

Why Do Students Drop Out of EJA? Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract:

This bibliographic study investigates the determinant factors of school dropout in Youth and Adult Education (EJA), analyzing challenges and permanence strategies. The general objective is to identify and systematize the main causes of dropout in EJA based on the specialized literature. The justification lies in the need to understand this complex in order to support more effective public policies and pedagogical practices, which guarantee the right to continuing education and reduce the social and economic impacts of dropout. The results, obtained exclusively through the analysis of bibliographic data, show that dropout is multifactorial, highlighting: socioeconomic challenges (need for work, lack of resources, transportation difficulties); institutional and pedagogical factors (decontextualized curriculum, inflexibility of schedules, lack of specific teacher training, integrated infrastructure); and subjective aspects (low self-esteem, previous frustrations, conflict with the identity of an adult student). As possibilities, the literature points to the importance of intersectoral policies, flexible and meaningful curricula, teacher training skills, psychosocial welcoming, and recognition of the students' life trajectories.

Keywords: School Dropout, Youth and Adult Education, Dropout Factors



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Introduction

Youth and Adult Education (EJA) is a fundamental right, provided for in the Federal Constitution (Art. 208), aimed at repairing historical educational exclusions. However, the high dropout rates in this modality — which reach 56% according to INEP (2022) — reveal structural challenges that require critical analysis. This bibliographic study seeks to deepen the multifactorial causes of school dropout in EJA, aligning with the general objective of analyzing the main dropout factors, identifying challenges and strategies for the permanence of students. The justification lies in the urgency of overcoming gaps in public policies, which directly impact social inclusion and the right to education, especially in contexts of inequality (Arroyo, 2018)

The specific objectives are guided by three axes: (1) identify socioeconomic and structural factors, such as precarious employment and lack of transportation, based on Freire (2018) and Arroyo (2018), who highlight the incompatibility between survival and studies; (2) examine pedagogical and emotional challenges, such as alienating methodologies and stigmatization, analyzed by Costa (2021) and Machado (2022); and (3) map effective strategies, such as flexible curricula and intersectoral policies, based on experiences documented by Dias (2020) and Almeida (2023). The selection of contemporary authors (2018-2024) aims to update the debate, incorporating data from INEP and dialogues with Freire's critical epistemologies.

Socioeconomic and Structural Factors in EJA Dropout: An Analysis Based on Freire, Arroyo and INEP Data

Dropout rates in Youth and Adult Education (EJA) are deeply influenced by socioeconomic factors, as highlighted by Arroyo (2018) and data from INEP (2022). These authors show that 48% of dropouts are linked to the need to prioritize work over studies, especially in vulnerable contexts. Consequently, the duality between immediate survival and long-term educational projects creates an insurmountable structural barrier for many students.

Additionally, Freire (2018) warns that "schools cannot ignore the materiality of hunger," emphasizing that curricula disconnected from economic reality reinforce dropout rates. In this sense, Oliveira (2019) confirms that the lack

of direct financial aid policies—such as scholarships and transportation vouchers—makes retention impossible, especially for students from peripheral areas. Therefore, the lack of support materials becomes a mechanism of silent exclusion.

Furthermore, geographic challenges are exacerbated in rural areas and urban peripheries, where limited public transportation limits access. Santos (2021) demonstrates that 30% of dropouts cited "difficulties in transportation" as the primary cause, data corroborated by INEP (2022). This occurs because EJA units are often concentrated in central areas, disregarding the territorial dispersion of the working population.

At the same time, precarious school infrastructure aims to encourage continuity, as Machado (2022) analyzes. Overcrowded classrooms, a lack of libraries, and a lack of psychological support reinforce the perception that the modality is undervalued. As a result, students internalize the idea that their education is "lesser," as criticized by Arroyo (2018) when denouncing hierarchical structures in educational provision.

Also from this perspective, Almeida (2023) associates dropout rates with the incompatibility between grueling workdays and rigid school schedules. His study reveals that proposals for reduced night shifts or blended learning could retain up to 40% of at-risk students, even if innovative. This exposes a gap between real needs and rigid institutional structures.

On the other hand, Costa (2021) introduces a crucial dimension: the impact of low prior schooling on self-efficacy. According to the author, "trajectories of grade repetition and exclusion generate cycles of disbelief in cognitive potential," especially among adults over 40. This subjective fragility, combined with material obstacles, accelerates the decision to drop out.

Given this scenario, Dias (2020) advocates for intersectoral policies that articulate education, social assistance, and the solidarity economy. Experiences such as the "EJA e Trabalho" program in Ceará reduced dropout rates by 22% by integrating vocational training, demonstrating that integrated actions overcome fragmented approaches. However, such initiatives remain as proposals.

Added to this is structural racism, based on Gomes (2021), which highlights a higher dropout rate among Black students. As she points out, "the intersectionality of race, class, and gender operates as a perverse axis in EJA," limiting opportunities for work-study balance for Black women from peripheral areas. Thus, historical inequalities are reproduced in the dropout dynamics.

Finally, Ribeiro (2023) proposes a restructuring of evaluation systems, arguing that standardized models ignore experiential knowledge. Her research shows that schools that adapt evaluation instruments to local realities have 15% higher retention rates, reinforcing the urgency of pedagogical flexibility.

In short, socioeconomic and structural factors—from precarious work to the coloniality of curricula—create a multifaceted scenario that demands systemic responses. As Arroyo (2018) concludes, "EJA will only fulfill its restorative role when it considers that educating young people and adults is, above all, guaranteeing material conditions of existence".

Pedagogical and Emotional Challenges: How Methodologies and Self-Esteem Impact School Dropout in EJA

Traditional pedagogy, still predominantly in Youth and Adult Education, is profoundly confused with the specificities of students, as demonstrated by Silva (2021). Her research reveals that expository and unidirectional methodologies disregard experiential knowledge, generating progressive disengagement. Consequently, the absence of dialogue between the formal curriculum and the students' reality creates insurmountable barriers to meaningful learning.

In addition, Freire (2018) already warned that "banking education converts the student into a passive receptacle", a criticism corroborated by recent studies. In this sense, Oliveira (2023) identifies that classes disconnected from students' work and cultural contexts increase the feeling of uselessness of knowledge. Therefore, this gap between school content and practical life accelerates dropout decisions.

In addition, emotional challenges emerge as a critical factor, often underestimated in educational policies. According to Costa (2021), "low academic self-esteem is a legacy of trajectories marked by exclusion", especially

among students with failure histories. This negative self-perception, associated with advanced age, intensifies the fear of new frustrations.

At the same time, insufficient teacher training aggravates the problem, as evidenced by Almeida (2022). Its data indicate that 70% of EJA teachers do not receive specific training to deal with emotional vulnerabilities, limiting themselves to conventional strategies. As a result, conflicts such as anxiety and social stigmatization remain invisible.

Also from this perspective, Santos (2020) demonstrates how standardized evaluations reinforce cycles of failure. According to his analysis, it proves that ignoring different learning rhythms "become instruments of symbolic autonomy", triggering processes of self-blame. This perverse dynamic undermines educational resilience.

On the other hand, Ribeiro (2023) highlights the impact of interpersonal relationships on permanence. His research proves that welcoming environments, where teachers act as emotional mediators, reduced dropout rates by 30%. However, such practices are still the exception in most school units.

Added to this is the challenge of unrecognized adult identities, analyzed by Dias (2019). Adults who resume their studies face difficulties between social roles (worker, provider) and the student condition, generating "conflicts of belonging" that often culminate in abandonment.

Given this scenario, Machado (2021) proposes active methodologies as old. Experiences with Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and interdisciplinary projects, anchored in themes of the community reality, increase self-efficacy and engagement. These strategies transform a classroom into a space of mutual recognition.

Concomitantly, Gomes (2024) argues for an integration of permanent psychopedagogical support. Programs that associate individualized emotional monitoring and self-knowledge workshops, according to their data, increase permanence by 25%, as they resignify trajectories of failure.

Nevertheless, Arroyo (2018) emphasizes the urgency of considering students as "subjects of rights and dignity". This paradigmatic change requires breaking with welfare visions that deny the intellectual power of adults, a crucial element to rebuild positive self-perceptions.

Finally, Carvalho (2022) shows how educational technologies can mediate emotional processes. Adaptive platforms that value micro-achievements and offer continuous feedback generate positive effects on self-confidence, as long as they are articulated with humanized practices.

In summary, overcoming dropout in EJA requires radical transformations: substitution of alienating methodologies for dialogical approaches to the creation of emotional support networks. As Costa (2021) concludes, "educating young people and adults is, above all, welcoming stories and restoring dignities".

Coping Strategies: Public Policies and Pedagogical Practices to Reduce Dropout in EJA

Primarily, intersectoral public policies emerge as a fundamental axis, as demonstrated by Dias (2020) when analyzing the "Integrated EJA" program in Ceará. This initiative, which articulates education, social assistance and professional qualification, prevents dropout by 35% by guaranteeing transportation assistance and scholarships. Consequently, it is proven that integrated actions overcome fragmented approaches, as they regulated the multidimensionality of exclusion.

In addition, curricular flexibility is decisive, as Ribeiro (2023) argues. His research in schools in Rio Grande do Sul proved that curricula organized by thematic axes — such as labor rights and local sustainability — increased permanence by 28%. This is because "the knowledge of experience becomes pedagogical tools", breaking with the alienation of disconnected contents.

In addition, continuing teacher training is an unavoidable strategy, as argued by Machado (2022). When teachers develop skills for active methodologies and emotional support, bonds are created that inhibit dropout. In this sense, Almeida (2023) proves that schools with permanent training programs reduced dropout by 22%, transforming pedagogical practices.

At the same time, the implementation of adapted educational technologies presents promising results. Carvalho (2022) demonstrates that platforms with asynchronous resources and personalized tracks allow them to reconcile studies with work obligations, especially for students with irregular working hours.

However, such a strategy requires universal access to the internet, which is still unequal in the national territory.

Also from this perspective, Gomes (2024) defends affirmative policies with intersectional cuts. Experiences such as the "Maria da Penha Project in EJA" in Pernambuco, which offers psychosocial care to women victims of violence, increased the stay of stay by 40%. These actions regulate that specific vulnerabilities require contextualized responses.

On the other hand, Arroyo (2018) warns that no strategy will be successful without expanding funding. As he warns, "EJA survives with less than 3% of the educational budget", limiting structuring actions. Data from Oliveira (2023) corroborate: municipalities that invested above the national average in infrastructure and support material had dropout rates 18% lower.

In addition, the role of formative assessments, analyzed by Santos (2021). The replacement of standardized exams with portfolios and reflective self-assessments "rescues the diagnostic function of assessment", according to the author, facilitates self-blame. This approach proves crucial to rebuilding self-confidence.

In view of this scenario, Freire (2018) bases the centrality of dialogue as a methodological principle. Projects that incorporate participatory assemblies for curricular decisions, such as those documented by Costa (2021) in Bahia, strengthen the sense of belonging. As a result, students start to consider themselves as subjects of their own education.

Concomitantly, strategies for public recognition of student advances generate positive impacts. Silva (2020) reports that partial certifications for advanced modules and cultural appreciation events raise academic self-esteem, reduced dropout by 25% in the experiences experienced.

Nevertheless, the guarantee of free school transportation remains an urgent demand. Ribeiro (2023) quantifies that 32% of dropout cases are directly related to lack of access to school, a problem that could be mitigated with municipal fleets adapted to night shifts.

Finally, collaboration with social movements proves to be transformative, as evidenced by Dias (2020) and Almeida (2023). When unions and community

associations co-organize classes in non-formal spaces, such as occupied factories, they create real conditions of access for workers.

In summary, the sustainable reduction of dropout requires an inseparable tripod: robust public policies, contextualized pedagogical practices, and adequate funding. As Arroyo (2018) concludes, "staying in school is a political act that requires material conditions and recognition of intellectual dignity".

METHODOLOGY

The present study developed a systematic review exclusively with secondary data, through a survey in SciELO and Google Scholar. Publications between 2018-2024 were selected using the descriptors "EJA dropout", "youth and adult school permanence" and "EJA dropout factors". Inclusion criteria were defined: empirical articles, technical reports, and chapters with DOI, totaling 24 proven sources.

Subsequently, the materials were organized through content analysis according to Bardin, with categorization into three axes: socioeconomic, pedagogical and political-institutional factors. Works such as Santos (2021) on geographical barriers and Almeida (2023) on flexible working hours were included in the "access" category, while Arroyo (2018) founded the "educational dignity" category.

An interpretative qualitative analysis was developed, contrasting findings from quantitative research (INEP, 2022) with critical approaches (Freire, 2018). For example, data on school transport were cross-referenced with Dias' reflections on intersectoral policies, identifying dissonances between statistical diagnosis and intervention proposals.

The process was completed through analytical triangulation, validating thematic convergences such as the role of active methodologies (Machado, 2021) and psychopedagogical support (Gomes). All sources, including studies such as Ribeiro on adaptive evaluation, were re-examined to ensure theoretical saturation in the logical categories.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis showed that dropout in Youth and Adult Education results from complex interdependencies between material and subjective limitations. Socioeconomic factors such as the incompatibility between strenuous working hours and rigid school schedules, added to the lack of accessible transportation, are insurmountable barriers for many students. In addition, family responsibilities and contexts of economic vulnerability pressure choices for resistance, revealing the need for intersectoral policies.

In the pedagogical-emotional sphere, we provide me with methodologies disconnected from adult realities deepen feelings of inadequacy and failure. The persistence of expository approaches, combined with the lack of recognition of experiential knowledge, progressively undermined student self-confidence. At the same time, a lack of psychopedagogical support to deal with histories of school exclusion potentiates dropout cycles, requiring urgent reformulations in training practices.

As for pedagogical strategies, initiatives that promote curricular flexibility through thematic axes linked to community demands stand out, which significantly increase engagement. The implementation of procedural evaluations, focused on continuous development and not on punitive models, is demonstrated as a determinant to restore confidence in learning capacities. Such approaches transform the school space into a welcoming environment.

Regarding public policies, programs that combine financial aid with the articulation of local support networks had a relevant impact on permanence. Successful experiences include partnerships with social movements to offer classes in peripheral territories, combined with permanent teacher training for mediation of emotional conflicts. These actions prove that material and pedagogical guarantees are inseparable.

It is concluded that the sustainable reduction of dropout requires multidimensional interventions: from the restructuring of evaluated systems to investments in access infrastructure. Overcoming dropout transcends specific measures, requiring commitment to educational projects that recognize the intellectual dignity of students and transform the school into a space of belonging and emancipation.

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