

# IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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## Abstract

This essay summarizes the results of a literature review from 2020 to 2023 on the impacts of Covid-19 on the education of young people and adults in Brazil, with special attention to obstacles to the enjoyment of this human right and the responses generated by educational policies. The analysis suggests that the potential of youth and adult education (EJA) was not mobilized by public policies to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The health crisis has intensified the ongoing movement to dismantle and make invisible EJA policies and the disarticulation of the three spheres of government. Despite the efforts and creativity of educators, the adoption of emergency remote teaching without the required support has deepened preexisting socio-educational inequalities.

YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION • PANDEMIC • SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES • PUBLIC POLICIES

## IMPACTOS DA COVID-19 NA EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS: UMA REVISÃO DE LITERATURA

### Resumo

O ensaio sintetiza resultados de uma revisão de literatura do período 2020-2023 sobre os impactos da covid-19 na educação de pessoas jovens e adultas no Brasil, com atenção especial aos obstáculos à fruição desse direito humano e às respostas geradas pelas políticas educacionais. A análise sugere que o potencial da educação de jovens e adultos (EJA) não foi mobilizado pelas políticas públicas na mitigação dos efeitos da pandemia da covid-19. A crise sanitária acirrou o movimento em curso de desmonte e invisibilização das políticas da EJA, bem como a desarticulação das três esferas de governo. Apesar dos esforços e da criatividade dos educadores, a adoção do ensino remoto emergencial sem os suportes requeridos aprofundou as desigualdades socioeducacionais preexistentes.

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## IMPACTOS DEL COVID-19 EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE JÓVENES Y ADULTOS: UNA REVISIÓN DE LA LITERATURA

### Resumen

El ensayo sintetiza los resultados de una revisión de la literatura del período 2020-2023 sobre los impactos de la Covid-19 en la educación de jóvenes y adultos en Brasil, con especial atención a los obstáculos para la disposición de este derecho humano y a las respuestas generadas por las políticas educativas. El análisis sugiere que el potencial de la educación de jóvenes y adultos (EJA) no fue movilizado por las políticas públicas para mitigar los efectos de la pandemia de covid-19. La crisis sanitaria intensificó el movimiento en curso para dismantelar e invisibilizar las políticas de la EJA, así como la desarticulación de las tres esferas del gobierno. A pesar de los esfuerzos y la creatividad de los educadores, la adopción de la enseñanza remota de emergencia sin el apoyo necesario profundizó las desigualdades socioeducativas preexistentes.

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POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

## IMPACTS DU COVID-19 SUR L'ÉDUCATION DES JEUNES ET DES ADULTES: UNE REVUE DE LA LITTÉRATURE

### Résumé

Cet étude synthétise les résultats d'une analyse documentaire réalisée entre 2020 et 2023 sur les impacts du Covid-19 sur l'éducation des jeunes et des adultes au Brésil, elle accorde une attention particulière aux obstacles ayant entravé la jouissance de ce droit humain et les réponses apportées par les politiques éducatives. L'analyse suggère que le potentiel de l'éducation des jeunes et des adultes (EJA) n'a pas été suffisamment exploité par les politiques publiques pour atténuer les effets de la pandémie de Covid-19. La crise sanitaire a exacerbé le démantèlement et l'invisibilisation des politiques relatives à l'EJA, ainsi que la désarticulation des trois sphères de gouvernement. Malgré les efforts et la créativité des éducateurs, l'adoption d'une «éducation à distance d'urgence» sans le soutien nécessaire a aggravé les inégalités socio-éducatives préexistantes.

ÉDUCATION DES JEUNES ET DES ADULTES • PANDÉMIE • INÉGALITÉS SOCIO-ÉDUCATIVES •  
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**T**HE BEGINNING OF THE 2020S WAS MARKED BY THE UNPRECEDENTED INTERNATIONAL impact of the Sars-Cov-2 coronavirus pandemic, which led the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a public health emergency of international concern between the end of January 2020 and May 2023. Until vaccines against the virus, which causes the disease known as Covid-19, were developed and distributed, control of the pandemic depended on non-pharmacological measures, especially social distancing. This impacted all socioeconomic activities and led to the temporary closure of educational institutions.

The repercussions of the pandemic in Brazil were particularly dramatic, with more than 38,000,000 cases and almost 710,000 deaths confirmed by health authorities by the end of 2023. The health crisis management was marked by federal inaction and a lack of intergovernmental coordination (Abrucio et al., 2020). The country also had one of the most prolonged periods of suspension of in-person classes in the world,<sup>1</sup> provisionally replaced by emergency remote teaching,<sup>2</sup> with detrimental effects on access, retention and learning in different stages and modalities of education.

This essay summarizes part of the results of a systematic literature review (Vosgerau & Romanowski, 2014) from the period 2020-2023 on the impacts of Covid-19 on the basic education of young people and adults in Brazil,<sup>3</sup> with special attention to obstacles to the enjoyment of the human right to educação de jovens e adultos [youth and adult education] (EJA) and the responses generated by educational policies to the modality. Conducted between the second half of 2022 and October 2023, the survey is part of international research that aims to develop recommendations for the field of educational policies, considering the possibility of new pandemics in the context of accelerating climate change, as warned by the WHO.

The literature review was the preliminary stage of the study, which subsequently included documentary analysis and interviews in municipal schools and social organizations in São Paulo that promote EJA. Time and staff constraints conditioned the methodological choices of the literature survey, which were added to the limitations imposed on the investigations carried out by researchers in the context of the pandemic. Considering this framework, although it does not allow for conclusive generalizations, the literature review presented in this article offers a comprehensive overview of the issues that marked the national context of the modality during the period.

Initially, the bibliographic survey favored journal articles indexed in the Brazilian database Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)<sup>4</sup>. It was expanded by searching the Portal de Periódicos

1 In 2021, the press covered the report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), according to which Brazil was one of the countries where schools remained closed for the longest time, with an average of 40 weeks, when the global average was 22 weeks. Source: <https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2021/01/24/relatorio-da-unesco-que-mostra-que-estudantes-perderam-em-media-23-do-ano-letivo-por-cao-da-pandemia.ghtml>

2 The term emergency remote teaching was adopted in essential education networks and higher education institutions to designate pedagogical practices (mediated by communication and information technologies and/or printed materials) temporarily adopted due to the imposition of social distancing rules during the pandemic, distinguishing them from those that characterize distance education, a teaching modality regulated by Brazilian regulations, which has its own foundations and methods.

3 As specialized literature points out (Canário, 2008; Di Pierro, 2010; Rivero, 2014; among others), adult education comprises a broad and diverse set of formal and non-formal education practices that develop in school and non-school spaces. In this article, we refer specifically to a subset relating to school practices of education of young people, adults and elderly people established in the history of Brazilian education and in legislation as a modality of basic education, as registered in articles 37 and 38 of Lei n. 9.394 (1996) – Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional [National Education Guidelines and Bases Law] – in force.

4 The SciELO database was selected because it facilitates consultation and electronic access to collections of scientific journals that regularly publish original articles resulting from research, peer-reviewed and positioned in the upper strata of Qualis Periódicos – a scientific publication classification system adopted by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior [Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel] (Capes).

da Capes [Capes Periodicals Portal]. Theses and dissertations defended in postgraduate programs, registered in the Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações [Brazilian Digital Library of Dissertations and Theses] of Instituto Brasileiro de Informação em Ciência e Tecnologia (Ibict), were also considered. The descriptors “covid” or “pandemic” were used as search keys, together with “adult education” or “youth and adult education”, selecting texts that dealt with the Brazilian context. The abstracts were read, and when considered relevant, the publications’ conclusions or full text and their contents were reviewed for later analysis. Based on the readings, categories were established that allowed the grouping of the texts by type of approach.

Documents were identified that can be categorized into three large groups according to the predominant approach: the first problematizes the restriction on the enjoyment of educational rights and the widening of educational inequalities during the pandemic due to the marginal position that the education of young people and adults occupies in the basic education policy agenda, the socioeconomic vulnerability of the individuals who participate in it, as well as their limited access to information and communication technologies (ICT); the second and most numerous set of documents addresses the strategies mobilized by educators to adapt curricula, teaching materials and methodologies given the emerging need to interrupt face-to-face teaching and adopt remote teaching, with the use of ICT; and the third set, with a small number of texts, reflects the responses of public policies for EJA implemented in the context of the pandemic.

Due to space limitations and because of the main objective of the study, which is to support public educational policies, in this article, we will highlight some findings from the first and third groups of texts identified in the bibliographic survey.

The initial corpus of analysis that met the proposed descriptors and the selection made based on the reading of the abstracts and conclusions consisted of two scientific articles identified in the SciELO database (Andrade et al., 2023; Silva & Di Pierro, 2022), seven articles selected from the Portal de Periódicos da Capes (Almeida & Guaraciaba, 2021; Barbosa, 2022; Costa et al., 2022; Kluthcovsky & Jouscoski, 2021; Pires et al., 2021; Silva & Barbosa, 2022; Souza et al., 2022) and three master’s theses found in the Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações of Ibict (Luz, 2021; Pires, 2021; Winter, 2021).<sup>5</sup>

Most of this production comprises case studies in school units or municipalities with a low level of generalization. This meant that, later, in a more exploratory search, articles, research reports and communications at events found in Google Scholar or mentioned in the bibliographies of the texts initially selected were also considered, as were documents produced by the EJA Forums<sup>6</sup> and civil society organizations in the pandemic context.<sup>7</sup>

The discussion also benefited from a more general bibliography on the pandemic’s impacts on education, including texts that do not specifically address EJA. From the international literature, some reference documents published by Unesco and by Latin American civil society networks related to adult education and learning were consulted, mentioned throughout the article and referred to in the bibliography.

5 Of the 11 doctoral dissertations defended from 2021 to 2023, only one addresses the field of EJA policies, but it refers to data collected before the Covid-19 pandemic (Quintão, 2023). Therefore, the text was discarded. Concerning master’s degrees, 52 theses were defended in these two years, and only three addressed this theme.

6 The EJA Forums are social and collective movement networking that aggregate institutions and individuals dedicated to right to education for young people, adults and the elderly. More information can be found at: <http://forumaja.org.br/>

7 This subset of just over two dozen titles, which would be too extensive to list here, is duly mentioned in the bibliographical references.

## Youth and adult education in a world impacted by Covid-19

In the first half of 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, editorialists from a specialized North American journal (Boeren et al., 2020) accurately mapped the likely impacts of Covid-19 on adult education and learning: previous research showed that adults and elderly people with lower levels of education, non-whites and immigrants, dependent on precarious jobs and who earn lower incomes would face more significant difficulties in taking advantage of training opportunities, indicating that such processes of selection and exclusion would be accentuated with the closure of schools during the pandemic, especially in densely populated communities poorly served by health services.

According to the authors, the economic stagnation resulting from the pandemic and the unequal capacity to respond to the crisis would produce unemployment, poverty, violence and hunger, and even essential workers on the “front line” (health, cleaning, care, transportation and retail), exposed to illness and to financial and health consequences, would not receive adequate guidance and training during the pandemic.

Boeren et al. (2020) highlighted that the digital divide that separates our society would mean that, even with the proliferation of distance learning opportunities, many people would not be able to benefit, because they do not have an internet connection or only have access via cell phone with limited data plans, or because they do not have the skills to engage in self-directed learning in a virtual environment. The authors hoped that adult education would help connect people forced to maintain physical distancing, allowing the much-needed support and solidarity networks to mitigate the multiple harmful effects of the pandemic (Boeren et al., 2020).

In a thematic note issued that same year, Unesco (2020) also stated that the pandemic represented an opportunity to exercise solidarity and active citizenship and reiterated the relevance of adult education in the context of the pandemic, in which people’s ability to use ICT had become strategic, both to access health information and to detect distorted or erroneous information (so-called fake news). Recognizing that most of the world’s population did not even have access to the internet, the organization considered it a priority to democratize such access and promote online learning. However, the United Nations has not launched an international program in this regard.

Held two years later in Morocco, still under the pandemic, in a hybrid format, the VII International Conference on Adult Education (Confinitea) approved a document that recognized the long-term structural impact of Covid-19 (among which the deepening of social and educational inequalities), highlighting the relevance of adult education in tackling the climate crisis and in training workers in the face of transformations in the world of work, demographics and technology (in which digital skills are essential), as well as the challenges of informed participation in contemporary civic life.

At a time when societies are threatened by rising fanaticism and violent extremism, growing distrust in science and rising inequalities within and between countries, we reaffirm that ALE can constitute a powerful policy response to consolidate social cohesion, enhance socio-emotional skill development, secure peace, strengthen democracy, improve cultural understanding, eliminate all types of discrimination, and promote peaceful living together and active and global citizenship. (Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, a Ciência e a Cultura [Unesco], 2022, p. 4, own translation).

In the previous year, in preparation for the VII Confintea, regional civil society networks outlined an overview of educação de pessoas jovens e adultas [youth and adult education] (EPJA) in Latin America (Hernández Flores et al., 2021) in which they highlighted that the commitments arising from the Confinteas have been insufficiently monitored and repeatedly breached by the countries of the region (Cabrera, 2022) and the health crisis has deepened a scenario of poverty and socioeconomic, territorial, racial, gender (Aragão et al., 2022) and educational inequalities, in a context of economic stagnation and an employment crisis. When reviewing documents on the impacts of the pandemic on the region's education systems, Hernández Flores et al. (2021) came across the digital divide, the invisibility of EJA and its individuals as holders of educational rights, as well as institutional fragility, lack of funding and the marginality of EJA in the education policy agenda:

Se documenta una diversidad de estrategias de respuesta en la pandemia, pero se coincide en la falta de apoyos oportunos e igualitarios para la EPJA en el marco del conjunto de los sistemas educativos nacionales. En este contexto, la innovación, creatividad y compromiso, singularmente de educadoras y educadores, fue central para la continuidad educativa. Su sentido incluyó más que los contenidos curriculares, la interacción personal, la afectividad, lo socioemocional ante pérdidas humanas y precarización del trabajo y la vida en confinamiento. (Hernández Flores et al., 2021, p. 85).

Several of these questions reappear in national literature, as seen below.

### **Education during the pandemic and the challenges of out-of-school youth in Brazil**

To understand EJA's specificities in the pandemic context and what it shared with other levels and modalities of education and with most of its students, we included in the bibliographic review some studies that address the pandemic's impact on school education as a whole and on Brazilian youth.

The suspension of in-person classes for an extended period was the widespread response of Brazilian education networks to the health emergency resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. The other reactions differed, with the transition to emergency remote teaching prevailing, with printed teaching materials, video classes (synchronous or asynchronous), online platforms and other computational resources in a country characterized by a digital divide.

The pandemic highlighted the precariousness of public policies regarding digital technologies in education. Emergency remote teaching requires intense use of a quality internet connection, which is inaccessible to the vast majority of the population and even to a significant portion of schools.<sup>8</sup> During the pandemic, public schools and other educational institutions were also seen using private technology platforms that encouraged loyalty and threatened the privacy of students and teachers, restricting the didactic-pedagogical autonomy of schools and teachers (Pretto & Bonilla, 2022).

The most comprehensive studies intending to map educational networks' responses to the health emergency and assess their results do not specify the contexts of EJA. Still, they are

<sup>8</sup> According to the School Census of 2023, the proportion of public schools with internet connection for pedagogical activities is 60.6% in elementary school and 79.8% in secondary school. Source: <https://www.telesintese.com.br/censo-escolar-2023-mostraabismo-entre-norte-e-restante-do-pais>



unanimous in finding that there have been significant losses in student participation and learning and the deepening of preexisting educational inequalities (Senkevics & Bof, 2022).

The inadequacy of educational policy management responses to the pandemic was highlighted by a survey conducted by Fundação Carlos Chagas (Villas Bôas & Unbehaum, 2020) on basic education during social isolation, based on forms filled out by teachers. Without explicitly addressing EJA, the investigation identified that, despite the interviewees' perception that the pandemic promoted greater recognition among families about the importance of teaching work, on the other hand, there is a negative assessment regarding the performance of educational management, considered as something that further aggravated the precariousness of the profession and neglected active listening and participation of education professionals.

Addressing the impact of the pandemic among young Brazilians, the survey *Juventudes e a pandemia: E agora?* – 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Atlas das Juventudes, 2022), promoted by the Conselho Nacional da Juventude [National Youth Council] and partners, with young people aged 15 to 29, identified that 11% were thinking about stopping their studies and 34% reported that they had already thought about this possibility, but said they no longer wanted to leave their studies. Despite considering stopping, continuing their studies was part of the vision of the future for the majority: 82% of students and 74% of those who were not studying in 2022.

Investigating the universe of teenagers who neither work nor study – known as NEET<sup>9</sup> – in the context of the pandemic, researchers from the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (Ipea), Enid Rocha Andrade da Silva and Fábio Monteiro Vaz, in an article published in 2020, highlighted a specificity of the crisis intensified by the pandemic: it not only impacted the job market but also interrupted the process of building skills, such as the continuity of education and professional training, which are fundamental to increasing the chances of young people finding decent jobs in the recovery phase.

Among the 56.7% who were still studying, 31% continued to carry out study activities remotely, compared to 30% who were unable to do so, either due to lack of supply, because they had to intensify work activities, or because they failed to combine the numerous activities during the period. Despite this, 52% intended to continue their studies, compared to 12% who did not plan to return to studies and 32% who were unsure about continuing. (Silva & Vaz, 2020, p. 1, own translation).

The authors emphasize the importance of educational policies actively seeking out and expanding schooling possibilities, recognizing the specificities and heterogeneities of NEET young people, so that this group can resume its educational trajectory.

Other studies point out that the EJA modality is one way for many young people who dropped out of school during the pandemic (or before it), as well as adults and the elderly people, to return to their studies, provided appropriate policies and strategies are adopted.

Appropriate strategies must be implemented to bring this population back to the classroom or provide a first opportunity for schooling in an environment that motivates them to continue their studies. They must also distance themselves from the difficulties imposed by work, mobility in large cities and the precariousness of providing EJA in small municipalities. (Sampaio & Hizim, 2022, p. 292, own translation).

9 Acronym for young people who are “not in education, employment, or training”.

## Impacts of the pandemic on EJA individuals and educational policies responses to the challenges of the modality

Among the few responses to the educational challenges caused by the pandemic, in March 2020, the federal government issued Portaria [Ordinance] n. 343 (2020), which authorized the replacement of in-person classes with those taught digitally, and in April 2020, Medida Provisória [Provisional Measure] n. 934 (converted into Lei [Law] n. 14.040, 2020), by which basic and higher education institutions were exempted, on an exceptional basis, from complying with the minimum number of school days provided for in the legislation, delegating to the education systems the task of formulating alternatives for complying with the curricula and other obligations. Also in April, the Conselho Nacional de Educação [National Education Council] authorized, in Parecer [Opinion] n. 5 (2020), the reorganization of the school calendar, allowing remote activities to replace in-person teaching. Concerning EJA, the opinion reaffirms previous guidelines that highlight the specificities of the modality:

While the health emergency that prevents in-person school activities continues, the measures recommended for elementary and high school education in the EJA modality must consider their singularities in the elaboration of methodologies and pedagogical practices, following Parecer CNE/CEB n. 11, of May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2000, and Resolução CNE/CEB n. 1, of July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000, which established the DCN's for youth and adult education (EJA), and Resolução CNE/CEB n. 3, of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010, which instituted Operational Guidelines for EJA. (Parecer CNE/CP n. 5, 2020, p. 14, own translation).

The literature consulted suggests that, in several contexts, municipal and state education administrations began to redefine educational services in an improvised and disjointed manner. The guidelines of the Conselho Nacional de Educação fell on municipal and state EJA services that were already negatively impacted by setbacks in public policies for the modality, as pointed out by Musial and Araújo (2022, pp. 2-3, own translation) in a bibliographic review related to the period preceding the pandemic:

. . . it is worth noting that, in recent years, there have been ruptures in the advances in public policies aimed at EJA. A first rupture can be pointed out with the approval of Emenda Constitucional n. 95/2016, which establishes a ceiling on public spending for 20 years (BRASIL, 2016) and has strongly impacted the financing of Education. More recently, the implementation of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC), which guides the development of the curriculum of Basic Education school units, can be considered another rupture, as it did not present guidelines for the education of young people and adults (BRASIL, 2017). With the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who assumed the presidency of the Republic in 2019, there was no proposal for this type of education; on the contrary, in his first month in government, the Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização, Diversidade e Inclusão (SECADI) was extinguished. Among other modalities, it was responsible for EJA. However, after more than half of his term in office and the replacement of three ministers of education, there is no consistent proposal for strengthening youth and adult education from an emancipatory, democratic perspective and as a right. Instead, Resolução n. 1 of May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, was approved, which establishes Diretrizes Operacionais para a Educação de Jovens e Adultos in aspects related to its alignment with the Política



Nacional de Alfabetização (PNA) and the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC), and Educação de Jovens e Adultos a Distância (BRASIL, 2021). The construction of the document above received strong criticism from the academic community, represented by GT18 – Educação de Pessoas Jovens e Adultas of the Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação (ANPEd).

Andrade (2021) shares this critical perspective on recent federal policies for EJA – especially the subordinate insertion of the modality in the BNCC and the reform of secondary education – who interprets such measures as elements of a project to adapt workers to the demands of the labor market, objectifying subjects under the discourse of employability.

Nicodemos and Serra (2020) qualify the BNCC and the new secondary education as counter-reforms, highlight the invisibility of EJA in the responses of public authorities to the pandemic and its inadequacy to the characteristics of the subjects (students and educators) and identify recent policies for the modality, a tendency towards deschooling, to the extent that regulations and government action give priority to distance mediation and certification by the Exame Nacional de Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos [National Exam for Certification of Competencies for Young People and Adults] (Encceja).

Other recent diagnoses (Mansutti et al., 2022) confirm the reduction in the number of schools offering EJA, the continuous closure of classes, the sharp drop in enrollments and the drastic reduction in federal public spending on the modality. This puts into perspective the non-compliance with the respective goals of the Plano Nacional de Educação [National Education Plan] 2014-2024, a context aggravated by the pandemic.

The school education of young people and adults was severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, with negative impacts on participation levels (lower enrollment and higher dropout rates) and learning. On the one hand, the social groups that make up the target audience of EJA in schools were severely affected not only by the health emergency but also by the employment and income crisis, putting their food security and basic living conditions at risk. With the drop in family income due to the contraction of the labor market, many young people, adults and elderly people with low levels of education had to seek means of survival in the informal economy, working long hours or looking for work and social assistance, activities that were difficult to reconcile with school routines, also affected by the confinement of families in reduced domestic environments. School dropout rates increased, and attendance at educational activities declined substantially. The participation of young people and adults in this modality was also influenced by the migration to emergency remote teaching that public education networks had to carry out in 2020 and 2021. Few education networks developed alternative strategies or produced teaching materials (printed, broadcast on radio, television or computers interconnected in networks) specific to EJA, and even in these cases, students had difficulty accessing them, mainly due to the limited connection to technological devices and data packages, shared by several family members. (Mansutti et al., 2022, p. 33, own translation).

As part of the movement to defund the modality, which gained intensity after the institutional coup of 2016 and acquired dramatic dimensions under the Bolsonaro government, the authors also indicate that the investment in the expansion of Encceja was made with the perspective of streamlining and making EJA precarious (Mansutti et al., 2022). They reveal that

the number of people registered for the test, which had increased from 366,000 in 2012 to 2,900,000 in 2019, corresponded to 1,600,000 in 2021 during the pandemic. In 2022, this national exam began to be widely publicized through an advertising campaign on radio and television.

In an article on the impact of the pandemic on the migrant and refugee population, Rita de Cássia da Cruz Silva and Maria Clara Di Pierro (2022) highlight three essential factors that were disregarded by the management of EJA policies when transferring all school activities to online platforms: 1) most EJA students are people who have been away from school for a long time and may not have enough autonomy to carry out remote activities; 2) this group is made up mainly of workers, many of whom are in the informal sector, without social rights, and whose economic reality does not allow access to equipment and quality internet to carry out activities; and 3) as this group is trying to survive in a challenging context, these people may not have the time or willingness to learn remotely. Furthermore, the authors note that, with overcrowded housing, many had to share equipment, devices, and internet signals, which – in many cases – made it impossible to continue their studies.

These obstacles to learning during the remote teaching period – lack of preparation of teachers, limitations of devices, connectivity and digital literacy of students,<sup>10</sup> the inadequacy of domestic environments and difficulties in reconciling family, professional and study routines – was also found in research with EJA students and educators carried out by Lopes and Vieira (2022), in Ceilândia (DF); Costa et al. (2022), in Baturité (CE); Kluthcovsky and Joucoski (2021), in Curitiba (PR); Pires et al. (2021), in Aragarças and Rio Verde (GO); Silva and Barbosa (2022), in the state network of Rio de Janeiro; among others.

### **Socialization, impacts of social isolation and the role of ICT**

Studies on EJA have long highlighted schools' important socialization function for low-income and low-education young people, adults, and elderly people, configuring a space where individuals can be recognized and interact with relative freedom outside the hierarchical patterns of the patriarchal family and subordinate work. As Moraes and Oliveira (2022, p. 35, own translation) state, "school presents itself as a place of meeting, relationships, and socialization". Some of the texts on EJA during the pandemic mention that the sudden interruption of regular face-to-face meetings caused insecurity about the ability to continue learning, lack of motivation to persist in remote learning, and feelings of regression in learning, which added to other repercussions of the pandemic (economic, physical and mental health, access to other rights, etc.) as factors inducing low participation and school dropout (Silva & Barbosa, 2022; Souza et al., 2022).

Some of the literature also mentions the emotional impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of the population, as recorded in a case study in an Amazonian municipality, whose authors call on schools to exercise support: "it is necessary to observe students who are experiencing grief, who have lost references and affections in their lives, who have suffered from complaints of anxiety, insomnia, depression" (Cunha et al., 2021, p. 31, own translation).

Few publications still address the return to in-person classes after the pandemic is controlled by vaccinating the population. When profiling students at a private but free EJA school in the

<sup>10</sup> The expression digital literacy designates the knowledge necessary to make social use of technological resources and writing in the digital environment.

capital of São Paulo, Frochtengarten (2022) found that many EJA students interrupted their studies, suffered a drastic drop in income, experienced unemployment or even greater precariousness in working conditions, and witnessed an increase in conflicts in the school environment.

Among the systematic literature reviews related to EJA during the pandemic, only one study – related to the Programa Nacional de Integração da Educação Profissional com Educação Básica na modalidade Educação de Jovens e Adultos [Professional Education with Basic Education in the Youth and Adult Education modality] (Proeja), which analyzed ten national and four international texts – placed optimistic expectations on the pedagogical mediation of ICT: although several reviewed articles pointed out that EJA students face difficulties in accessing digital tools, Melo et al. (2022, p. 15) concluded that they have the potential to favor the construction of knowledge of EJA students, as long as there are policies that facilitate access to cyberspace and promote the training of educators. Winter's (2021) study on Proeja in Santa Maria (RS) partly corroborates these conclusions since, although it recorded a significant proportion of students who did not adhere to remote teaching and dropped out of the course, it found the persistence of a portion of students who can benefit from methodological adaptations to teaching-learning mediated by ICT, in addition to the financial aid and digital tools provided by the federal education network.

Several experience reports about remote teaching mention that teachers predominantly facilitate communication with EJA students via WhatsApp since most young people, adults, and elderly people have cell phones and already use the free messaging application. This includes those who are in the process of learning to read and write and have a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing, as they can use voice messages (Costa, 2021; Morais & Oliveira, 2022; Pires et al., 2021; Santos, 2021; Silva & Barbosa, 2022).

Jorge Luis Teles da Silva (2020) also addressed the challenges of digital inclusion and ensuring the survival conditions of EJA students during the pandemic, especially regarding access to income, health, and food security, in an article presented to the Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação [National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education] (ANPED). The author identified that teaching routines were drastically altered and that planning and assessment suffered constraints that put the participation and monitoring of EJA students at risk.

One controversial topic in the literature was the advisability of including EJA students in automatic progression, a measure widely adopted during the pandemic in public education systems, repudiated by a large portion of EJA educators and students.

Disregarding that many of these students have spent years away from school and offering them a certificate unaccompanied by effective learning is to maintain the logic of empty certification. It is to fail to see their capacity to expand knowledge to understand and act in the world around them. To think that EJA students cannot achieve a satisfactory level of learning due to all the problems they have experienced that led them to leave school is an act of exclusion and disqualification. (Barauna et al., 2022, p. 247, own translation).

In July 2020, in response to the pressure from educational policies aimed at EJA, the EJA Forums of Brazil launched a national document calling attention to emergency actions during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to denouncing the worsening of socioeconomic

inequalities, the document listed three priority points in the fight to defend EJA policies in the pandemic context:

The first point of the agenda concerns the provision of broadband as a social right, in the form of free public service; a public platform, with the expansion of the Rede Nacional de Pesquisa [National Research Network] (RNP); integration with public TVs, public radios and social networks; and virtual technology infrastructure, in the classroom, as instruments for insertion in the so-called cyberspace with the production of trans videos and construction of text types on cell phones, demonstrating the functionalities and applications in the life of each student. . . . The second point of the agenda is that we reaffirm that the provision of EJA needs to become part of the constitution of state public policies (at the federal, state, municipal, and district levels) and not through programs. We defend the right to quality education against compulsory EJA services in the distance learning modality. We demand that, to provide this service, the government and its institutions (at the federal, state, municipal and district levels) conduct a census, mobilize society through public calls to publicize vacancies in demand, and ensure the opening and maintenance of EJA classes/schools in basic education (elementary and high school) in an integrated manner with professional education, under article 5 of LDB 9394/96 and Law 13.005/2014 of the Plano Nacional de Educação (Goals 9 and 10). . . . The third point on the agenda is the defense that the school year does not need to coincide with the calendar year, especially in exceptional situations such as the one we find ourselves in. It is possible to organize school days and hours in such a way as to guarantee in-person education for all, ensuring that there is no discrimination due to the living conditions of student workers and the structure of educational institutions; autonomy to systems (municipal, state, federal and district) to define their forms of recovery, with DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT, ensuring the participation of school communities. (Fóruns EJA Brasil, 2020, pp. 2-4, own translation).

Despite pressure from EJA Forums and other social movements at national, state and municipal levels, there were few responses from educational administrations at different levels to the demands for sustaining the modality in such a dramatic context for their students: more than 70% are made up of black people, precarious workers, domestic workers, the LGBTQIA+ population, elderly women, sex workers, young people and adults who have left places of deprivation of liberty, among other subjects with rich experiences and a lot of life knowledge, but with trajectories marked by profound rights violations.

### EJA in spaces of deprivation of liberty

It is noted that, during the pandemic, most prisons linked to the prison system or socio-educational measures for the internment of adolescents in conflict with the law suspended the limited provision of educational services in the units, intensifying the violating effects of the institutions as a whole (Carreira & Oliveira, 2016). This situation dramatically affected this population, made up of more than 800,000 people, around 80% of whom are black, considered to be in *degrading* conditions in a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on Brazil, published in February 2021.

In her master's thesis on state governments' responses to the situation of educational services in prisons, Beatriz Luz (2021) identified that reactions, when they existed, occurred through the distribution of scripts and printed materials, showing of video classes, projects to promote reading for sentence reduction, and encouraging the writing of letters to relatives and friends, in the context of the interruption of visits due to the pandemic. With the largest prison population in the country, around 230 thousand people, the state of São Paulo distributed kits, materials, and scripts prepared by professionals from the Secretaria Estadual de Educação [State Department of Education] to only 17 thousand inmates.

It is observed that despite the recommendations issued by the Conselho Nacional de Justiça [National Council of Justice] (CNJ) – Recomendação n. 62 (2020) and Recomendação n. 68 (2020), aimed at the Judiciary, referring to the prison and socio-educational systems, in the sense of flexibilities and shortening procedures that aimed to reduce the population deprived of liberty during the health emergency –, the punitive perspective of most judges prevailed, by not implementing such recommendations, according to an assessment in the report by the human rights organization the Instituto Brasileiro de Ciências Criminais [Brazilian Institute of Criminal Sciences] (IBCCRIM) (2020), maintaining the levels of incarceration and hospitalization during the pandemic.

### **The diversity of EJA in territories impacted by Covid-19**

The studies reported in the reviewed national literature. However, they cannot be generalized, allowing us to glimpse the challenges and approaches that various municipal and state school networks adopt to continue teaching and learning in EJA.

Analyzing João Pessoa's (PB) educational context, Andrade et al. (2023) highlight teachers' lack of preparation to handle the technological resources necessary for emergency remote teaching, aggravated by the lack of training opportunities for acquiring and developing such skills. This lack of preparation becomes more evident when teaching is carried out in classes with significant generational heterogeneity since the elderly have greater difficulties in using ICT, in addition to scarce economic resources to acquire devices and data packages that allow them to learn with technological mediation.

In a case study on the simultaneous implementation of the BNCC and emergency remote teaching in a state-run adult education center located in Fortaleza, which, before the pandemic, organized modular teaching in a disciplinary and blended learning format, Costa et al. (2021) observed that the guidelines provided by the Secretaria da Educação [Department of Education] (Seduc) and the Conselho Estadual de Educação [State Council of Education] for the adoption, in 2020, of the special regime of non-face-to-face teaching activities and, later, in 2021, of hybrid teaching, combining remote and face-to-face activities, were improvised and unspecific, and teachers were unprepared to put them into practice. Even so, the school formulated its home-based activities plan following higher education guidance, adjusted the curriculum to the Basic Knowledge Matrix proposed by Seduc, and aligned with the BNCC. The authors conclude that incorporating ICT into this hybrid teaching and learning model requires more resources and investments in infrastructure and teacher training.

Cunha et al. (2020) analyzed the impacts of the suspension of in-person classes in EJA in the first year of the Covid-19 health crisis in three municipalities with different characteristics (Bom



Jesus da Lapa, Itapetinga and Porto Seguro) in Bahia, the state with the most significant number of illiterate people in the country.<sup>11</sup> The three municipalities suspended in-person classes and adopted different remote teaching approaches – via ICT and/or printed materials – but none of them had the means to hire digital platforms or provide schools with technological resources (whether equipment or broadband internet connection) to provide distance learning, leaving teachers (who did not receive training) with the responsibility of producing educational materials and ensuring that they reached students.

Barbosa (2022) reports on the measures adopted in 2020 in the municipal education network of Rio de Janeiro, whose Conselho Municipal de Educação [Municipal Education Council] authorized the special home-based regime, with the Escola de Formação Paulo Freire [Paulo Freire Training School] responsible for preparing teachers to use the available technological tools. The survey respondents assessed “low student adherence to remote activities and low access to digital platforms”, mainly due to the limitations of data packages for internet access, which forced the Secretaria Municipal de Educação [Municipal Department of Education] (SME) to provide free access application (Barbosa, 2022, p. 10, own translation), without, however, having made more significant investments to democratize access to ICT. The author concludes that remote teaching has proven inadequate for the EJA modality.

Also noteworthy in Rio de Janeiro is the production of dossiers on EJA during the pandemic by the Fórum de Educação de Jovens e Adultos do estado do Rio de Janeiro [Youth and Adult Education Forum of the State of Rio de Janeiro], especially the *Dossiê sobre terminalidade na EJA em tempos de pandemia* [Dossier on terminality in EJA in times of pandemic] (Fórum de Educação de Jovens e Adultos do Estado do Rio de Janeiro [Fórum EJA RJ], 2020), which provided the basis for several public complaints and to the Public Prosecutor’s Office about the deepening of the movement to reduce classes and the accelerated precariousness of the modality’s offering, during the pandemic, due to the inadequacy of the educational management’s responses to the modality’s specificities.

During the pandemic, a drastic class reduction was also experienced in São Paulo. Data collected by Agência Mural (Oliveira, 2023) show that, between 2019 and 2022, 322 EJA classes were closed – a drop from 1,653 to 1,331 classes. In addition, 28 schools no longer have any classrooms for youth and adult education, according to information provided by the Secretaria Municipal de Educação. From 2019 to 2022, the number of enrollments in EJA in the city of São Paulo fell from 45,048 to 29,141, a reduction of 35%. In the same period, the municipal administration failed to invest R\$ 10 million in EJA, according to data collected by Agência Mural and the Tribunal de Contas do Município [Municipal Court of Auditors].

Among the recommendations approved by the Conselho Municipal de Educação [Municipal Education Council] (CME) of São Paulo, Recomendação n. 2 (2020), which dealt with hybrid learning, and Recomendação n. 7 (2021), which addressed active school search procedures for all basic education, stand out. Specifically on EJA, the CME approved Parecer n. 5 (2020) in June 2021, aimed at greater flexibility in modular EJA during the pandemic, based on a consultation proposed by the Secretaria Municipal de Educação de São Paulo and the

11 Source: Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios [National Household Sample Survey] (Pnad) 2022 (<https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/tabela/7112#resultado>).



creation of a working group with the participation of representatives of the units that offered this form of service.<sup>12</sup>

As in other cities, essential experiences of welcome and solidarity were promoted by EJA professionals, such as that developed by the Centro Integrado de Educação de Jovens e Adultos [Integrated Youth and Adult Education Center] (Cieja) Perus, linked to the municipal education network of São Paulo, discussed in an article by Fialho et al. (2020). Serving a population of around 800 immigrants and refugees, the vast majority of whom are Haitians, out of a total of 1,500 students, the Cieja Perus team diversified the ways of maintaining bonds and providing assistance beyond what was proposed by the Secretaria Municipal de Educação and developed activities to raise awareness among students about ways to prevent Covid-19 and recognize and deal with fake news.

In a paper detailing the experience of Cieja Perus during the pandemic, the Center's director, Franciele Lima (2022), demonstrates how the inseparability of the right to education from other human rights is key to developing EJA policies, a perspective also affirmed by Eda Luiz (2022), when addressing in an article the experience of Cieja Campo Limpo in its intense relationship with the surrounding territory.

In a study on the provision of EJA high school education in eight schools in the municipality of Diadema (SP), Fernando Ferreira Pires (2021) revealed that the lack of specific guidelines for the modality by the state administration forced schools to make local decisions that were at odds with each other, a situation resulting from the absence of a network of interaction between them, with regional or state coordination and guidance to manage the processes, which intensified, despite the efforts of some educators, a policy of continued exclusion. The lack of specific guidelines for EJA was also recorded by Alves et al. (2022) in the state network of Rio de Janeiro.

Looking at the Amazonian context during the pandemic, Alessandra Sampaio Cunha, Joana d'Arc Vasconcelos Neves and Nívia Maria Vieira Costa (2021) address the reality of EJA policies in the municipality of Bragança, state of Pará. As in other studies, the authors highlight that the pandemic intensified the dismantling of the current modality in the city, that the implementation of remote activities was much lower than in the rest of the country due to the severe difficulty of accessing the Internet and the lack of technological resources by local Amazonian populations – riverside dwellers, family farmers, fishermen, collectors, among others – and that the suspension of in-person teaching activities extended in the municipality beyond the period experienced in most of the country.

### Final considerations:

#### The potential of EJA in mitigating the educational impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and in preventing and confronting new pandemics

Recognizing the limits of this literature review, including the challenges faced by research carried out during the pandemic, it is possible to conclude that there have been few advances or innovations in public policies for EJA, except for an intensification of pedagogical experiments

12 Modular EJA is one of the five forms of EJA services in the city of São Paulo. Regulated by Parecer CME n. 234 (2012), modular EJA is organized by modules (curricular components covered continuously for 25 school days). The modules are not taken in a specific order because students can start taking another one when they complete a particular one (Portuguese language, mathematics, natural sciences, history, among others). More information can be found at: <https://educacao.sme.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/educacao-de-jovens-e-adultos-eja/>

mediated by ICT, constrained by the limited training of teachers in this area and by the limited access of students, educators and school units to technological devices, data packages and quality connections.

The analysis of the literature survey suggests that the potential of EJA was not mobilized by public policies in mitigating the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, in the training of educators, in strengthening solidarity networks and access to other policies and in educating the population for democratic citizenship (Benevides, 1996; Muzzatto & Silva, 2021) in the face of the wave of denialists blatantly promoted by the Bolsonaro government (2019-2022). On the contrary, the pandemic has generally intensified the ongoing movement to dismantle EJA policies, disarticulate services between municipal, state and federal education networks, and the modality's invisibility in educational policies.

Access to information and communication technologies has become increasingly inequitable. This must be overcome by democratizing information resources – quality equipment and connections – and guaranteeing the protection of educational communities' data against market interests. Such democratization must be at the service of open educational projects, which promote coexistence for the construction of knowledge and do not deprive students and educators of autonomy, as occurred during the recent pandemic (Pretto et al., 2020).

Despite this situation, part of the literature investigated<sup>13</sup> provides evidence of the creativity and effort of EJA teachers in developing teaching and learning strategies, stimulating knowledge exchange networks and technological experimentation, and using their own informational and financial resources to support students in situations of extreme vulnerability and actively seeking and strengthening bonds of solidarity with students. The work of popular educators and activists from EJA Forums in creating everyday alternatives and demanding effective responses from educational administrations to the challenges of the modality in the pandemic context is also highlighted.

Considering the enormous potential demand for EJA, especially its growth among young people (Sampaio & Hizim, 2022), the analysis carried out recommends that youth and adult education be understood effectively as a human right and, expressly, as a way of welcoming a contingent of adolescents and young people excluded from elementary and high school during the pandemic, whose school trajectories will probably only be resumed through EJA.

In addition to the importance of investing in EJA for the education of children and adolescents whose parents are educated or in the process of schooling, we draw attention to the immense potential of EJA – from the perspective of emancipatory popular education (Di Pierro, 2017; Carreira, 2014; Paludo, 2008) – for building solidarity networks, providing low-income populations with access to intersectoral policies, disseminating quality information, political-democratic literacy and civic education to confront denialism, racism, gender violence intensified during the pandemic, fascism and the effects of climate change.

In this sense, our analysis indicates the urgency of strengthening EJA policies, with adequate funding, coherent and coordinated planning, ongoing training of educators, coordination of services between municipal, state and federal networks, territorialized and intersectoral action, educational regulations appropriate to the modality, student retention grants and social participation, based

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned previously, this article does not describe and analyze the subset of documents found in the bibliographic survey related to the pedagogical strategies mobilized by educators during the interruption of face-to-face teaching, which will be done in another publication.

on the recognition of the specificities of its diverse subjects as part of the strategies to confront the country's profound racial, gender and social inequalities, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and to prevent and mitigate the effects of possible new pandemics.

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### Note on authorship

Denise Carreira: supervision, conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, methodology and writing.

Maria Clara Di Pierro: conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, methodology and writing.

### Data availability statement

The contents underlying the research text are contained in the manuscript.

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