European, and Asian peoples, who influenced customs, religions, cuisine, music, language, and ways of life. Thus, what is understood as diversity is extended to all differences, including those related to gender, ethnicity, and social class, which constitute fundamental references. We consider it essential to understand all the historical and social content that emerges from these relationships, particularly because “no one can construct their own identity independently of the identifications that others make of them” (Habermas, 1983, p. 22). In the educational field, recognizing diversity means valuing the different trajectories, cultures, and identities of individuals, especially in Youth and Adult Education (EJA), which serves students whose life histories are marked by inequalities, early entry into the labor market, and school exclusion.

In addition to regional inequalities, the data show that educational difficulties mainly affect (IBGE 2022) older people, Black and Brown populations, workers experiencing social vulnerability, and residents of rural and peripheral areas. Some measures are decisive for the principles of equity and social justice, as advocated by (Saviani & Duarte, 2013), within the

historical-critical pedagogy, and reinforce the need to ensure objective conditions for learning. According to (Floss, M. et al.), the arrival of students referred by the Agronomic and Itacorubi Health Centers contributed to the pedagogical team's perception of the value attributed by these students to returning to their studies as a means of taking care of their health. (Floss & et al 2023; 139-145, p).

Within this context, people often experience happiness when returning to and resuming their studies, interacting with other realities and with other people, while, at the same time, the act of taking care of their health projects them toward the future through their return to classes, with perspectives of better living and working conditions, (Floss, et al.2023).

In their narratives, the students stated that they had returned to their studies because "I urgently need to stop drinking", "I am in a lot of pain", "I suffer a lot from anxiety". Gradually, other narratives emerged: "I feel so well that I even put on makeup to come to class today"; "I do not even remember my pain", "EJA was my salvation" (Floss et al 2023, 139-145 p). Thus, there are many barriers to be overcome by EJA-EPT students in order to enter the classroom and continue their studies and vocational training, many of which are related to personal and family factors. Pedagogical practices and management, as well as public policies for access and incentives, remain incipient, in addition to the curriculum, which can be adapted to specificities according to the reality of each individual, (Ricardo Antunes, 2009, p. 165) states that work "[...] constitutes the original, primary source of the realization of the social being, the protoform of human activity, the basic ontological foundation of human omnilaterality. In this context, discussing the challenges of the permanence of working students in EJA/EPT means reflecting on the very social role of education. More than training labor for the market, EJA/EPT should contribute to the comprehensive human formation of the individual.

Method

A bibliographic literature review was conducted. The SciELO, CAPES Journal Portal, and Google Scholar databases were consulted, as well as searches conducted through IBGE and INEP. The searches considered publications from 2019 to 2025. The following descriptors were used in combination: "Youth and Adult Education", "Vocational and Technological Education", "EJA-EPT", "student retention", "school dropout", and "educational policies".

Finding

The present review evidenced that individuals from diverse backgrounds enrolled in Youth and Adult Education integrated with Vocational and Technological Education (EJA-EPT) carry trajectories marked by school exclusion, social inequalities, economic difficulties, and multiple forms of vulnerability. Despite advances in public policies aimed at expanding access to education, challenges related to student retention, academic success, and the effective integration of basic and vocational education still persist. In this regard, it is essential to develop strategies that strengthen student retention and success, such as expanding student assistance policies, providing transportation and meals, promoting curricular flexibility, offering continuing teacher education, employing inclusive methodologies, and valuing the life experiences of individuals. Combating school dropout requires actions aimed at welcoming, inclusion, curricular flexibility, and social and pedagogical support for students. Ensuring access, retention, and completion of studies means promoting opportunities for human and vocational development, strengthening citizenship, and expanding prospects for social transformation and improvements in the quality of life of these individuals. Table 1 presents a synthesis of the main impact areas and possible actions to be undertaken, with the aim of ensuring accessibility and retention within the school environment.

Table 1 -Synthesis of the main impact areas and possible actions.

Impact Areas	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Conditions for Retention	. Student assistance, transportation, food, childcare, and flexible schedules
Pedagogical Dimension	. Integrated curriculum, individualized monitoring, and contextualized methodologies
Welcoming and Inclusion	. Valuing trajectories, combating prejudice, and strengthening a sense of belonging.
Institutional Articulation	. Active outreach, teacher training (to work with diverse trajectories, ages, and experiences, and integration with public policies) Combating prejudice and discrimination

Prepared by the authors

Results

When relating this issue to school abandonment and dropout, it became evident that student retention depends not only on ensuring access to school, but also on the existence of social, economic, family, and pedagogical conditions that ensure the continuity of their educational trajectory. In this regard, it is essential to develop actions that contribute to overcoming the difficulties faced by students and foster their retention and completion of their studies. The retention of young people in EJA/EPT does not depend exclusively on the individual effort of students, but rather on institutional, pedagogical, social, and economic conditions that promote access, participation, and the continuity of their educational trajectory.

Discussion

1. Illiteracy in Brazil

It is not possible to analyze the Brazilian educational reality without considering the concerning situation of people who remain illiterate in the country. According to IBGE (2022), there are 203,080,756 people in Brazil. According to the results of the 2022 Demographic Census, of the 163 million people aged 15 years or older, 151.5 million were able to read and write a simple note, while 11.4 million were not. These data demonstrate that, despite advances in Brazilian education, illiteracy remains a major social challenge, particularly among the most vulnerable population and those with less access to schooling. In this regard, the Northeast region presents the highest illiteracy rates in the country, at 11.1%, being the only region with a rate above 10%. The lowest rates were recorded in the South (2.7%) and Southeast (2.8%) regions. The North presented a rate of 6%, while the Central-West recorded 3.3%. EJA has become consolidated as a public policy for inclusion and democratization of education, reaffirmed by the 1988 Federal Constitution and the 1996 LDB. It is understood that, historically, EJA in Brazil has been associated with compensatory and emergency policies, focused more on reducing illiteracy rates than on ensuring comprehensive and emancipatory education. According to Diret/Inep (2013-2024), a decrease in EJA enrollment rates can be observed; however, with regard to EJA-EPT, there was a significant increase during this period. The reduction in demand for EJA generated a cascading effect, due to the need for individuals to prioritize work, as well as perform household tasks or care for children, older adults, or people with disabilities. In this context, millions of Brazilians leave school, and with fewer students, many classes are closed, making access even more difficult for those who wish to return to their studies.

Within this context, EJA cannot be considered in isolation, as if simply restoring an individual's access to school were sufficient. It is necessary to consider the purpose of this schooling, its connections, its relationship with school life and the world of work, and the construction of the transformation of the human being as a whole. (Freire, 1996) Those who teach learn by teaching, and those who learn teach by learning. It is within this context that the integration between EJA and Vocational and Technological Education (EPT) acquires importance, giving rise to the National Program for the Integration of Vocational Education with Basic Education in the Youth and Adult Education modality (PROEJA). The program represents a concrete

attempt to articulate general education and vocational training, overcoming the historical duality that separated academic knowledge from technical knowledge.

2. National Education Plan (PNE) – GOAL 10 (2014–2024)

The PNE determined that at least 25% of EJA enrollments at the elementary and secondary education levels should be offered in an integrated format with Vocational Education. In 2024, INEP (2024) indicated the percentage of enrollments in Youth and Adult Education (EJA) offered in an integrated format with Vocational and Technological Education (EPT); however, it was not possible to achieve the target of offering at least 25% (twenty-five percent) of educational enrollments in this format. In this regard, it is understood that the lower the number of enrollments, the more evident the inequalities in the country become.

3. New National Education Plan (PNE) – GOAL 12 (2026–2036)

With the approval of the new PNE, through Brazilian Law No. 15,388, of April 14, 2026, which establishes the guidelines, objectives, goals, and strategies for the 2026–2036 decade (with a ten-year validity period beginning on the date of its publication), the educational goals were reorganized. The former Goal 10 of the 2014–2024 PNE was incorporated into the new plan within the goals addressing Youth and Adult Education (EJA) and Vocational and Technological Education. Accordingly, the new PNE maintains the commitment that 25% of EJA enrollments at the elementary and secondary education levels be offered in an integrated form with vocational education, through Goal 12.c. This provision reaffirms the importance of integrating basic education and vocational training in order to expand educational opportunities for young people, adults, and workers and to contribute to comprehensive human development by articulating scientific, technological, cultural, and vocational knowledge.

4. Differences Between School Abandonment and Dropout

According to (Evaristo,2017), a young person who is disconnected from the education system represents a problem that extends far beyond the physical boundaries of the school and becomes a social issue. To better understand this problem and seek the most appropriate solution, it is first necessary to distinguish between the concepts of school abandonment and school dropout. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, they refer to different situations in which students leave school. Failing to attend classes during the academic year characterizes school abandonment. In contrast, when a student,

whether they have passed or failed, does not enroll to continue their studies in the following year, this situation is understood as school dropout.

(Fernandes, 2010) points out that “dropout is not a sudden act, but rather the result of a slow process of student disengagement from school.” As previously discussed, young people who drop out of school, in most cases due to economic or family-related reasons, are influenced by external factors that require an active and direct approach from school administrators to prevent both school abandonment and dropout. Negative interactions with teachers, learning difficulties, grade repetition, prejudice, and emotional issues experienced during adolescence may also contribute to school dropout.

In this regard, making school a more engaging and attractive environment for students is a fundamental step toward ensuring their continued participation in the educational setting. Findings from the literature demonstrate that the limited integration between Youth and Adult Education (EJA) and Vocational and Technological Education (EPT) remains a challenge for guaranteeing the right to education and reducing inequalities. Therefore, EJA-EPT must ensure access, retention, and completion through public policies and actions that provide social, economic, and pedagogical conditions appropriate to students’ needs.

References

Andriguetto, M. J.; Maraschim, M. S.; Ferreira, L. S. EJA-EPT policies in Brazil: rise, stagnation, and silencing. *Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação*, Araraquara, v. 16, n. 3, p. 2179-2198, July/Sept. 2021. e-ISSN: 1982-5587. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21723/riaee.v16i3.13544>

BRASIL. Ministry of Education. Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion. *Diversity in education: reflections and experiences*. Brasília: MEC/SECADI, 2013.

BRASIL. National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Inep). *School performance rates 2023: statistical notes*. Brasília, DF: Inep, 2024. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/acesso-a-informacao/dados-abertos/indicadores-educacionais/taxas-de-rendimento-escolar>. <Accessed: 10 May 2026>.

BRASIL. Law No. 15,388, of April 14, 2026. Approves the National Education Plan (PNE) for the 2026–2036 decade. *Official Gazette of the Federal Government*, Brasília, DF, April 15, 2026. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2026/lei/115388.htm. <Accessed: 26 Sept. 2026>.

BRASIL. (2011) Law No. 12,513, of October 26, 2011. National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment – PRONATEC, amending Laws No. 7,998, of January 11, 1990, No. 8,121, of July 24, 1991, and No. 10,260, of July 12, 2001. <Accessed on 22 May 2026>.

BRASIL. Law No. 13,005, of June 25, 2014. Approves the National Education Plan – PNE and provides for other measures. *Official Gazette of the Federal Government*: Section 1, Brasília, DF, June 26, 2014.

BRASIL. Law No. 9,394/1996. *Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education*. 1996.

Floss, M. et al. Is returning to school a matter of health? Networking between Primary Health Care and Youth and Adult Education in Florianópolis-SC. Vol. 5, n. 3, p. 139-145 | September/December/2023.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of autonomy: necessary knowledge for educational practice*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1996.

Harbemas, Jorgen. *For the reconstruction of historical materialism*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983.

Evaristo, Macaé. *Parliamentary profile*. Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais. Available at: ALMG – Macaé Evaristo. https://www.almg.gov.br/deputados/macaeevaristo/28873?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed on: May 24, 2026.

Fernandes, Reynaldo. *Secondary education: how to increase attractiveness and prevent dropout?* São Paulo: Instituto Unibanco, 2010.

IBGE. *Continuous National Household Sample Survey*. 2022.

Manfredi, S. M. *Vocational Education in Brazil*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2002.

Saviani, D.; Duarte, N. *Historical-critical pedagogy and class struggle in school education*. Campinas: Autores Associados, 2013.