

EVASION AND INFREQUENCY IN EARLY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

EVASÃO E INFREQUÊNCIA NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL: UM ESTUDO DE CASO

EVASIÓN E INFRECUENCIA EN EDUCACIÓN TEMPRANA: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO



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ABSTRACT: School evasion and infrequency are problems in Brazil, especially reported in elementary education compared to early childhood education (EI). The study aims to analyze the causes of infrequency and dropout rates in a specific Brazilian public school's preschool stage of early childhood education. This is qualitative research with Case Study and content analysis. Data collection took place through open interviews with seven people responsible for preschool students and four institution managers. We found that the socioeconomic reality of families implies difficulties in understanding the importance of ECE and guaranteeing the child's right to attend it regularly. Given this scenario, it is necessary to intensify the collaborative work of the school team to bring families closer together and raise awareness.

KEYWORDS: Public school. Management team. Responsible. Child education. Infrequency and evasion.

RESUMO: *A evasão e a infrequência escolar é uma problemática no Brasil, relatada especialmente sobre o Ensino Fundamental quando comparada à Educação Infantil (EI). O objetivo deste estudo é analisar as causas da infrequência e evasão na etapa de pré-escola da educação infantil em uma determinada escola pública brasileira. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa com Estudo de Caso e análise de conteúdo. A coleta de dados deu-se por meio de entrevista aberta a sete responsáveis por alunos da pré-escola e a quatro gestoras da referida instituição. Foi constatado que a realidade socioeconômica das famílias implica não somente em dificuldades de compreensão sobre a importância da EI, mas também de garantia do direito da criança frequentá-la regularmente. Concluiu-se que, diante deste cenário, é necessário intensificar o trabalho colaborativo da equipe escolar para maior aproximação e conscientização das famílias.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Escola pública. Equipe gestora. Responsáveis. Educação infantil. Infrequência e evasão.*

RESUMEN: *La evasión y la falta de asistencia escolar son problemáticas en Brasil, especialmente informadas en relación con la Enseñanza Fundamental en comparación con la Educación Infantil (EI). El objetivo de este estudio es analizar las causas de la falta de asistencia y la evasión en la etapa de preescolar de la educación infantil en una escuela pública brasileña específica. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa con un Estudio de Caso y análisis de contenido. La recopilación de datos se realizó a través de entrevistas abiertas a siete responsables de alumnos de preescolar y a cuatro directivas de la institución mencionada. Se constató que la realidad socioeconómica de las familias implica no solo dificultades para comprender la importancia de la EI, sino también para garantizar el derecho del niño a asistir regularmente. Se concluyó que, frente a este escenario, es necesario intensificar el trabajo colaborativo del equipo escolar para una mayor aproximación y concienciación de las familias.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Escuela pública. Equipo directivo. Responsable. Educación infantil. Infrecuencia y evasión.*

Introduction

One of the goals of the National Education Plan (PNE), in its law 13,005/2014, determines the universalization of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the preschool stage (4 and 5 years old), this being the initial age group of mandatory attendance in primary education (BRASIL, 2014). The law, which aimed to reach the target by 2016, remains far from being achieved. For the first time, since the beginning of the Continuous National Sample Survey of Municipalities (PNAD), in 2017, the numbers showed a reduction in the number of children from this stage of education enrolled in schools. In 2019, 92.7% of children were enrolled, however, in 2022, this number fell to 91.6%, probably a reflection of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in 2020 and 2021 there was no research (IBGE, 2022).

ECE, as an important school stage for a child's development, has been constructed in conjunction with the vision of childhood that has also changed over time, loaded with social representations of what is meant by childhood, children, and Early Childhood Education. In Brazil, the first attempts to organize daycare centers, nursing homes (institutions for children over 3 years old), and orphanages emerged with a welfare character (VIEIRA; BAPTISTA, 2023). The aim was to help women who worked outside the home and widows, due also to a series of problems associated with orphaned children, who were abandoned on the streets or in foundling circles, “[...] the child began to be seen by society with a philanthropic, charitable, caring feeling, which began to be served outside the family” (DIDONET, 2001, p. 13, our translation).

For Mascaro *et al.* (1979), this explains why ECE was born with marked welfare support, as it was created by volunteers who decided to take care of children who were abandoned on the streets, aiming to alleviate marginalization and disorder. Studies state that “[...] kindergartens constituted an alternative for the education of children from other social classes (including the elite), even though, in Brazil, their emergence in 1875 was related to childcare devalued” (BORRIONE; CHAVES, 2004, p. 4, our translation).

The trends that accompanied the implementation of daycare centers and kindergartens, at the end of the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th century in Brazil, were the legal-police trend, which defended morally abandoned childhood; the medical hygienist; and the religious (PASCHOAL; MACHADO, 2009; VIEIRA; BAPTISTA, 2023). All of them were intended to combat the high rate of infant mortality, both within the family and in childcare institutions.

From the Industrial Revolution and the manifestation of the feeling of childhood, the need to educate children appears. Moralists and educators were the main defenders of the separation of the child from the adult world, this being a significant milestone in the development of the feeling of childhood, as it symbolizes and defends this period of human development as a stage marked by the need for protection and care (MATTIOLI, 1994).

Over the decades, the few achievements in the field of educating young children have not been without conflicts. With the advancement of industrialization and the increase of middle-class women in the job market, the demand for services from childcare institutions increased. To this end, workers' villages, sports clubs, daycare centers, and nursery schools were created for the workers' children. The fact that workers' children were cared for in daycare centers, nursery schools, and kindergartens set up by factories began to be recognized by some businesspeople as advantageous, as worker mothers produced better knowing that their children were receiving adequate care (OLIVEIRA, 1992; VIEIRA; BAPTISTA, 2023).

It was in the early 1970s that the idea of compensatory education began to spread in Brazil, which offered care to young children outside the home, enabling them to overcome the precarious social conditions to which they were subject. From this perspective, preschool would function as an instrument of social change, enabling the democratization of educational opportunities (PASCHOAL; MACHADO, 2009).

In this social and cultural context, it is possible to think about the history and consolidation of Early Childhood Education in Brazil, which, in legal terms, is supported by the Federal Constitution (CF) (BRASIL, 1988), Child and Adolescent Statute, Law n. 8,069/1990 (BRASIL, 1990) and Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) n. 9,394/1996 (BRAZIL, 1996). The CF was a milestone because it established access to ECE as a child's right and offered it as a duty of the State (VIEIRA; BAPTISTA, 2023), however, only in 2013 did attendance become mandatory, according to Law no. 12,796/2013 (BRAZIL, 2013). As a result of this and other factors, assistance associated with caring predominated to the detriment of educating, as if (in a proposal for full development (BRASIL, 1996), they could be separated.

The legal determination of supply and entitlement is not sufficient to guarantee permanence in compulsory Basic Education. According to Riffel and Malacarne (2010), the term evasion is the act of evading, fleeing, abandoning, leaving, giving up, or not staying somewhere. Truancy is understood as escaping or abandoning school to carry out another activity. The difference between school evasion and abandonment was used by the National

Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira/Inep (1998). In this case, “evasion” means the situation in which the student leaves school but returns the following year, while in “abandonment,” the student leaves school and never returns to the school system.

The Basic Education Development Index/Ideb (2012) indicates abandonment as the student’s withdrawal from the education system and withdrawal from school activities without requesting a transfer. Steinbach (2012) and Pelissari (2012) adopt the term school dropout, as they consider “evasion” to be a “solitary act,” leading to blame on the student and external reasons for their absence. Machado (2009, p. 36, our translation) says that “dealing with evasion is dealing with school failure; which presupposes a subject who was not successful in his career at school”.

Evasion and infrequency in school are interdependent moments, which tend to be external reflections or beyond the student’s will, resulting directly from the social context in which the child is inserted, such as a family situation. In the case of preschool children, they depend on a guardian to take them to school, therefore, the term infrequent is applied when the child stops attending school regularly, showing repetitive absences, alternately and/or consecutively. In this case, there is no dropout per se, as the child is enrolled and attends school sporadically.

In this sense, students from disadvantaged backgrounds end up more prone to infrequent attendance and evasion, victims of various factors that impede regular school attendance (GATTI; VIANNA; DAVIS, 1991). Furthermore, the late democratization and adaptation of public education in Brazil directly impacts the understanding of these social layers, significantly transforming the social, economic, and cultural order, with significant consequences for all public education (KRAWCZYK, 2011). Fernandes and Kerbauy (2022) analyze projects from schools that won the School Management Award in the last decade and found that the practice of democratic and participatory management involving teachers, staff, parents, and students, among others, resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching and a reduction in evasion rates in participating schools.

Therefore, actions aimed at education must involve listening to school actors, considering the social context in which they live and the conditions of existence of families. The reality faced by students from disadvantaged classes is different from the ideal sought by the school: lack of access to the internet, minimum necessary equipment, encouragement, family participation, child labor, and other adverse conditions, factors that further accentuate the disparity in education between the social classes (UNESCO, 2020).

Some authors, such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) and Cunha (1997), claim, however, that the cause of evasion is internal and related to the institution. They find that the school is responsible for the success or failure of students, especially those belonging to poor categories of the population, explaining the reproductive character of this institution understood as an ideological State apparatus. Respecting the depth of the authors' ideas and recognizing the real aspect of the functioning of macrostructures and their impact on each person's life, we chose to consider the school as a dynamic and non-determined institution. We understand that part of the constant tension between social demands, the essential function of the school, and the student who needs to be educated in the best possible way does not depend exclusively on the institution; it has its share to play as it is made up of people whose social representation is vast.

About the CF, according to Sousa (2000, p. 48, our translation), "it is indisputable that this Federal Constitution of 1988, insofar as it expands children's rights to school, is also responsible for the care and democratization of early childhood education". Therefore, being a right guaranteed in the Federal Constitution, it is up to families to ensure that this right is met, seeking the necessary ways for the child to be frequently present at school.

Therefore, one of the constitutional premises is that the school is an institution responsible for offering education in an equitable and egalitarian manner to all, intending to provide the students with full development. Therefore, it must have adequate infrastructure, the basic tools necessary for such development, and specialized professionals. It is the school's responsibility to observe cases of infrequency and school evasion throughout basic education, including early childhood education, which is mandatory from age 4 (BRASIL, 2013).

Gaywood and Pascal (2019) reported a case study involving a participatory model that included parents in the child's learning in some nurseries in a certain region of England. As the group was considered socially and economically vulnerable, the institutions created a model of joint construction with parents based on listening to them and considering their perspectives. Something to be highlighted in the research of the authors is that a model was sought that emphasizes supporting children in developing their skills so that parents do not feel guilty; on the contrary, they feel more instrumentalized and "engaged in the support for their children's learning" (GAYWOOD; PASCAL, 2019, our translation), which occurred, as reported by the authors. With this, the aim is to show that the school must support parents for the constitutional right to be guaranteed, even if its actions are not unique and determining.

Each school must establish a strategic plan to observe and deal with possible cases of dropout in their individualities, this work being foreseen in the unit's Political-Pedagogical Project, being the commitment and responsibility of the entire school community.

Data collection and analysis methodology

This research is qualitative with a Case Study because it analyzes non-attendance cases at a given school. Qualitative research allows the attribution of meanings and meanings based on the interpretation of concepts and the identification of reasons and motivations related to the phenomenon studied. The case study provides an in-depth analysis of reality to investigate the context and situation that instigated the research (GIL, 2021).

To collect data, an open interview was conducted with seven people responsible for preschool students and the management team from the same school unit. The interviewed guardians were selected because the children were classified as "infrequent" or "escaped" from the school environment, and all of them received explanations about the research, had access to the research project, and, after accepting to participate, signed the Free Consent Form and Clarified (TCLE). The Research Ethics Committee approved this project under opinion number 5,378,245.

Four managers from the same institution were also interviewed, with the aim of, in addition to understanding the reasons for this problem in their view, understanding the role of the school in the context of school infrequency and dropout rates to guarantee young children's access to schooling. The content analysis of the statements was carried out inspired by the content analysis of Bardin (2016). In addition to the field research, documents relevant to the process of dropout and non-attendance at the school in question were analyzed. Therefore, the questions of this research cover the understanding of those responsible for students and school managers about the importance of attendance at this school stage, the causes of infrequency and school evasion, and the role of the school in this context.

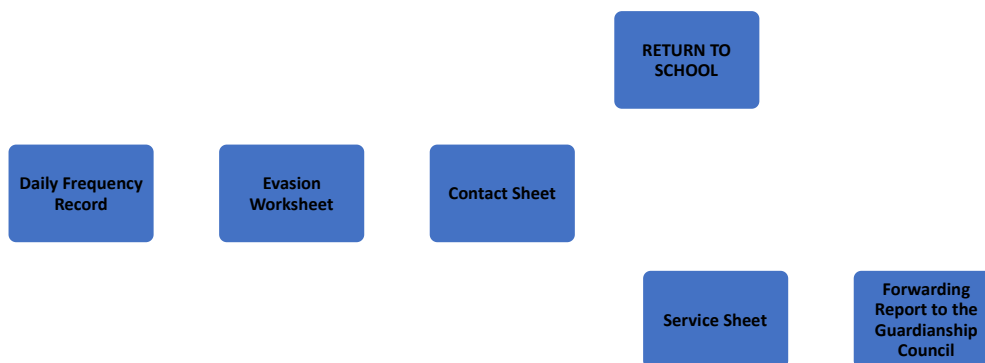
Discussions and analysis of results

The school participating in this research has its technical team responsible for dealing with evasion. This team is made up of four professionals who will be referred to as Manager 1, Manager 2, Manager 3, and Manager 4, aiming to protect anonymity. Each of the managers plays a specific role that complements each other. The professional called “Manager 4” oversees contacting families to verify student absences from school.

Analysis of processes and documents

The school in question uses procedures pre-established by municipal management to deal with the problem of school attendance and truancy. The figure below illustrates the flow of the control process for infrequent and/or truant students:

Figure 1 – Flow of the control process for infrequent and/or truant students



Source: Produced by the authors.

In this research, as explained by Manager 4, the process begins with the teacher responsible for the room, carrying out the daily attendance call, and making the necessary records. When seven absences are noted (sporadic or consecutive) within a period of two weeks (ten school days), the teacher must fill out the “Evasion Worksheet” made available in advance by the same manager. Sometimes, the teacher is already aware of the reason for the absence, previously informed by the student’s guardian, such as illness or travel. This information must be written briefly on the spreadsheet in question as support so that Manager 4 can officially contact the family to record the reason for absence.

The document is delivered back to Manager 4, who will contact the student’s guardians. Such contact is recorded in the “Contact Sheet” spreadsheet. When contact by telephone is impossible, Manager 4 goes to the address indicated in the child’s registration to speak

personally with those responsible. During the visit, the cause of the student's absence is investigated, and the importance of the school as a place for the child's learning and development is mentioned. All information is recorded in the "Attendance Sheet" spreadsheet, where Manager 4 reports the in-person visit issues.

Finally, there is the "Referral Report to the Guardianship Council", which Manager 4 can use in two situations: a) when the person responsible for the child cannot be located (via telephone or in-person after several attempts and the child remains absent from the school); b) when, even after contact with those responsible, the child remains absent from classes. In this case, Manager 4 must send a detailed email to the local person responsible for the Guardianship Council, passing on subsequent negotiations to the institution and ending the school's direct participation in the process. When the Guardianship Council manages to contact the family in question, a report is generated and forwarded in copy to the school unit involved to monitor the student's process.

Evasion Worksheet

The "Evasion Spreadsheets" were calculated for the period from February 2018 to December 2022, presenting the comparative percentage of infrequency between the total number of students enrolled in the school used in the research and the total calculated infrequency and evasion in the same period (Table 1), as well as the comparison of the school's infrequency rate concerning the average of other schools in the municipality (Table 2).

Table 1 – Enrolled x infrequent students x non-attendance percentage

| School Unit | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Enrolled | 328 | 317 | 333 | 331 | 341 |
| Infrequent | 81 | 93 | 167 | 80 | 98 |
| % | 25% | 29% | 50% | 24% | 29% |

Source: Produced by the author based on data from the school research unit.

Table 2 – Rate of infrequent students x general infrequency rate of the municipality

| INFREQUENCY | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| School | 25% | 29% | 50% | 24% | 29% |
| County | 3% | 4% | 11% | 9% | 7% |

Source: Produced by the author based on data from the school research unit.

Table 1 demonstrates the significant rate of infrequent students in the research school unit, considering only the preschool stage. Manager 3 pointed out that adherence to the emergency system resulting from the pandemic in 2020 was considered low since the profile of the school community presents difficulties in accessing the necessary infrastructure to conduct activities using technology, which ended up increasing the numbers of infrequency in addition to the usual causes of school infrequency. Conducting a comparison with the attendance figures calculated in the same period of all municipal school units, it is observed that the school under research stands out for presenting attendance rates above the municipal average, characterizing the case study in question (Table 2).

Contact sheet

The "Contact Sheet" document consists of listing the student's data found in the "Evasion Spreadsheet" spreadsheet, which is the second step carried out by Manager 4 in dealing with school truancy. When there is no service and/or return, this information is described in the form and, in this case, up to two new contact attempts are made by telephone.

Table 3 – Actions registered in the Contact Form

| Outgoing Calls | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Accomplished | 324 | 331 | 337 | 312 | 396 |
| Not resolved | 148 | 126 | 194 | 157 | 121 |
| % without solution | 45.68% | 38.07% | 57.57% | 56.09% | 30.56% |

Source: Produced by the author based on data from the school research unit.

There is difficulty in obtaining telephone contact with those responsible for infrequent students, especially during the period related to the COVID-19 pandemic, with exclusively

remote classes (2020/2021), meaning that Manager 4 needed to move to the third step in the path of negotiations, which is the face-to-face search for those responsible.

Service Report

During this visit, when Manager 4 manages to locate the child's guardian at the address on the school register, she seeks to discover the causes of the child not going to school, as well as emphasizing the importance of attendance so that all the learning opportunities and experiences necessary at this stage of school are guaranteed. The justifications for the infrequency of those responsible for reporting on calls coincide with those reported in the interviews in this research.

Once these justifications are noted, the report is filled out with the information collected, and upon returning to the school unit, the information is passed on to the teacher in charge of the room where the student is enrolled so that they can monitor whether the child has returned to school in an appropriate manner frequent.

Table 4 – Actions recorded in the Service Report

| Home Service | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Accomplished | 148 | 126 | 194 | 157 | 121 |
| Not resolved | 44 | 57 | 74 | 68 | 63 |
| % without solution | 29.73% | 45.24% | 38.14% | 43.31% | 52.07% |

Source: Produced by the author based on data from the school research unit.

When the frequency is observed even after the home visit, Manager 4 moves on to the fourth and final stage of the negotiations applicable to the school unit, which is the activation of the Guardianship Council. As shown in Table 4, there is still difficulty in resolving cases after the home visit. This difficulty may be due to the inability to locate someone responsible for the child (due to a change of address or because there was no one there at the time of the visit).

Manager 4 highlights that even when cases are resolved at this stage, it is common for the child to return to the beginning of the process shortly afterward during the same school year.

When the stay is observed in the context of infrequency, the Guardianship Council is called to conduct a home visit together with the Manager 4.

Forwarding report to the Guardianship Council

The final stage of the process of dealing with infrequency and school evasion, the “Report for forwarding to the Guardianship Council,” consists of informing, via institutional email, the entire route taken to search for and resolve the infrequency conducted by Manager 4. From this moment on, it is up to the Guardianship Council to conduct the necessary procedures to locate and call those responsible for the evaded child. The actions carried out by the Council are subsequently reported to the school via email for monitoring and control. It is up to the school to determine whether the child has returned to the school environment frequently or not and to communicate via email to the Guardianship Council about the success of the actions.

Table 5 – Referrals to the Guardianship Council

| Referral to the Guardianship Council | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Accomplished | 44 | 57 | 74 | 68 | 63 |
| Not resolved | 11 | 16 | 37 | 27 | 18 |
| % without solution | 25% | 29% | 50% | 25% | 28% |

Source: Produced by the author based on data from the school research unit.

It is noted, considering Table 5, that when the Guardianship Council is called, the percentage of cases resolved is higher. However, the length of the process is still difficult since it takes approximately three months until this stage is completed. Therefore, children who only return to school after this period have already missed almost a third of the current school year.

Interview Analysis

This topic presents the analysis of interviews with the student's guardians and the school unit's management team, presenting the main points for understanding the reasons that lead parents to allow absences. After the data coding phase, the most frequent words table as can be seen below:

Table 6 – Most frequent words in interviews



Source: Produced by the authors.

We highlight the term *school* in the word cloud as evident in the interviewees' statements, bringing to reflection the meanings and meanings that may be attributed to it. Although it was noticeable that how preschool is understood by those responsible reveals a certain limitation regarding its role, we perceive the school as a central element in the speech of both groups interviewed. In other words, the educational institution represents an essential sphere of family life even though the school's expectation regarding this meaning attributed to it is often not achieved.

Terms such as *child*, *working*, *home*, and *absence* also appear prominently, corroborating the analysis made of the statements in which the child is always a concern on the part of those responsible. Still, they cannot always deal in a balanced way with the demands of everyday life. Sometimes, they prioritize attending work, especially when it comes to scheduling when it coincides with taking the child to school. There is a report that they "choose" for the child to be absent.

Responsible for students: Causes of infrequency and evasion

The following tables were organized with the reasons/reasons of the interviewees concerning the profession as it was the attribute chosen for the association of information. According to those responsible for the students, the main causes for children's school infrequency and dropout in preschool, as can be seen in Table 7, include the family routine and difficulties in care, in addition to the prioritization of work.

Table 7 – Causes of infrequency X Professions of those responsible

| | Housewife | Cleaner | Autonomous | Worker of the industry | Cook | Manicure | Ironing lady |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|------------|------------------------|------|----------|--------------|
| Climatic Condition | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Class time | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Family routine | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Lack of support network | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Work priority | 0 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Child's emotional issues | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 |

Source: Produced by the authors.

Reconciling the family routine, such as caring for other children, work, and various activities, in addition to the lack of a support network to assist with the necessary logistics, is part of the interviewees' justification for the children's absence from school. The numbers expressed in Table 7 refer to the number of interviewees who cited a given reason.

Guardian 1 explains that, although she tries to adjust the family routine so that the child goes to bed early and can wake up the next day to go to class, she often cannot reconcile it, claiming that “[...] *the schedule is very difficult [...] it's also difficult to get her to sleep early so she wakes up earlier. No matter how many times I take away her cell phone, she rolls over in bed and takes a long time to fall asleep. Then the next day she doesn't wake up. Sometimes I don't even wake up*”. Guardian 4 refers to the difficulty in reconciling work and school hours: *"It's difficult to take him, he only goes when I'm at home"*.

Regarding the school's interventions, responsible 4 explains: *"They've already called me, they've already spoken to me at school, but I've already explained my difficulty and that I'm doing what I can to get him to go to school. It's a phase, next year, he should be able to go properly, and then he'll recover"*. Even though it does not seem to have the expected immediate effect, contact between the school and the family is considered essential.

The National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) state the importance of schools building meaningful learning strategies that children will have the

opportunity to access if they are at school. They also add the importance of providing parents with “specific documentation that allows families to learn about the institution’s work with children and the child’s development and learning processes in Early Childhood Education” (BRASIL, 2009, p. 29, our translation).

Some difficulties in care were also highlighted by those responsible, including the lack of a support network. Guardian 4 mentions that when the “[...] *eldest son was a minor, he was also absent a lot, and once the Child Protection Council came to my house to find out. I explained and gave one way or another until he got bigger. Last year, he started going alone, and then they stopped bothering me. Soon Maria will be able to go too, then there won't be any more problems*”.

Among the justifications for the student's absence from school is the prioritization of work since the family routine and school schedules make it difficult to organize the child's attendance. Guardian 2, who works the night shift, claims that she doesn't arrive in time to take her child to school and can't get a place in another class period: *"When I go to work, my neighbor's daughter watches him until he goes to sleep, but she doesn't I have someone to take him to school for me because the schedules never work out"*. She continues reporting that *"he stays at home sleeping, and I go to work. The neighbor keeps an eye on him for me, he already knows how to eat and ends up spending the day on the street playing with the other children"*.

We found that the reality identified in the researched group corroborates the research by Vieira and Baptista (2023) when mentioning the new demographic profile of the Brazilian population, whose families tend to decrease in size. Therefore, having a support network becomes, consequently, more difficult; parents can no longer rely on cooperative strategies for the care of young children, such as relatives and neighbors (VIEIRA; BAPTISTA, 2023).

The view of those responsible for preschool

Table 8 reveals the vision that those responsible had about the preschool. In some answers, the terms found in the table's left column were not mentioned exactly, but the ideas are represented.

Table 8 – View of those responsible for preschool x Profession

| | Housewife | Cleaner | Autonomou s | Worker of the industry | Cook | Manicure | Ironing lady |
|---|-----------|---------|----------------|---------------------------|------|----------|--------------|
| Space to play | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Preparatory stage | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Learning place | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Start of schooling | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Difficulty in understanding the role of ECE | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 6 |

Source: Produced by the authors.

We noticed that among the understandings presented by the interviewees, the one that had the greatest incidence was the difficulty in understanding the role of ECE. We confirm that no responsible person interviewed mentioned having this difficulty, this deduction occurred through the researchers' analysis and interpretation of the statements. Regardless of their professional area, all guardians presented answers related to the subcategory in question: Guardian 4 mentioned that her son *“only went to school because they said it was mandatory”*. Responsible 3 explains that her son will go to school regularly *“when he is older and can understand things better. At this age he still doesn't know the letters”*.

This finding is interesting because it evokes the school's commitment to approaching families to understand them and, based on this understanding, exert influence by raising awareness so that they broaden their vision of the educational institution. Just as important for the school is the quality of the relationships that families establish with their children is the relationship that the institution of early childhood education maintains with families because *“the child is a total being information, dependent on the intervention of adults with which it relates”* (MALUF, 2022, p. 76, our translation). There are countless ways in which the school can plan the bond with families since the bond already exists when the child is enrolled and is the responsibility of both instances (family and school).

However, enrollment does not guarantee dialogue, exchange, or mutual respect. These spaces need to be conquered, and we understand that the primary role lies with the school

because it has greater control of the educational process it develops. Maluf (2022, p. 78, our translation) suggests

Families are informed, through lectures, leaflets, among other information, about content that will be covered with children according to their age group, explaining the relevance of subjects and themes and how they will be emphasized, as well as tips for families to get closer to their children and share this important stage in their lives.

The school category as a “space to play” was also mentioned by a significant number of interviewees, who demonstrated that they understood ECE as limited to free play without intentionality. In this sense, the educational duty would only start from the first year of elementary school, as explained by Responsible 4: *“he still has time to learn, to study right. Next year he will go to the first year, then he should start studying and learn something”*. Responsible 7 also demonstrated that she had the same understanding: *“When she goes to first grade when she really starts studying”*.

However, about the Federal Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), according to Sousa (2000, p. 48, our translation), “it is indisputable that this Federal Constitution of 1988, insofar as it expands children’s rights to school, is also responsible for providing and democratization of early childhood education”. Then, being a right guaranteed in the Federal Constitution, it is up to families to ensure that this right is met, seeking the necessary ways for the child to be frequently present at school.

The National Curriculum Guideline for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2009) has as its guiding principles for pedagogical work interactions and play that should provide children with the opportunity to integrate various significant experiences that will stimulate them in their current stage of development. We believe that such stimuli will not happen in the same way that the school space can provide because the school, as a systematized and organized institution for the educational function, provides intentional means of guaranteeing children access to spaces, materials, interactions, toys, and other learning situations diverse.

Therefore, we understand that there are pedagogical objectives (systematized teaching and learning) in the experiences provided for preschool children, which are offered according to the student’s age group and their learning needs, with the aim of the child’s integral development. For that reason, school attendance is essential for the expected development of preschool students, experiencing experiences that will allow them to develop their full potential.

School management team: Community Profile

The other participating group is school managers. When asked about the understanding of those responsible, in their view, about the importance of attendance at this school stage, the managers were unanimous in highlighting that the socioeconomic conditions of the community are unfavorable, and no appreciation is expected from the school.

Understanding the social, economic, and cultural context is essential to avoid blaming the child and family displaced from the social situation in which they are inserted, also giving a more coherent idea of school failure as proposed by Prioste (2020), whose research revealed multifaceted causes related to families, students themselves (referring to older students), the educational system and school context, as well as social problems and less access to culture and literate environments.

Table 9 – View of the management team regarding the school community

| | 1 year and 6 months | 3 years | 4 years | 10 years |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Not valuing the school | 0 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Difficulty in care | 0 | 6 | 3 | 1 |
| Low education level | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

Source: Produced by the authors.

Although the manager with less experience in the role did not give her opinion on this topic, the other three managers exposed important elements for the discussion. Table 9, therefore, represents the subcategories observed in terms of their perception of the profile of the school community. Both the most experienced and least experienced managers in the role, except for the manager who did not mention any element, the idea of “Not valuing the school” was the most mentioned among those interviewed.

Manager 1 mentions the *"lack of responsibility of the person responsible and the fact of not giving due importance to the child's academic support"*. She adds: *"I believe that those responsible do not understand the importance of study in the life of human beings and everything they can achieve through knowledge"*. She explains that *"most of the time, there is a lack of prospects for a better life. They don't want anything more than what they already have. It's as if their current family situation is the most they can achieve"*. Manager 3 mentions: *"I think there is a lack of understanding and responsibility that most parents, at this school stage,*

still do not understand, where they do not prioritize the child's right to attend school by being regular and punctual".

Within the socio-cultural and economic context, managers attest to the difficulties in caring for children and different priorities for their children's education. We realize that the school assumes the child's right to be at school and the adult's responsibility to guarantee this right, while the family is involved in the daily demands of life and cannot always meet the children's educational needs under their responsibility.

The family must be a partner of the school, therefore, there needs to be collective work, with reciprocal exchanges and mutual support. "The institution's professionals must share, with parents, knowledge about child development and relevant information about children using a system of regular communications" (BRASIL, 2009, p. 79, our translation). Therefore, it is up to the school, a professional institution, to organize ways of approaching the family. We understand, however, that this task is complex, as explained by Manager 4:

It's complicated because I have to make home visits frequently, and I can see up close the reality in which they live. It's not a maximum, but the ones I have to visit are generally the most needy, vulnerable families in unfavorable conditions. I observe precarious hygiene conditions and lack of food, in addition to the cultural issues, such as those responsible for alcoholic beverages and small children loose on the street without supervision.

Manager 2 adds: *"it adds the issue of the difficulty of moving around on rainy, cold days, with more than one child at the same time. They end up prioritizing older children, or work, or other factors"*. According to the professionals' view, therefore, the biggest causes for infrequency and evasion in the preschool stage are based on the lack of understanding on the part of those responsible for the importance of study for this age group because of socioeconomic difficulties and the culture of the students' families. The managers are unanimous in declaring the role of the school in this context, which is to guide those responsible on the importance of keeping children in school, where learning strategies appropriate to the student's age are provided.

It is interesting to note that concern for children's education is recorded in the works of educators such as Fröebel. As an attentive observer of childhood, he explains that full development depends on meeting their conditions as a human being and that activity is the foundation of a child's internal satisfaction, it is how they externalize their inner development. He also mentions that the place where everything should be provided to the child in his early life is the home. He adds that kindergarten is a special place for a child's development in the

first years of life until school. Fröebel compares children to fragile plants and the teacher to an attentive gardener (HEILAND, 2013).

Even though the terms and analogies used by Fröebel are linked to his time, the concept of childhood that was being constructed, especially in Europe, brings us important clues about the peculiarity of this phase of development and the need for a joint and attentive look at the needs of the child so that, as Fröebel said: “Inside the child, an inner and outer satisfaction infiltrates even the most productive part of the child; the true consideration of this fundamental appearance in the child’s life is the main key to adequate treatment and education [...]” (FRÖEBEL *apud* HEILAND, 2013, our translation).

Through school, he/she has access to content and possibilities that she would not have if she did not attend and, at this point, we can remember Snyders about the joys of obligatory being the rewards achieved by the efforts made in knowing something edifying, a true masterpiece (SNYDERS, 1996). Genuine joy is knowing that, when it comes to young children, each achievement can be celebrated by everyone around them, as the child expresses authentically when their human needs have been met. Let us be sensitive to each expression!

Final consideration

There were many years of research and analysis conducted by various scholars in the field of early childhood education so that today, although full of contradictions, advances, and setbacks, we have a teaching format that seeks the integral formation of the student, respecting the child’s peculiar phase. Children and their individualities promote the development of cognitive, social, and intellectual skills.

In the Brazilian context of education, today the child is considered a whole being, with importance whose reference is not what they lack, but what they are. Even though there are marked inequalities regarding the living conditions of Brazilian children, we hope that in different educational institutions, they can develop fully. We realize that all progress that has occurred over time has occurred through the struggles and efforts of educators to ensure that social rights are protected for children, including school.

Many were (and still are) responsible for the didactic thought and methodologies used by teachers today so that children experience childhood in their uniqueness and that this phase provides them with robust training to face the challenges of both subsequent schooling and life. This idea of preparation does not mean that early childhood education should be seen as a

preparatory stage but as a basic stage for the development of capabilities that should find space to expand over time.

In this particular case, the results obtained from the analysis of documents and open interviews with those responsible for the students and the management team of the school unit constituted six main factors, which combined, have contributed to the causes of school infrequency and evasion: limited understanding of the value of the school at this stage; family routine; difficulty in care; school as a space to play primarily; primacy of work; lack of support network.

The analysis and understanding of these factors reveal that those responsible have limited knowledge of the value of school in the preschool stage concerning what it is or should be; perhaps for this reason, they allow absences, as some mentioned in subsequent studies. They will not allow excessive absences due to the compromise this would cause to their studies. However, we also know, unfortunately, that evasion and infrequent attendance occur in other stages of basic education, as mentioned at the beginning of this text, which perhaps reveals that those responsible would not consciously want the children under their responsibility not to attend regulate school, but the objective conditions of life and family structure make this objective difficult.

The other related factors that imply the absence of students at that school are, therefore, the family's routine, which, for the most part, needs to prioritize work or caring for younger children, to the detriment of preschool children. On the other hand, the analysis of interviews with managers, in line with scholars in the field and documents guiding early childhood education, states that the preschool stage is crucial for the students' teaching-learning process.

We emphasize that the management team is expected to have a different understanding than those responsible concerning the role of the preschool, given the training it has and the social function that the school performs. We also confirm that this understanding of what ECE represents for children puts the school in the position with the responsibility to intensify the mechanisms for bringing families together to understand their reality and work on raising awareness, which may seem like hard work, as it is, but it becomes gratifying to think that a child's story can be changed.

Regular attendance at the preschool stage is essential for skills and abilities to be fully developed and for children to have their rights to equity and equal access to education guaranteed. The situation becomes complex because, due to the age range of the students, it is necessary for a guardian to take the child to school, ensuring regular attendance. However, the

unfavorable socioeconomic reality of families implies difficulties in understanding and fulfilling this right, where different causes prevent some children from attending school properly.

Despite this reality, within its possibilities, the school must play the role of care, monitoring, and guidance for those responsible. The mutual support of democratic and participatory management, which considers the team, teachers, guardians, and students in its decisions, helps the collective to make a difference. It is the circle of organized collaboration, where the teacher in the classroom cares about the child; the management team pays attention to procedures and guidance to the family; the family needs to be receptive to dialogue with the school.

We highlight the importance of the school team, therefore seeking to understand the reality of families. In addition to the elements highlighted in the field research, we know that many guardians, given the generational difference (ages between 23 and 52 years old in this case study), had experiences related to school that were different from those that the children under their responsibility are having. Although the research did not identify aspects of the education of those responsible, it is possible that the majority did not attend Early Childhood Education because when this stage became mandatory (in 2013), they were already of more advanced school age. History also shows us that the way ECE was understood decades ago differs from how we perceive it today. Does this reality motivate us to devote more attention to the training process of those responsible? In addition to monitoring families at school and visiting them when necessary, what strategies can the school develop to guide families?

It is essential to think beyond reading reality and diagnosis. It is necessary to build concrete forms of awareness/guidance for those responsible without, however, exceeding the limits of the school's sphere of activity. One path initiated as a result of this master's research was the construction of a technical product, an instructional video prepared by one of the authors of this research, intending to inform and guide those responsible regarding the importance of ECE for the child's development. However, it has not yet been possible to verify the influence of this material on family awareness. We hope that other initiatives and research are developed in this sense, aiming at equal access and permanence of children at school to promote their integral development.

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