



Stories and memories of EJA students in Brazilian and Portuguese universities after 1974¹

Histórias e memórias de alunos da EJA nas universidades brasileiras e portuguesas após 1974²

Historias y recuerdos EJA de estudiantes en universidades y portugués brasileña después de 1974

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RESUMO

As políticas portuguesas e brasileiras de democratização no ensino vêm proporcionando, ainda que discretamente, um crescimento do número de alunos egressos da Educação de Jovens e Adultos nos cursos de licenciatura das instituições públicas de ensino. Para realizar um mapeamento histórico dos perfis sociodemográficos dos estudantes egressos da educação de adultos que fizeram licenciatura em Pedagogia no Instituto Federal Goiano, ou Ciências da Educação na Universidade de Coimbra, foi realizado um estudo com a utilização de entrevistas semiestruturadas com ex-alunos desses cursos. Com auxílio das narrativas e suporte metodológico da história oral, foi possível constatar que eles tiveram percursos de escolarização frágeis, maioritariamente trabalham, são casados e estiveram afastados da escola por muitos anos. Alunos brasileiros revelaram que se sentiram motivados a cursar o ensino superior na expectativa de um reenquadramento profissional e, de modo divergente, os alunos portugueses apresentaram forte motivação pela busca de realização pessoal.

Palavras-Chave: Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Instituto Federal Goiano. Universidade de Coimbra.

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ABSTRACT

The Portuguese and Brazilian policies of democratization in education have led to, albeit discreetly, a growth in the number of students from Youth and Adult Education (EJA) in undergraduate courses of public education institutions. In order to perform a historical mapping of the socio-demographic profiles of adult students who graduated in Pedagogy at the Federal Institute of Goiano (*Instituto Federal Goiano*), or Educational Sciences at the University of Coimbra, a study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with former students of these courses. With the help of narratives and methodological support of oral history, it was found that they had fragile education pathways, most of them work, are married and have been away from school for many years. Whereas Brazilian students revealed that they felt motivated to attend higher education in the hope of redefining their line of work, Portuguese students, on the other hand, showed strong motivation to pursue personal fulfillment

Keywords: Youth and Adult Education. Instituto Federal Goiano. Coimbra University.

RESUMEN

Las políticas portuguesas y brasileñas para la democratización de la educación han proporcionado, aunque de manera discreta, un aumento en el número de estudiantes que se gradúan de la educación de jóvenes y adultos en cursos de pregrado de instituciones educativas públicas. Para realizar un mapeo histórico de los perfiles sociodemográficos de los estudiantes adultos que se graduaron en Pedagogía en el Instituto Federal de Goiano o Ciencias de la Educación en la Universidad de Coimbra, se realizó un estudio utilizando entrevistas semiestructuradas con ex alumnos de estos cursos. Con la ayuda de narraciones y el apoyo metodológico de la historia oral, se descubrió que tenían una escolaridad frágil, principalmente trabajo, están casados y han estado fuera de la escuela durante muchos años. Los estudiantes brasileños revelaron que se sentían motivados para asistir a la educación superior con la expectativa de un replanteamiento profesional y, de manera divergente, los estudiantes portugueses mostraron una fuerte motivación para la realización personal.

Palabras clave: Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos. Instituto Federal Goiano. Universidad de Coimbra.

Introduction

Brazilian and Portuguese research in the field of History of Education has shown that, unlike in the past, contemporary history has presented policies for the democratization of education, in particular with a view to expanding the education offer and increasing the number of evening courses. Albeit discreetly, this has provided opportunities for the increase in the number of students from Youth and Adult Education in undergraduate courses of public education institutions.

In Portugal, education and training policies have contributed to expanding the pathways of youth and adults and have also encouraged progression into higher education. As the effective implementation of lifelong learning is essential for democratic societies, one in which universities play a key role, it is necessary to historically map the sociodemographical characteristics of adult students studying literature in Brazilian and Portuguese public institutions.

Following the enactment of the National Education Directives and Bases Act (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional – LDBEN*) in Brazil in 1996, the number of places offered at universities increased gradually. Between the second half of the 1990s and 2007, for example, the number of private higher education institutions increased by 197.1%, while the number of public institutions increased by 18.6%, according to the Higher Education Census organized and disclosed by the National Institute of Education Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (*Instituto de Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira – INEP*). Such an increase strongly impacted on the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions, which, according to INEP increased from 1.76 million, in 1995, to 4.88 million in 2007.

The INEP 2016 report data reveal a total of 2,407 Higher Education Institutions (IES), “predominantly made up of private IES, which account for 87.7% of the total, followed by state IES (5.1%), federal IES (4.4%) and, finally, municipal IES (2.7%)”. (BRASIL. INEP, 2016). The report also shows the number of students enrolled in undergraduate degrees: 7,356 students enrolled in undergraduate courses in 2016. It should be pointed out that between 2014 and 2016 the number of the aforesaid enrollments dropped by 6.4%.

In Portugal, between the second half of 1990 and 2018, the number of students enrolled in Higher Education increased significantly. In the 1990s, an estimated 157,869 students fell into this education group, while in 2018 it totaled 372,753 students. According to the Contemporary Portugal Database (*Base de Dados Portugal Contemporâneo – PORDATA*), 13,969 students enrolled in the education and training field, dubbed “education”, in 2016. In 2014, the number reached 17,208, that is, there was an 18.82% drop.

As regards Youth and Adult Education (EJA), INEP data show a total of 1,055,347 students enrolled in high school, as per Annex I of the final report on the 2018 school census. In 2016, the total number was 1,004,155. As we can see, in the context of democratization of education and increased education offer of evening courses in Brazil, there was a growth in the number of students from Youth and Adult Education in undergraduate courses of Public Education Institutions. Similarly, the education and training policies in Portugal have contributed to broadening the pathways of Youth and Adults and to encouraging progression into higher education, by implementing measures specifically geared to this audience.

Questions arise from the studies conducted on Higher Education Institutions and the course of Youth and Adult Education in Brazil: What are the characteristics of students from Youth and Adult Education that enroll in the Pedagogy course at the Instituto Federal Goiano in Brazil and in the Education Sciences course at the University of Coimbra in Portugal? Which historical and family facts may have contributed to them choosing to enroll in higher education? What are their future expectations after completing their higher education course?

This paper seeks to answer these questions by presenting the data from interviews conducted with four research subjects who studied in youth and adult education, with the purpose of learning about the profile of these students who enrolled in higher education in Pedagogy and Education Science courses in Brazil and Portugal. The subjects, all female, will hereafter be referred to as STUDENT A, STUDENT B, STUDENT C and STUDENT D, the first two being Brazilian and the remain two Portuguese.

In this regard, we will also seek to explain the background of the pathways of these subjects who completed part of their schooling in EJA and were admitted to university, overcoming the difficulties imposed by social and educational exclusion, and engaged in their own social emancipation and freedom (FREIRE, 1987).

Methodological framework

The bibliographic research focused on the historical development of Adult Education in Portugal and the laws connected thereto in the aftermath of the 25 April 1974 Revolution, and also on Youth and Adult Education in Brazil with the enactment of the National Education Directives and Bases Act in 1996. Based on this initial study, a further survey was carried out on the laws concerning entry into higher education in Portugal. A further survey examined the Pedagogy courses at the Instituto Federal Goiano and at the University of Coimbra on the students from EJA/EFA (Adult Education and Training, in Portugal) who are studying Pedagogy and Education Sciences. An interview roadmap was prepared containing questions intended to explain the research-related problems, following by interviews with two students from Youth and Adult Education who are currently taking the Pedagogy course at the Instituto Federal Goiano-Go and two students who went through the Adult Education programme in Portugal and were admitted to the Education Sciences course at the University of Coimbra through a special access scheme.

The semi-structured interviews, which served to understand the students' background, were transcribed and analysed from a qualitative viewpoint using the Oral History methodology as the thematic guide. In line with Meihy and Holanda (2007), oral history is a research method of conducting historical research through recorded interviews of the protagonists of events in time, present or past. This methodology is thus not limited to the interview or oral source, but rather draws on a series of actions planned from a properly prepared project.

According to Alberti (2005), Oral History acts as a historical research method that privileges interviews with people who have taken part in, or witnessed, events, circumstances, and world views as a way of drawing closer to the object of study. For Garrido (1993), one of the most important aspects of using oral sources is that one not only learns about the researched facts, but also how the group experienced and understood them.

Through Oral History, the memories of Brazilian and Portuguese students were used to learn about their stories and pathways. Memory, in this research, is understood as the capacity for conserving information, thus enabling us to remember and revive past impressions and understand how they were processed and represented individually or collectively. (LE GOFF, 1990).

The analysis of the interviews was used as a guideline to gauge some characteristics of the students from Youth and Adult Education that enrolled in the Pedagogy course of the Instituto Federal Goiano and in the Education Sciences course of the University of Coimbra, in Portugal, the different historical and family elements that contributed to them choosing to enroll in Higher Education and, finally, their future expectations after completing their higher education course.

The trajectory of youth and adult education in Brazil

According to the 2016 Census conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE*), youth and adult education in Brazil over the past decade has been much in evidence as a response to the demands of more than 11.8 million people over the age of 15 who do not know how to read and write, that is, 7.2% of that population.

Youth and Adult Education has been a much-discussed public policy issue with respect to access, retention and attendance, especially in recent decades, due to the progress made in broadening basic and higher education in the country. However, despite some attempts and political and social initiatives to minimize the problem, there is still a long way to go in order to ensure a quality education.

The young student in Youth and Adult Education in Brazil is essentially a worker – sometimes underemployed or even unemployed (GADOTTI; ROMÃO, 2007). STUDENT A talks about how she copes with trying to strike a balance between study and work: “I work 35 hours a week and still have to study. I have to go to classes, I can’t do much more, and I have my house to tend to, I don’t have a maid, so I do everything”. (STUDENT A, 2019).

Youth and adult education is not restricted to the age of the student, but, above all, to a cultural specificity. Although a chronological outline is defined, the youth and adults to whom this educational initiative is intended are not just any young people and adults, but a specific segment of the population.

My dream was to get in. I only finished high education in Youth and Adult Education. I stopped because I got married and at the time I couldn’t go on and I had to stop. After the boys grew up I came back so I could finish, and I realized you really need to study, right? I worked, but as a social educator. I did projects and taught handicrafts to a children’s class. (STUDENT A).

As Oliveira (1999) states, that student is also excluded from school, but usually integrated in supplementary courses at later stages of schooling, therefore has a better chance of completing elementary school or even high school.

Conceptually, Youth and Adult Education in Brazil is a specific arrangement of Basic Education designed for a specific audience through a formal, informal or non-formal learning process, to allow people to build their knowledge and/or improve their technical and professional skills. For Di Pierro and Haddad (1999), Youth and Adult Education is perceived as

a field of practices and reflection that inevitably exceeds the boundaries of schooling in the strict sense. Firstly because it encompasses diverse formative processes, which may include initiatives aimed at professional qualification, community development, political formation and a countless number of cultural issues based on spaces other than the school (DI PIERRO; HADDAD, 1999, p. 132).

The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien in 1990, presented a concept of adult education widely disseminated and also reaffirmed at the 5th International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg in 1997. Thus, adult education

denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. Adult learning encompasses both formal and continuing education, non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning society, where theory- and practice-based approaches are recognized (Article 3 of the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, 1997).

This concept, however, being characterized by its magnitude, on various occasions, in pedagogical practice, is often confused with that of evening courses. This is a mistaken association, as Youth and Adult Education is not defined by the shift in which it is offered, but rather according to the characteristics and specificities of subjects for whom it is intended. Several adult learning initiatives in schools or in other informal spaces have shown the need for it to be offered beyond the evening arrangement, so as to include those who can only study during the morning or afternoon period and usually work at night.

Article 4(VII) of the National Education Directives and Bases Act (LDBEN) reaffirms the State's duty to ensure "the provision of regular schooling for young people and adults, with the appropriate features and ways and means to meet their needs and availability, guaranteeing those who are workers the conditions for attending and remaining in school" (BRASIL, 1996).

History of the policies for the democratization of Adult Education in Portugal

Worldwide educational (re)formulations starting in the 1990s and throughout the 2000s take the central role of training of education professionals as a possible trigger to restructure the system in their countries.

Historically speaking, the Portuguese State is marked by a strong and lasting centralizing established practice. In the 18th century, "the State superseded the Church in the control of education, through processes that were not always peaceful, and became the most important player in the expansion of the school institution" (TEODORO; SCOCUGLIA, 2008, p. 20). After the 25 April 1974 Revolution, a municipal community movement emerged seeking more autonomy and more involvement in the educational policy.

In the following decade, the Ministry of Education began to integrate schools in the communities. A legislative package was published in 1984 according to which education activities came under the authority of municipalities. According to Baixinho (2017), this decentralization left to the municipalities the burden of investing in pre- and basic schools, school transport, and of preparing the materials for adult education.

The Comprehensive Law on the Education System, approved by Law 46/86 on 14 October 1986, on the deconcentration and decentralization of public administration, established the general framework for the Portuguese education system as "a set of means used to provide the right to education, expressed by the guarantee of a continuous training geared to foster the overall development of personality, social progress and the democratization of society." (PORTUGAL, 1986). The aim was to democratize education focusing on equal opportunities for attending, remaining and be successful in school. Among other issues, the Law proposed that: (1) The State could not grant itself the right to programme education and culture according to any philosophical, aesthetic, political, ideological or religious guidelines; (2) Public education would not be denominational; (3) The right to set up private and cooperative schools would be guaranteed.

The Portuguese Comprehensive Law on the Education System was fundamental as preparation for strengthening Adult Education in Portugal. In its Article 12, the Law establishes:

Article 12

(Access)

1 – Access to higher education shall be granted to:

- a) Individuals who have completed a secondary education course, or equivalent, who, cumulatively, prove their competence to attend it;
- b) Individuals over 25 years of age without such a qualification who provide appropriate proof of the competence to attend it.

2 – The evidence or proof of competence referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be of a national level and specific for each course or similar group of courses.

3 – Access to each higher education course shall take into account the needs for qualified staff and the enhancement of the country's educational, cultural and scientific standards, and may also be conditioned by the need to ensure the quality of education.

4 – The State shall establish the conditions to guarantee that citizens have the possibility of attending higher education, so as to prevent the discriminatory effects arising from economic and regional inequalities or from previous social disadvantages. (PORTUGAL, 1986).

This paper deals with the issue of access to higher education, with emphasis being placed on the implementation of a special national entrance exam for individuals of a specific minimum age. It also highlights the need for the State to promote actions to guarantee Portuguese citizens access to higher education.

Two important phases can be established in the 1990s and 2000s. The first one began in 1996, when the education sector underwent a political revaluation, the year being declared the European Year of Lifelong Learning and, in the late 1999, with the restructuring of Youth Education and the emergence of the Europeanisation of education policies for the sector. The second phase, from 2000 on, establishes a new role for the European Union. (BARROS, 2014).

The 1995 national legislative elections gave more visibility to the dissatisfaction of sectors that were more argumentative and concerned about Adult Education as a public education sub-system and, consequently, highlighted the need for a programmatic revaluation of the sector by emphasizing the importance of education and training for all, in a continuous learning perspective.

The Socialist Party came to power in 1995 and a new political era began with the XIII and XIV Constitutional Governments under the leadership of António Guterres. When he took office as Prime-Minister, the educational system still was suffering the deficits rooted in the Estado Novo policies – Estado Novo was a regime that ruled the country in the period between 1926 and 1974 and believed that education and culture were a risk to the country's stability. According to Benavente (2004), in the ten years that followed the implementation of the Estado Novo regime, discussions were held at National Assembly level with positions defending against literacy and questioning the need to learn how to read.

Portuguese education in the second half of the 1990s lagged considerably behind most Western European countries. As Baixinho (2017) states, in 1996 data show a 12% retention rate in the 9th year of schooling and 24% in the 10th year. The school drop-out rate in those two years stood at 10% and 18%, respectively. In the 12th year, retention reached 33%.

The Socialist party won the 1995 elections and a government was formed, but with no Parliament majority, in a context marked by: (1) dissatisfaction of the population regarding

education – 80 % of the Portuguese population between the ages of 15 and 65 had low levels of reading, writing skills, and basic mathematical skills; (2) the lack of a cohesive Adult Education policy; (3) drop-out and failure rates in the nine-year mandatory schooling; (4) lack of trust in the school. (BENAVENTE, 2004).

According to Freitas (2010), this new political cycle lasted 7 years and on 28 October of that year a commitment to enter into dialogue and a discourse of proximity to education was initiated, proposing the centrality, decentralization and autonomy of schools. As per António Guterres's government programme:

[...] Educational policies, as they concern society as a whole, imply constant negotiation and the active participation of society and its citizens, which means involving those responsible for public, private and cooperative education, teachers, parents, students, staff, municipalities and all other educational players in the process. In this sense, changes in education should be gradual, centered on schools and educational communities, subject to assessment and to a constant and participated process of adjustment to reality. [...] It means understanding education management as a society issue, involving all partners, without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the State, decentralizing powers in the provision of appropriate responses to diverse situations, valuing innovation at local level and linking education and training to its geographical and social territories [...]. (PROGRAMME OF THE XIII CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, 1996, p. 117).

The basic guidelines for relaunching Adult Education in Portugal were presented in this government programme as a strategic option of the government's educational policy, emphasizing the two following measures: (1) "negotiating an educational pact that guarantees a change in method, the continuation of policies, dialogue and the joint responsibility of all players in the education process", and (2) "the establishment of local education councils as democratically representative bodies of the various players and social partners, aiming to set the guidelines and to follow-up on the measures appropriate to the country's different realities" (PROGRAMME OF THE XIII CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, 1996, p. 67).

This new phase was marked by a neo-reformist rebalancing of Adult Education, with some initiatives and measures contained in an Education Pact for the Future directed at a new way of perceiving the decision-making process on education matters in Portugal. "The Education Pact for the Future was a key element in this strategy, requiring all education and social partners to be involved therein and, thus, the appeasement of the education sphere, dialogue and the definition of positive goals, valuing resolves and energies." (BENAVENTE, 2004, p. 73).

The Pact offered directions, strategic goals and immediate commitments. The aim was to draw up a reference charter for the various education segments. At local, regional and central levels, it sought to foster the establishment of new bodies, revalue existing ones and improve work conditions. Its main goals were:

- a) To call for a broad public debate on education problems and the solutions thereof, identifying priorities and concrete action;
- b) To broaden the concept of educational partner, identifying a vast number of social partners, which met with the opposition of the "traditional" partners (in particular the teachers' unions).

- c) Driving consensus on how policies should be run and consolidating actual responses does not mean unanimity and even less so conformity; this consensus must be based on possible convergences from different positions, interests and viewpoints [...], in terms of 'variable geometry', that is, through partnerships anchored in mutual advantages in specific areas, without fooling ourselves into thinking that imaginary agreements on all matters can be achieved.
- d) To create the conditions for some stability in education and for continuing underlying processes.
- e) To value the institutional framework of changes and of the concrete education activity, such that change is based on the sustained and sustainable transformation of organizations and practices.
- f) To promote changes in the attitudes and social practices towards dialogue, joint responsibility and consolidation of the results achieved.
- g) To develop gradual change strategies that encourage monitoring, assessment and correction mechanisms; the time for major centralized changes is over, and change must take into account the diversity of situations and requires the involvement of all educational partners. (BENAVENTE, 2004, p. 80).

On 19 September 1997, the government published Law 115, which amended, *inter alia*, Article 12 of the Portuguese Comprehensive Law on the Education System, now reworded to read:

- 1 – Access to higher education shall be granted to individuals who have completed a secondary education course or equivalent, who prove their competence to attend it.
- 2 – The Government shall define, through a Decree-law, the entry conditions for higher education, in compliance with the following principles:
 - a) Democracy, equity and equal opportunities;
 - b) The objective nature of the criteria used for selecting and ranking the candidates;
 - c) Universal rules for each higher education sub-system;
 - d) Valuation of the candidate's educational pathway in secondary school, as regards continuous assessment and national exams, translating the relevance of the national secondary education certification system into access higher education;
 - e) Mandatory use of the final grade of secondary education in the ranking process;
 - f) Coordination of higher education establishments to assess, select and rank the candidates so as to avoid the countless number of exams that they must sit;
 - g) Implement a national application process for enrollment and registration in public higher education establishments, without prejudice to local competitions, in well-justified cases;
 - h) Applications shall be conducted by central and regional education services.
- 3 – Within the limits specified by the preceding paragraph, the process for assessing the competence for attending the course, as well as that

of the selection and ranking of aspiring entrants to each course and higher education establishment shall be the responsibility of the higher education establishments.

4 – The State shall gradually eliminate the restrictions on the number of students entering higher education (*numerus clausus*) and create the conditions so that the courses, existing and to be created, match the needs of skilled workers, individual aspirations and the raising of the educational, cultural and scientific standards of the country, to ensure the quality of the education provided.

5 – Access to higher education shall also be granted to individuals over 25 years of age without a secondary education course or equivalent, who, although not holding a higher education degree, provide appropriate proof of having the competence to attend one.

6 – The State shall establish the conditions to guarantee that citizens have the possibility of attending higher education, so as to prevent the discriminatory effects arising from economic and regional inequalities or from previous social disadvantages. (PORTUGAL, 1997).

The new law strengthens the government's interest in creating the conditions for those over the age of 25 who have not completed a secondary education course or equivalent, to be able to access a higher education course, through an assessment that will measure their competence to attend it.

On 30 August 2005, the government presented the new amendment to the Comprehensive Law on the Education System (Decree-law 49, 2005), which impacted on Adult Education.

Article 12

[...]

1 - ...

2 - ...

3 - ...

4 - ...

5 – Access to higher education shall also be granted, under conditions to be defined by the government, by Decree-law:

a) To individuals over 23 years of age who, although not qualified to access higher education, provide appropriate proof of their competence to attend it, by taking special exams offered by the higher education institutions;

b) Holders of appropriate post-secondary school qualifications.

6 - ...

7 – Working students shall have special higher education access and admission schemes that guarantee the objectives of lifelong learning and flexibility and mobility of school pathways. (PORTUGAL, 2005).

In Law 49/2005, Article 12 was reworded, dropping the minimum age for sitting the entry exams required for higher education from 25 to 23 years of age, and one paragraph was added, making admission and attendance flexible for working students. This law changed the minimum age required for admission to higher education, lowering it, as part of a more flexible policy in the democratization of access of non-traditional students to higher education. In addition, as part of this flexibility and of the reform of the Portuguese higher

education, associated to the Bologna Process (OLIVEIRA, 2012), it also provided an opportunity for making the education system less rigid by giving each institution the responsibility for selecting adult learners, giving preference to professional experience and training of candidates, in accordance with Decree-law 64/2006, on the special conditions of access and admission to higher education. Thus, and together with the Pedagogical Regulation of the University of Coimbra (Regulation 321/2013, Article 10, “Class attendance”), it also contributed to retaining the working student in the Education Sciences course. “As attendance is not required, I can be more flexible while working and studying”. (STUDENT C, 2019).

As regards flexibility, more students over the age of 23 from Youth and Adult Education, with some relevant professional experience and training or who had interrupted their studies, were admitted to undergraduate courses in Portugal.

I started studying here at the University of Coimbra at the age of 44. I didn't study for some 20 plus years. First, because after I finished 12th year I applied to study, but was still doing the same thing. There weren't many opportunities and at the time there weren't any scholarships and opportunities, so I had to worked, then I worked, I built a house, had a daughter and went elsewhere. Basically, so as not to harm the family. A whole lot of options led to this distancing, which then later on led to new opportunities to study again, that's it. (STUDENT C, 2019).

On 21 March 2006, President Jorge Sampaio published Decree-Law 64/2006, which regulated the exams specially geared to assess the skills of those over 23 years of age to attend higher education. As the President stated, “the programme of the XVII Constitutional Government sets out that one of the objectives for the higher education policy is the promotion of equal opportunities to access this level of education, attracting new audiences, in a logic of lifelong learning” (PORTUGAL, 2006). He stressed the need to regulate the Comprehensive Law on the Education System so as to conform it to a new model that would cater for more candidates and enable admission to a larger number of individuals. Thus, albeit slow and gradual, admission opportunities increased.

“I hadn't studied for fifteen years. Due to circumstances of life, I stopped. My mother died and so there was a moment there... and I only resumed studies later on. My son was now more independent at school so I was able to accommodate school hours with my attending the undergraduate degree through the new admission opportunities. (STUDENT D, 2009).

For STUDENT D, the change in the law also contributed to her being admitted to the Education Sciences course at the University of Coimbra. She had not studied for fifteen years and, after a family readjustment, she managed to combine the new opportunities with the change in the law and her desire to take the Education Sciences course.

Students from Youth and Adult Education in the Pedagogy course of the Instituto Federal Goiano – Morrinhos

By looking into some of the characteristics of students from Youth and Adult Education studying Pedagogy at the Instituto Federal Goiano, research has also shed light on the overall characteristics of students taking the Pedagogy course at Morrinhos-GO. When the

course first opened in 2013, 40 students were admitted based on their High School National Exam grade (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio – ENEM*).

Overall, 55% of the Pedagogy course students came from public schools in the city of Morrinhos-Go and 45% from neighboring cities within 70 km. Their family income is below three minimum wages, 40% carry out some kind of paid work, and their parents have a low level of education. “This is the first course. I was admitted in 2015. I was already working in the field of education as a social educator in a project sponsored by Banco do Brasil called ‘BB comunidade’”. (STUDENT A, 2019). I was “encouraged by one of my brothers who also graduated when he was older together with his children, and he believed that we should have an education, have an opportunity to move forward” (STUDENT B, 2019).

Another highlight of the research findings is that studying in Youth and Adult Education can be a bridge to higher education as a result of the encouragement from teachers: “I didn’t study for 16 years before returning to Youth and Adult Education. There, I had a teacher who encouraged me so much and already had this class who was studying there, so I learned about the course.

The four-year Pedagogy course classes are taught in the evening and attendance is mandatory. As to there being learning issues when starting the Pedagogy course because they came from Youth and Adult Education, the students said that they found no difficulties and that their maturity at this stage of life even helped them cope with the challenges of a degree course. After resuming their studies, they stated that the changes were quite significant as far as their life was concerned. “I was admitted and I never imagined that I would completely change my way of thinking. I thought I would only enter because my sister wanted me to, but actually my mind changed after I did.” (STUDENT B, 2019).

Students over the age of 23 admitted through special entry exams in the Education Sciences course of the University of Coimbra

The Education Sciences course is offered by the University of Coimbra as a full or part-time programme, in daytime classroom based sessions at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. The Faculty dates back to 1911 and 1912, when Pedagogy and History of Pedagogy were taught for the first time at the University of Coimbra as part of the Philosophy course of the Faculty of Arts and of the Teacher Training course. The Education Sciences course began in the 1990/1991 academic year, with a very variable entrance rate, although the number has stabilized since 2016, with 70 students being admitted. Overall, students over the age of 23 come from public schools in the Coimbra district and interrupted their studies for many years and are, on average, 40 years old. Data collected by the course secretariat services show four students who studied Education Sciences in 2019 and who were admitted through special exams for students over the age of 23.

Classes take place in the morning and are not mandatory. Nevertheless, the students said that they frequently take part in the proposed activities. “Because of my age, I really like these classes. I find them very enriching. At first, I considered not attending some of them, but I really like the teachers, the relationship we have with them.” (STUDENT D).

The Portuguese students who participated in the research felt that being admitted to university is a personal achievement.

Raising my personal and professional worth can also bring me something, we’re always aspiring for more, for personal achievement, some value, learning, I felt I was at a standstill. I needed to do something new. I have a 22 year-old daughter. I am married. My parents finished the 4th year of school. They know how to read and

write. I have 5 other brothers, none of them studied; they only completed the compulsory schooling required at the time. I was the only one who completed secondary school and now, as an adult, I am here at university through a different form of access. I liked the study plan as a friend of mine told me she liked it a lot, and that was it. I like this area. I started in 2016. (STUDENT C).

During the interview, the students also spoke of the difficulty in entering university as a result of their life situation, where they had to play multiple roles, the fact that they entered through the special admission scheme and the effort it took to progress in the Education Sciences course. They mentioned there were no specific difficulties, but agreed that there the changes in their daily lives were significant. “My routine had to change, my effort was three, four times greater, right, but I am managing it, I have a lot of will power. I started studying here at the university at the age of 44. I didn’t study for some 20 odd years.” (STUDENT C).

Their future expectations as a result of being at university have also changed: “I must admit that I am really reflecting on it. I would very much like to work in this area, I would say that my goal is to have a go at it, but it’s a one step at a time process.” (STUDENT D).

Final comments

The education policies implemented in Portugal in the aftermath of the 25 April 1974 Revolution have not only contributed to expanding the pathways of young people and adults, but also encouraged progression to higher education. The narratives have helped us determine that, in general, the school pathways of students from Youth and Adult Education have been precarious, marked by school failure, and most of them work, are married and have been away from school for many years. The Brazilian students showed that they felt motivated to take a university course hoping to find a professional fit, while the Portuguese students, on the other hand, proved to be strongly motivated to seek personal achievement.

In general, they believe that higher education increased their intellectual curiosity, that they felt supported by their teachers and liked their educational strategies, positively highlighting their interpersonal relationship. The Brazilian students reveal that they found it more difficult to comply with the course workload, while the Portuguese students welcomed the fact that class attendance is not mandatory, so they have more freedom to manage their multiple roles and tasks.

Moreover, the research showed that historical studies point to a disregard towards Youth and Adult Education in Brazil, showing that the Republicans are in debt to the Youth and Adults who are illiterate.

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