

**A LOOK AT THE MAIN CLAIMS IN THE INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL DEBATES SPACES AROUND YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION: CONFITEA AND CONAE**

***UM OLHAR SOBRE AS PRINCIPAIS REIVINDICAÇÕES NOS ESPAÇOS DE DEBATES INTERNACIONAIS E NACIONAIS EM TORNO DA EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS: CONFITEA E CONAE***

***UNA MIRADA SOBRE LAS PRINCIPALES REIVINDICACIONES EN LOS ESPACIOS DE DEBATES INTERNACIONALES Y NACIONALES DE LA EDUCACIÓN DE JÓVENES Y ADULTOS: CONFITEA Y CONAE***

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**ABSTRACT:** The article presents spaces for dialogues and debates established around the theme of Youth and Adult Education (EJA) in the context of international and Brazilian events. The qualitative approach brings, as a basis for analysis, the preparatory and final documents of the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA) and the National Conference on Education (CONAE) that took place in Brazil in the first two decades of the 21st century. The results of the analysis present the focused claims for the education of young people and adults in a context in which the spaces for dialogues, debates and demands become important fields of struggle in the processes of participation and formulation of public policies of EJA. It is, therefore, crucial that the existence of these spaces move from the position of demanding the realization of the right to education to that of contributing to the planning, development and evaluation of EJA public policies.

**KEYWORDS:** Youth and adult education. Public policy. Debate spaces.

**RESUMO:** O artigo apresenta espaços de diálogos e debates estabelecidos em torno da temática Educação de Jovens e Adultos (EJA) no âmbito de eventos internacionais e brasileiros. De abordagem qualitativa traz, como base de análise, os documentos preparatórios e finais da Conferência Internacional de Educação de Adultos (CONFITEA) e da Conferência Nacional de Educação (CONAE), que tiveram lugar no Brasil nas duas primeiras décadas deste século XXI. Os resultados da análise apresentam as reivindicações focalizadas para a educação das pessoas jovens e adultas num quadro em que os espaços de diálogos, debates e reivindicações tornam-se importantes campos de luta nos processos de participação e formulação das políticas públicas de EJA. É, portanto, crucial que esses espaços

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*resultem em ações que articulem o ato de exigir a efetivação do direito à educação com o de contribuir para o planejamento, desenvolvimento e avaliação das políticas públicas de EJA.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Educação de jovens e adultos. Políticas públicas. Espaços de debates.*

**RESUMEN:** *El artículo presenta espacios de diálogos y debates establecidos sobre la temática educación de jóvenes y adultos en el ámbito de eventos internacionales y brasileños. Con un abordaje cualitativo, tiene como base de análisis los documentos preparatorios y finales de la Conferencia Internacional de Educación de Adultos (CONFINTEA) y de la Conferencia Nacional de Educación (CONAE), que tuvieron lugar en Brasil en las dos primeras décadas del siglo XXI. Los resultados del análisis muestran las reivindicaciones focalizadas para la educación de jóvenes y adultos en un cuadro donde los espacios de diálogos, debates y reivindicaciones se convierten en importantes campos de lucha en los procesos de participación y formulación de las políticas públicas de EJA. Por lo tanto, es crucial que la existencia de estos espacios se desplace de la posición de exigir la concretización del derecho a la educación para la de contribuir para el planteamiento, desarrollo y evaluación de las políticas públicas de EJA.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Educación de jóvenes y adultos. Políticas públicas. Espacios de debates.*

## Introduction

The history of Brazilian education reveals the marks of the struggle for the recognition of the right to education for young people and adults, as exemplified by the actions of organized civil society movements in the 1980s, which led to the conquest of rights proclaimed in the Federal Constitution of 1988. This normative rule expresses the recognition of the right to fundamental education for young people and adults beyond the age for which the legal system has agreed on the right age.

This recognition has been materializing, even if slowly, in the legislation that regulates national education and, more precisely, in the policies instituted for this teaching modality in basic education in the first decade of the 21st century, notably: Curricular Guidelines for EJA; Operational Guidelines for EJA; Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals - FUNDEB and the National Education Plan - PNE

Public policies for Youth and Adult Education (EJA) have been greatly influenced by agreements from international and national events (DI PIERRO; HADDAD, 2015; FÁVERO, 2009; PAIVA, 2009). And, although the active participation of civil society has contributed to the definition of these policies, the proposals presented by this social segment are not always included in the educational policy established for EJA in national education.

Although civil organizations in defense of EJA have had great expressiveness in the 1990s, as Paiva (2009) points out, the actions of these organizations have been configured since the 1960s. With the political rupture resulting from the military coup of 1964, which lasted until 1985, "the popular education and culture movements were repressed, their leaders persecuted, their ideals censored" (HADDAD; DI PIERRO, 2000, p. 113). In the passage of the 1980s and 1990s, after the period of military dictatorship, the recognition of the right to education for young people and adults is the result of the democratization process that resulted in the 1988 Constitution, being this Constitution, therefore, a breakthrough regarding social rights (DI PIERRO, 2015).

Regarding the claim for Youth and Adult Education as a public policy, civil society is organized in various spaces, including international, national, regional and local events (BELIZARIO, 2015). Therefore, discussing and analyzing the public policies for Youth and Adult Education requires an understanding of the historical time and the struggle for the right to education for young people and adults.

The present work, which is the result of master's research completed in 2015, and which continues into doctoral research, is divided into two parts: the first is dedicated to discussing the International Conference on Adult Education (CONFITEA) and the second to presenting the main discussions present at the National Youth and Adult Education Meeting (ENEJA) and at the National Education Conference (CONAE)<sup>3</sup>, held in the period from 2010 to 2018, the time frame of this research. The results of the analysis bring the claims of these events for the education of young people and adults.

The effectiveness of the struggle is consolidated with the implementation of the proposals presented by those who effectively know the reality of the public for whom the policies are intended. Therefore, it is necessary to put pressure on the State by the civil society movements that militate in favor of EJA, so that the State fulfills its obligations with respect to guaranteeing education as a right for all, as stated in the Federal Constitution of Brazil of 1998.

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<sup>3</sup> The choice of these events is justified because they are spaces for debates about EJA.

## **International Context - The International Conference on Adult Education - CONFINTEA (2009)**

At the international level, the fight for the right to education of young people and adults has as a landmark the I CONFINTEA, held in 1949, in Denmark (HADDAD, 2009; PAIVA, 2009). The international conferences are characterized as important spaces for dialogue, reflection and construction of proposals around the EJA. The directions are systematized in documents that compile the recommendations of the Conference members. As highlighted by Fávero (2009, p. 9), reading these documents helps us to understand the process of denial of the opportunity of a quality education and a decent job to young people, besides helping us to understand the scope of adult education, "which has more recently incorporated the assistance to young people".

The inclusion of the expression "youth"<sup>4</sup> to Youth and Adult Education - EJA expresses the widening of the denial of the right to education, when, a few decades ago, people fought for adults to have access to the socially produced goods transmitted by the school. Today, the struggle is for young people who have had their schooling trajectories interrupted to also be included in the EJA modality. It is worth noting that the agenda of the movements that militate in favor of education does not consist in the entry of young people into EJA, but rather that they conclude basic education at the age agreed upon as the right age, which has not been occurring, since the phenomenon that Carmen Brunell calls "juvenilization of EJA" (BRUNELL, 2004) has been increasingly frequent.

After CONFINTEA I, five more conferences were held <sup>5</sup>, respectively, according to Paiva (2009) in the following countries: Canada (Montreal - 1960), Japan (Tokyo - 1972), France (Paris - 1985), Germany (Hamburg - 1997) and Brazil (Pará - 2009). The VI Conference stands out for being the first held in Brazil and the last in the period covered by this study, a period between the publication of the Belém Framework for Action (BRASIL, 2010), a document resulting from the last CONFINTEA, and the last National Conference on Education - CONAE 2018.

Brazil hosted the VI CONFINTEA, held in 2009, in the city of Belém, state of Pará. The organizing committee for the preparatory meetings for the VI Conference, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), composed of several organizations from civil

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4 About the young subject of EJA, Moura and Silva (2018) point out that a few years ago, the discourse revolved around the adult, which can be observed in the agendas of the CONFINTEAs. Only in the 1997 and 2010 Conferences, held respectively in Hamburg and Belem, the term youth begins to constitute subjectivities "that start to mark presence in the daily school life of EJA" (MOURA; SILVA, 2018, p. 14).

5 About the Conferences, see Paiva (2009)

society, government representations and others, produced the National Preparatory Document for the VI International Conference on Adult Education, entitled "Youth and Adult Education and Learning throughout Life" (BRASIL, 2009), which included a diagnosis of Youth and Adult Education in the country, requested by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The regional, state and national meetings are preceded by extensive debates on Youth and Adult Education, whose central strategy is to prepare the participation of civil society in the production of the final document, aiming to expand the guarantee of the right to education through agreements between political agents (HADDAD, 2009). The National Preparatory Document for the VI CONFITEA recognizes the importance of social movements in the processes of conquest and expansion of human rights, in the expectation that the EJA becomes effective as a public policy of the State, thus agreeing with the fact that social rights are the result of civil society struggles.

The national and international mobilizations initiated in 2007, during the preparation of the VI CONFITEA, together with the agreements signed at this event, are registered in the Belém Framework for Action (BRAZIL, 2010). In this aspect, the commitments signed entail the restoration of the denied right (BRASIL, 2000). However, "the great challenge now is to move from rhetoric to action, making efforts so that the recommendations presented in the Belem Framework for Action are implemented in public policies for Youth and Adult Education" (BRASIL, 2010, p. 3). Considering that the conquests of the struggles are materialized not only with the insertion of the claims in legal documents, but, above all, with their implementation, the monitoring and evaluation of actions are instruments that must be assumed, also, in the processes of the conquest of rights.

In the Preparatory Document for CONFITEA VI, UNESCO commits itself to follow the recommendations expressed in the Belem Framework for Action in the areas of literacy, policies, governance, financing and monitoring its implementation. The Belem Framework for Action (BRAZIL, 2010, p. 7-8) presents recommendations for adult literacy, among others: "[...] develop a literacy offer that is relevant and adapted to learners' needs and that leads to the attainment of functional and sustainable knowledge, skills and competencies by participants. We see, in this recommendation, adult literacy associated with functionalist education, which, in Rummert's (2000, p. 165), is "subordinated to the interests of capital", which leads us to infer that this model of education based on the interests of capital that bases its principles on the exacerbation of profit at the expense of human formation diverges from the emancipatory,

critical education, which "can never do without the lucid perception of change that even reveals the intervening presence of the human being in the world" (FREIRE, 2000, p. 32).

The current scenario reflects the dissonance between the agreements made by the signatories of the Conferences and the actions resulting from such agreements. After fifty years of Conferences and ten years of the last one, held in Brazil, the situations of exclusion of the young and adult population from schooling processes persist, to the extent that, in 2018, in Brazil there were 11.3 million people aged 15 years or more who were not literate, according to IBGE (PNAD, 2019), reason for the need to intensify the struggle in order to further close the gap between the legal and the real.

The recognition of the right to education for young people and adults starts with the guarantee of access to literacy, seen as the first stage of the formal learning process. That is why investment and monitoring are fundamental, in order to ensure the apprehension of knowledge that enables the continuity of studies. Literacy needs to have as its starting point public policies that guarantee its materiality and quality. The more literacy processes are related to the existential experiences of the students, recognizing that they carry "words pregnant with the world" (FREIRE, 2001, p. 16), the more effective these processes are likely to be.

In the line of recommendations presented in the Belém Framework for Action (BRASIL, 2010, p. 9), we highlight the actions to make public policies effective, with the intention that they include funding, well-focused plans and legislation to ensure adult literacy and Youth and Adult Education. The Document points to funding as a fundamental requirement to ensure the provision of learning and quality education for young people and adults.

The existence of financial resources is as important as the definition of the sources to be applied according to the reality of each region. Due to the structural crisis of capital, restrictions in the financing of education have been recurrent. However, this restriction that generates the difficulties does not stem from the lack of resources, "but their appropriation by financial corporations that use them to speculate instead of investing" (DOWBOR, 2017, p. 32). Thus, instead of boosting the productive system, the financial system has enhanced capital speculation (DOWBOR, 2017).

In this context, the recognition of the definition and expansion of funding sources for the development of EJA is accompanied by a recommendation to indicate criteria to evaluate the declared agreements, in order to ensure that political agents do not prioritize other segments of basic education to the detriment of EJA. Without funding, the effectiveness of actions aimed at the youth and adult education modality cannot be guaranteed, as Costa and Machado (2017) point out.



When outlining the actions focused on Youth and Adult Education, the demands of the VI CONFITEA, in 2009, subsidized the proposals made at the National Education Conferences. After the VI CONFITEA, among several national debate spaces, for the purposes of this study period, we will focus on analyzing the main proposals on Youth and Adult Education at the 2010 and 2014 National Education Conferences (CONAE) held in Brazil, since these are the debate spaces whose proposals involve the structuring of the National Education Plan (PNE).

### **Brazilian Context - the National Conference on Education - CONAE**

The National Education Conference (CONAE), which was held in 2010 in Brasilia, had the theme "Building the National Articulated Education System: the National Education Plan, Guidelines, and Action Strategies.

The organizing commission prepared a Document with the purpose of guiding the discussions of the conferences held at the municipal or inter-municipal, state (including the Federal District), and national levels. This Reference Document was structured in six axes and, in Axis VI - *Social Justice, Education and Work: Inclusion, Diversity and Equality* - it contemplated, in its ninth item, the theme of youth and adult education (CONAE, 2010a).

Throughout the preparation process that preceded the 2010 National Conference, civil society participated through its representations. However, it is important to note that the dissenting voices, nuanced in the correlation of forces eminent in the decision-making processes, generate results that are often disconnected from the claims and proposals presented by the representatives of the popular strata.

Not always the voices of popular groups are materialized in the Documents, especially when these voices are heard only at the time of the composition of the social representations, occasion when they consider their relevance for knowing the reality of EJA and, for this reason, have much to contribute to the formulation of policies for this public (BELIZARIO, 2015).

Facing this situation, the CONAE of 2010 presented fundamental principles to guarantee the national education policy, highlighting the main claims for the national policy on Youth and Adult Education, among which: "To adopt a minimum age of 18 years for EJA exams, ensuring that the attendance of adolescents from 15 to 17 years of age is a responsibility and mandatory offer in the regular education network" (CONAE, 2010b).

This proposition aims to safeguard the priority of access to the modality for the public over 18 years of age. The Federal Constitution of Brazil itself preconizes that the State's duty

to education is made effective, among other attributions, in the guarantee of "compulsory and free basic education from 4 - (four) – to - 17 - (seventeen) – year - olds" (BRAZIL, 1988, art. 214).

This proposal is a nod to a State policy, avoiding compensatory and focused policies, especially for the public who are still in compulsory schooling age. Therefore, the CONAE Final Document (2010b, p. 150) proposes that the public policies for EJA consider the following dimensions: "intersectoriality, social control, conceptions of EJA, educator training, didactic and pedagogical aspects, public management, and EJA data".

Each of these dimensions is followed by action strategies, in which the dimensions of the conception of Youth and Adult Education and public policies for this modality are highlighted. In the dimension of public policies for Youth and Adult Education, the strategy of formulating state public policies for Youth and Adult Education stands out (CONAE, 2010b). The conception of education implies decisions regarding educational policies. With the reform of the State in the light of neoliberal principles that prioritize the laws of the market, generating new ways to provide Youth and Adult Education, transferring "the execution of the educational offer to the private sector with or without profit" (ANTUNES; PERONI, 2017, p. 109), the provisional character of the actions aimed at Youth and Adult Education is reinforced.

Consistent with this neoliberal structure, the conception of education has been aligned with the market conception of education, especially since the 1990s, with the reform of the State having repercussions on educational reforms, for example the conception of lifelong education, which, in Licínio Lima's (2016, p. 16) understanding, is "largely subordinated to the adjustment to the economy in the new capitalism, to productivity and economic growth, employability and competitiveness.

At this juncture, the correlation of forces has intensified, exacerbating the tensions related to the decisions that guide public educational policies. Most of the proposals for Youth and Adult Education signed in the CONAE of 2010 were not included in the National Education Plan (PNE) of 2014. Therefore, the CONAE held in November 2014, after the approval of the PNE of 2014, reaffirmed the demands from the 2010 Conference and included new proposals for national education, including the demands for Youth and Adult Education.

The CONAE of 2014, entitled "The PNE in the articulation of the National Education System: Popular Participation, Federative Cooperation and Collaboration Regime", followed the model of the previous Conference. The deliberations of this Conference inserted propositions and strategies distributed in seven axes for debate and, in each one of them, the forwarding of proposals for EJA.



Axis I conceives the National Education Plan (PNE) and the Educational System of Education (SNE) as public policy of the State and highlights the need for both to guarantee conditions for the educational policies articulated among the teaching systems to promote, among other actions, the:

Student's right to an integral education, through the guarantee of universalization, expansion and democratization, with quality, of basic education, including in the modality EJA and its specificities, especially education in prisons - EJA for people deprived of freedom and higher education (CONAE, 2014, p. 14).

The specificities of EJA constitute a much-discussed dimension of this modality (ARROYO, 2017; SOARES, 2007; 2011; VENTURA, 2012). These studies explain the dichotomy between the school and the profile of the EJA public. In this profile, the formative paths are intrinsic, which cannot be disregarded by the school, since they are directly related to what Arroyo (2017) calls itineraries for the right to a dignified life, which need to compose the meanings of the actions aimed at the public of this modality. After all, people who decide to return to school carry with them stories imbricated with experiences of exploitation and exclusion, which is why education must transcend schooling, being associated with the "recovery of their stolen humanity" (FREIRE, 2005, p. 32). 32).

In this regard, the proposal of the right to comprehensive education calls for the participation of organized civil society through forums, aiming to "develop joint and articulated actions for dialogue and strengthening of the FNE and [...] EJA Forum, among others" (CONAE, 2014, p. 27). The National Education Forum (FNE) gathers social movements in Brazil that are engaged in the fight against social inequalities.

As a result of this engagement, the deliberations that emerge from the segments of civil society define the agenda for education with a focus on democratization, as it is possible to verify in Axis IV - *Quality of Education: Democratization of Access, Permanence, Evaluation, Conditions for Participation and Learning*. The proposition is to "foster, expand, and promote the quality of education at all levels, stages, and modalities," emphasizing the strategy of ensuring conditions to "overcome illiteracy in the country, enabling access, permanence, and continuity of studies for young people, adults, and the elderly in the EJA modality, with a view to universalizing the right to education," with the collaboration of the federated entities (CONAE, 2014, p. 62-70). In the same Axis IV proposition, there is also an indication of the strategy of offering EJA integrated to professional education.

Against the backdrop of the struggle for quality education and taking into account the access, permanence and success in school performance, with legal support, supplementary exams as a way to certify people excluded from schooling processes constitute the actions of the public power in offering EJA. The universalization of the right to education cannot be restricted to certification processes, in order to avoid abandoning what has been consecrated by pedagogy as essential foundations for obtaining knowledge: "the teachers, the curriculum, the teaching materials, the methodologies, etc.", besides reducing the responsibilities of the public power regarding the stages of education of young people and adults (HADDAD; XIMENES, 2014, p. 247).

Just as reducing the right to education to massive certification processes that make training unviable, focusing training on qualification to meet market demands is also a form of denial of the right to education, to the extent that this training model is governed under the logic of the market, which fragments the formative processes. Such fragmentation distances itself from omnilateral training, which, according to Marx (2010), is associated with the mode of becoming human.

In Axis VII - *Education Financing, Management, Transparency and Social Control of Resources* -, the financing policy for basic education recommends that "the EJA modality be treated with full financial equality" (CONAE, 2014, p. 109). This is a major challenge, considering that the EJA modality is the one that receives the smallest portion in the redistribution of resources allocated to basic education (CARVALHO, 2014; FÁVERO, 2009; DI PIERRO; HADDAD, 2015; VOLPE, 2013).

The proposals concerning the democratization of education of CONAE 2010 and 2014 were reiterated in the 2018 Conference, with the theme "The consolidation of the national education system - SNE and the National Education Plan - PNE: monitoring, evaluation and proposal of policies to ensure the right to social, public, free and lay quality education". The Base Document - Final Report of CONAE 2018, held three years after the approval of the PNE, emphasizes that "the conceptions of access, permanence, and management, aiming to ensure the democratization of Brazilian education, seek their materiality in the goals approved in the PNE 2014- 2024" (CONAE, 2018, p. 81).

The proposals printed in the Base Document - CONAE 2018 Final Report reiterate the goals of the PNE. Regarding EJA, the Document points out as the main challenge of goal 8, referring to raising the schooling level of the population aged 18 to 29 years, the fact that most of this population is not attending school or has not completed elementary school. It also highlights that the relevance of raising schooling levels is associated with the integration of

EJA and professional education. The document also highlights the challenge to eliminate illiteracy and reduce functional illiteracy as the number of enrollments in the first segment of EJA has been continuously reduced (CONAE, 2018).

At the same time that the challenges are expressed for the realization of the right to education, the goals concerning EJA elucidated in the PNE guide the government in conducting this realization, and it is up to the monitoring and evaluation of actions so that they are of quality and continuous.

It is noteworthy that these proposals resulting from the National Education Conferences had the effective contribution of the EJA Forums, the main movements in the construction of the public educational policy for EJA in Brazil, whose history of struggle dates back to the 1990s, during the preparation of the V CONFITEA, held in 1997 in Germany (PAIVA, 2009).

We verify the long trajectory of struggle and resistance aiming at the guarantee of education for young people and adults who do not enter school or who have not concluded basic education. In this process, the civil society movements, with the participation of the EJA Forums, have been fundamental in the attempt to form an agenda that contemplates the learning needs, especially regarding the curriculum, methodology, and assessment, considering the heterogeneity of age and schooling of the groups of students in this segment. Moreover, the agenda defended by the EJA Forums is based on the principles of liberating, emancipating education, in opposition to the model of education aligned to the purposes of the market under the aegis of the capitalist system.

### **Final considerations**

The denial and restriction of the right to education for young, adult, and elderly people have contributed to the organization of spaces for debates, proposals, and claims, aiming at the construction of EJA as a public policy of the State, in order to break with the compensatory policies aimed at the demand for this type of education.

In the process of the conquest of rights, these spaces for debate are configured as a field of struggle in the construction of the agenda of public policies. Therefore, the struggle is for the proposals originated in the spaces of debate to be inserted in the promotion of policies for EJA, which makes the participation of social segments in these spaces important, especially in the CONAE, which contributes to the structuring of the National Education Plan, the central axis of the Brazilian public education policy.

In this matter, the contribution of civil society organizations is of great relevance, since these organizations bring with them an experience capable of guiding the planning processes of the guidelines for the education of young people and adults, so that they are consistent with the real learning needs of this public.

Therefore, the effectiveness of the struggle materializes with the implementation of the proposals presented by those who effectively know the reality they are talking about. Thus, considering that at each event the implementation of the agreements signed in previous events is evaluated and future actions are planned, and from the moment that there is a commitment to follow the recommendations expressed in the final documents of these events, while these agreements are not fulfilled, the denial of the right to education for young people and adults over the age stipulated by the legal frameworks as the proper age will continue.

It is necessary, therefore, especially with the extinction of SECADI, in face of the current political context of loss of rights, a greater articulation and resistance from civil society movements that militate in favor of EJA in the defense of conquered rights, in the perspective of the materialization of what the Federal Constitution of Brazil, promulgated in 1988, advocates, which defines education as a right for all.

It is expected that, when the guarantee of education for all people becomes effective, the action of these social segments will no longer be to demand that this right becomes effective, but to contribute to the planning, development, and evaluation of public policies that contemplate EJA.

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