

# Medicalization and pathologization of learning and the conduction of teaching and learning processes on campus Itaperuna of Iffluminense<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The medicalization and pathologization phenomenon has been constantly present in debates about school failure, a fact that demands a critical look from the education professionals. In this regard, this study seeks to understand how such phenomenon influences the conduction of teaching and learning processes in the Brazilian educational context, especially in Professional and Technological Education on the Itaperuna campus of the Federal Fluminense Institute . To achieve this purpose, after conducting a bibliographic research, a field study of an exploratory and qualitative nature was carried out through a interview and the administration of questionnaires aimed at understanding professionals' perceptions regarding the aforementioned topic. The data interpretation was carried out using the assumptions of content analysis and its results indicated a marked presence of medicalizing and pathologizing discourses on campus and the need for continued training work that deconstructs such a view among professionals.

**KEYWORDS:** Medicalization of learning; Pathologization of learning; Teaching and learning processes; Professional and Technological Education.

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*Medicalização e patologização da aprendizagem e a condução dos processos de ensino e aprendizagem no campus Itaperuna do Iffluminense*

**RESUMO**

Os fenômenos da medicalização e da patologização da aprendizagem têm marcado presença constante nos discursos sobre o fracasso escolar na contemporaneidade, o que demanda um olhar crítico dos profissionais de educação. Neste intuito, este trabalho busca compreender como tais fenômenos influenciam na condução dos processos de ensino em uma instituição de Educação Profissional e Tecnológica - o *campus* Itaperuna do Instituto Federal Fluminense. Para alcançar tal propósito, após a realização de uma pesquisa bibliográfica, foi realizada uma pesquisa de campo, de caráter exploratório e qualitativo, por meio da realização de uma entrevista e aplicação de questionários visando entender a percepção dos profissionais acerca da temática supracitada. A interpretação dos dados foi realizada por meio dos pressupostos da análise de conteúdo e seus resultados indicaram uma presença marcante dos discursos medicalizante e patologizante no *campus* e a necessidade de uma trabalho de formação continuada que desconstrua tal visão entre os profissionais.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Medicalização da aprendizagem; Patologização da aprendizagem; Processos de ensino e de aprendizagem; Educação Profissional e Tecnológica.

*La medicalización y patologización del aprendizaje y la conducción de los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje en el campus Itaperuna del Iffluminense*

**RESUMEN**

Los fenómenos de medicalización y patologización del aprendizaje han marcado presencia constante en los discursos sobre el fracaso escolar en la contemporaneidad, lo que demanda una mirada crítica por parte de los profesionales de la educación. Con este propósito, este trabajo busca comprender cómo tales fenómenos influyen en la conducción de los procesos de enseñanza en una institución de Educación Profesional y Tecnológica - el *campus* Itaperuna del Instituto Federal Fluminense. Para alcanzar tal propósito, después de realizar una investigación

bibliográfica, se llevó a cabo una investigación de campo, de carácter exploratorio y cualitativo, mediante la realización de una entrevista y la aplicación de cuestionarios con el objetivo de entender la percepción de los profesionales sobre la temática mencionada. La interpretación de los datos se realizó utilizando los presupuestos del análisis de contenido, y sus resultados indicaron una marcada presencia de discursos medicalizantes y patologizantes en el campus y la necesidad de un trabajo de formación continua que deconstruya esa mirada entre los profesionales.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Medicalización del aprendizaje; Patologización del aprendizaje; Procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje; Educación Profesional y Tecnológica.

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## Introduction

The reason why this research was done was the constant perception of the phenomena of medicalization and pathologization in discourses about school failure in the contemporaneity, including in institutions which offer professional and technological education. Frequently, the school problems are understood from individual matters of the students, exempting from responsibility the myriad factors which influence the educational phenomenon, above all the social ones.

According to Moysés and Collares (2020), western societies have been moving the problems native of human life to the medical sphere, which has been transforming collective matters into individual problems, presumably inherent to the biological field. Through this deterministic lens, the interaction between the biological and the environment is not taken into consideration or is not significant. The fact that each individual is a historical and cultural being who lives in community is not taken into account either. The authors emphasize that, with the advancement of modern science, medical knowledge has entered social spaces, taking over the power to define what is normal,

pathological, deviant, healthy and ideal to the human development. It is important to point out that this power has been continuously entering the educational field, defining criteria and establishing new forms of brain evaluation and human behavior.

Therefore, “dyslexic, hyperactive, inattentive, questioning brains and low IQ would justify school failure” (Moysés; Collares, 2020, p. 34). Through this view, the problems inherent to the educational environment would be consequence of conditions that medicine could solve. In this context, some health professionals tend to give explanations to the problems in the field of education based on the notions of pathology, deviation and abnormality, which transforms into medical and biological issues problems that are pedagogical and political, thus expanding the phenomenon of medicalization (Moysés; Collares, 2014).

Starting from these thoughts, this field research sought to identify how the matters of medicalization and pathologization influence on the conduct of the processes of teaching and learning on campus Itaperuna of IFFluminense. More specifically, the research was done so as to identify how such phenomena present themselves when it comes to types and recurrence of diagnoses among students and how the teachers organize their work regarding the presence of students with any kind of learning-related diagnosis. In order to reach the study goals, the field research focused on gathering information from the Support Center for People with Special Needs (NAPNE) and directly from the teachers who work on campus Itaperuna.

It is important to point out that NAPNE is a section that is present on every campus of Instituto Federal Fluminense, which aims to guarantee specialized educational service. This section was created with the goal of working on the guarantee of access, continuity and success of students with specific educational needs, as well as to offer support to teachers in the service to said students. In order to reach this goal, NAPNE is composed of a multiprofessional team (IFF, 2018).

Campus Itaperuna is one of the 12 campi of Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia Fluminense. It is located next to BR 356, in the city of Itaperuna, in the northeast of the state of Rio de Janeiro. The institute offers technical courses integrated to high school, concomitant technical courses, higher education and graduate degree courses.

### **Methodological approach**

For the development of this research, the chosen methodology was based on a qualitative approach, of applied nature, since it seeks to find solutions and applications to the practice. As of the procedure, it is a field research, the most suitable when the goal of the research is to gather information about a problem-situation, seeking an answer or to confirm a hypothesis (Lakatos; Marconi, 2003).

This study began through a bibliographic research on the “state of the art” about the pathologization and medicalization of learning. For this purpose, the referenced subject was searched on Portal de Periódicos da Capes/MEC on March 4, 2023, using the following keywords: “medicalização da aprendizagem”, “patologização da aprendizagem” e “educação profissional e tecnológica”. The search only found results when the subject was searched without being associated to professional and technological education. Thus, when searched on the previously said date, observing the following criteria: national production, Portuguese language, peer reviewed and published between 2013 and 2023, the following results were found (all of them with no relation to professional and technological education): 1 – thirty papers with the keyword “medicalization of learning”, and six of them were not directly related to learning per se; 2 – twelve papers with the keyword “pathologization of learning”, and six of them were not directly related to learning.

The articles “Infância e patologização: contornos sobre a questão da não aprendizagem” (Barbosa; Leite 2020) and “Medicalização e

patologização da educação: desafios à psicologia escolar e educacional” (Scarin; Souza, 2020) were found using the cited keywords. After the selection of the bibliography, reading and reviewing of the material was done, using the techniques of filing and summarizing. As soon as the bibliographic survey was done, the reading of the selected texts focused on conceiving the terms “pathologization and medicalization” and the understanding of how this matter has impacted the processes of teaching and learning. Despite that, the main goal of this step of the research, which was to find papers that approached the subject of medicalization and pathologization of learning in professional and technological education was not met due to the inexistence of works on the searched platforms.

Following the investigation, the field research step of the research was done, which used, as data collection tools, an itinerary for the development of an interview and a questionnaire, both applied to the workers of campus Itaperuna of IFFluminense. It was verified, with the coordination of people management of campus Itaperuna that, on May 2023, the teaching staff was composed of 79 active workers, and that the coordination of NAPNE, at that time, was exercised by a technical administrative professional in the position of social worker.

It is worth highlighting that all participants of the research signed a free informed consent (TCLE) made available to the respondents of the questionnaire both virtually and printed. It is important to highlight that the field research only started after the approval of the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), collegiate responsible for the monitoring of research with human beings, in order to contribute to minimizing risks and guarantee that the research is done following ethical principles.

The interview was done on campus Itaperuna, exclusively with the coordinator of NAPNE, with the goal of identifying the amount of medical reports presented to the section, as well as the CID described on each of them and the referrals that derive from these.

With regard to the teachers, targeted audience of this research, the data collection was done by means of the application of a questionnaire which had both open and closed questions. The questionnaire was forwarded to the teachers of campus Itaperuna through the institutional email in the period of July to August 2023, and was answered online on “Google Forms”.

Out of a total of 79 teachers preliminarily listed to participate in the research, 70 answered the questionnaire, 1 was transferred before the survey was done, while only 8 did not reply. It is worth to say that the anonymity of every participant of the study was preserved.

Proceeding, after the end of the collection of all the data, it was organized and analyzed through content analysis which, according to Bardin (1977, p. 44), “[...] seeks to know about that which is behind the words that it studies”. Therefore, the material collected during the field research, after careful and thorough analysis, was categorized and, right after, the calculation of the percentage of the obtained categories was done so as to facilitate viewing by the reader, since the research does not have the intention of representing statistically any universe of research.

### **The medicalizing and pathologizing viewpoint on campus Itaperuna: how the phenomenon presents itself**

The data collected by the research allowed for a better comprehension of the daily life of the institution and about the matters that permeate the relationship between students and teachers. The interview with the coordination of NAPNE was about the operation of the section on the researched campus, and also unveiling the quantity and situation of the students served by it. Thus, some remarks are worth highlighting.

It was ascertained that NAPNE, on campus Itaperuna, has been coordinated for two years by a technical administrative professional who

holds the position of social worker. Also, work at the section: a psychologist, a psychopedagogue, two translators/interpreters of Libras, two school mediators and a technician in educational matters.

The obtained data indicates that, in 2023, 14 students were attended to by NAPNE on campus Itaperuna. All of them had diagnoses, as well as medical reports issued by psychiatrists or neurologists. The diagnoses were presented spontaneously by either the students or their families. The list with the quantity of students attended to, as well as the course they were registered to is seen on Chart 1.

**CHART 1** - Amount of students attended to by NAPNE in 2023 by course

COURSE	STUDENTS ATTENDED TO		DIAGNOSIS PER STUDENT
	TOTAL PER COURSE	AMOUNT PER DIAGNOSIS	
Technical Course Integrated to High School in Chemistry	2	1	Dyslexia e ADHD
		1	Bilateral Hearing Loss
Technical Course Integrated to High School in IT	3	1	ASD e ADHD
		1	ADHD
		1	DMDD e ADHD
Technical Course Integrated to High School in Business Administration	2	1	ASD e ADHD
		1	Low Hearing
Technical Course Integrated to High School in Electrical Engineering	2	1	ASD
		1	ADHD
Technical Course Integrated to High School in Electrical Engineering Proeja	1	1	Hearing Loss
Technical Course in Mechanics	2	1	Tetraplegia
		1	ADHD
Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems	2	1	ASD
		1	ADHD

**Source:** Research data (2023).



Thus, it was observed that, in the school year of 2023, most of the attended to students had diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In brief, eight students had ADHD, which represented 44,4% of the cases, and four students had diagnoses of ASD, representing 22,2% of the cases. It matters to point out that four students had comorbidity: two of them had ASD and ADHD; one, dyslexia and ADHD; and the other Dysruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder (DMDD) and ADHD.

The diagnoses identified on the researched campus support the perception of Moysés and Collares (2014), that neurological or psychiatric disorders are almost the totality of cases of the diagnoses presented by students. According to the authors, dyslexia, ADHD, ASD, ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) and, recently, DMDD, have been frequently present in the medicalizing discourse in educational institutions. Moysés and Collares (2020) also state that modern society lives the “Age of Disorders”, in which is observed the uncontrolled raise in the number of all these diagnoses already known to the public, and also many other names created by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which are commonly associated with some kind of medicine.

With the intention of shedding light on the complexity of the school routine, teachers of the institute were given voice through the application of the questionnaire. It had both closed and open questions so it was able to understand the perceptions of the teachers regarding the proposed subject. The reading and rereading of all the obtained information allowed the data to be organized in percentage and categories created based on analysis and consideration of the replies of the respondents.

With respect to the categorization of the 70 respondents to the questionnaire, data indicates that 91% of them are effective teachers and 9% are substitute teachers. As of the gender of the respondents, 74% identify as male and, 26%, as female. More than half the sample, 56%, were between 31 and 40 years old; 21% between 41 and 50 years

old; 13% between 51 and 60 years old; 6% between 21 and 30 years old; and 4% were above 60 years old. It was possible to ascertain that, out of the practicing teachers on campus Itaperuna, 63% have licenciante degree; 59% have bachelor's degree; and 13% have technologist degree. Data indicates that 25% of the teachers have more than one degree and, for this reason, the percentage is above 100%. As of the level of education of the respondents, considering the highest degree, more than half (53%) have a master's degree, 31% have doctorate and 16% have graduate degree.

Regarding professional experience, the obtained information indicates that most of the teachers on campus Itaperuna have worked in education for more than 10 years: 37% have more than 15 years of work as teachers; 33% have between 10 and 15 years; 21%, between 4 and 9 years; and 9% below 3 years. The replies of the teachers also indicated that IFF was the first experience with teaching to 12% of the respondents, since eight of them affirmed never having worked as teachers before.

Continuing the research, the teachers were asked to think about their teaching practices and the students registered in the courses of campus Itaperuna. They were questioned about the amount of students that presented difficulty to learn the subject taught by them. The answer to this question indicates that 36% of the respondents affirmed having observed more than ten students with difficulty, 26% between 4 and 6 students, 15% between 1 and 3 students, 9% observed 10 students, 8% between 7 and 9 students and 6% affirmed not having observed any student with difficulty.

After that, the teachers were asked how many of the students who presented difficulty to learn their subject had some diagnosis related to learning. In response to the question, 42% of the respondents did not have any knowledge about any diagnoses; while 58% knew about at least one student with a diagnosis.

The teachers mentioned cases of ADHD, dyslexia, autism, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia, dysgraphia and hearing loss to specify the difficulty, disorder or pathology of the students (even though the answers also include cases of disability).

It matters to point out that, according to the coordination of NAPNE the diagnoses presented by the students, whenever necessary, are informed to the teachers by means of meetings or forwarding via Unified System of Public Administration (SUAP). This could be one of the reasons why the teachers showed familiarity with some of the names native of the field of health.

However, it's important to stress that, when asking the teachers about the kinds of difficulty identified in the processes of teaching and learning of the students of IFF, some answers showed a discourse permeated by the medicalizing and pathologizing view of medical knowledge, as, for instance: "*students which had a very big gap, with attention deficit and other situations involving matters such as dyslexia and autism*" (Respondent 12), "*chronological age and mental age distortion, difficulty to focus, indicating ADHD and/or ADD, signs of family conflicts which compromise learning, among others*" (Respondent 29), "*dyslexia, disgraphia, anxiety, 'fast thinking', hyperactivity, attention deficit etc.*" (Respondent 64), "*cognitive and/or behavioral*" (Respondent 28).

The Regional Council of Psychology of Rio de Janeiro indicates that "medicalization is, in principle, the denial of inclusion. That's because the diagnosis labels and, thus, excludes of the possibility of looking at people from their potentiality. We focus on their limitations!" (Conselho Regional de Psicologia, 2016, p. 18). It is perceived that, when observing the discourses of the teachers cited in the last paragraph, the presence of answers which talk about behavior or characteristics considered symptoms of disorders. In some answers, the names of such disorders are mentioned the way they are described on guides of health diagnoses, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders – DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2014) and the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems – ICD) (Organização Mundial de Saúde, 2019), to give examples of the difficulties attributed to the students. In their studies, Amarante, Pitta and Oliveira (2018) highlight this crescent invasion of terms native of the health area to the educational field and that tend to become common terms among professionals of education, families and even the students. The authors emphasize that in order to oppose this proposal, it is necessary to optimize the teaching practice so as to provide the demedicalization of school processes.

In the face of the presented scenery, in which school routine has been progressively permeated by practices connected to the medical speech, it is necessary to be vigilant to what happens at school seeking alternatives. From this perspective, it is important to understand the perception of the teachers on the matter. Also, trying to understand how much this medicalizing and pathologizing process inserts itself on campus Itaperuna of IFFluminense has impacted the accomplishment of the teaching process.

In the studied context, the collected data indicated that 94% of the teachers, when teaching, identified difficulties in the process of teaching and learning of the students of campus Itaperuna of IFF. In the face of this statement, the teachers were asked about the kinds of difficulty that had been identified. It's worth highlighting that this question was asked by means of an open question and that the sum of the percentage goes above 100% due to some answers having been identified in more than one category, as shows Chart 2.

**CHART 2** - In case you have marked yes to question 11, “when teaching your classes, have you ever identified difficulties in the processes of teaching and learning of the students of IFF?”, what kinds of difficulties have you identified?

<b>IDENTIFIED DIFFICULTIES</b>	<b>%</b>
Difficulty to read, write and interpret texts	40%
Learning gap	26%
Difficulty with logical and mathematical reasoning	24%
Difficulty with attention and concentration	24%
Indiscipline/Demotivation/Uninterest	21%
Difficulties related to executive functions	17%
Difficulties related to learning disorders/biological issues	16%
Difficulties to understand concepts	14%
Difficulties related to the teacher or the course organization	6%
Socialization difficulty	4%
Personal matters of the students	4%
Difficulty to memorize	3%
Difficulties related to public presentations	3%
Family-related difficulties	1%

**Source:** Research data (2023).

The obtained information indicates that most of the difficulties pointed out by the teachers are related to reading, writing and interpreting texts; to logical and mathematical reasoning; to learning gaps arising from middle school; attention and concentration and matters such as indiscipline, demotivation and uninterest of the students regarding their teaching and learning process. As it is known, the explanations to these difficulties are multifactorial and the social, economical, cultural and educational aspects should be highlighted.

However, 16% of the answers affirm that the difficulties presented are related to learning disorders and biological aspects of the students. As Patto (2015) points out, this kind of explanation is used to justify school failure, by means of a discourse that naturalizes this failure and

understands it from the point of view in which the failure of the students is caused by personal inability. Also, according to the author, this situation prevents the perception regarding the political intentions that are connected to the school failure.

It is worth highlighting that only 6% of the answers affirm that the difficulties presented by the students are concerning to the teacher or the organization of the course. This statement confirms Patto's (2015) view, that great part of the discourses about school failure hold the students and their families accountable and anchors themselves in the conception that learning difficulties are native of some intrinsic matter of the student. This individualization trend was also observed in a research done by Bassani and Viégas (2020) about the reasons why students in the municipal schools of Vitória-ES were directed to health services.

It is important to highlight that the processes of teaching and learning are marked by their complexity and dynamics. These processes are under the influence of external and internal factors to the learner. The interference of such factors can occasionally maximize or create barriers that end up impairing the whole school process. Regarding this matter, the teachers were led to list the myriad variables that contribute to the production of difficulties in the processes of teaching and learning. The three most cited factors were insufficient or inadequate previous school education (56%), family issues (21%) and the health/learning disorders of the student (20%).

It is interesting to observe that the most recurrent item points to a serious problem: the school gap. It was verified that 56% of the answers talk about the insufficient or inadequate previous school education of the students as generator of difficulties in the school process. This data goes in the same direction as a statement already discussed by authors such as Patto (2015, 2022) and Bassani and Viégas (2020): the educational system of the country, as a general rule, has provided the students a school process of low quality. Unfortunately, many students finish middle and high school

with learning gaps that interfere decisively in the continuation of their studies or their inclusion in the job market. This is an important point which needs to be discussed. If it is a structural problem, why seek individualizing solutions?

It matters to highlight that one of the purposes of high school, determined by Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional, in its article 35 is “I – the consolidation and deepening of acquired knowledge in basic education, allowing for the continuation of studies” (Brasil, 1996). However, how to consolidate and deepen something that has not been learned?

Following this logic, Bassani and Viégas (2020) emphasize that basic education in Brasil has reached terrible index according to information obtained through the systems of evaluation of education. In this perspective, considering it is a a national problem, the authors reflect if the education should or not be of pedagogical and political order. Patto (2022) states that the practices adopted by the educational system of the country have collaborated to the exclusion of many students who are not able to seize the knowledge even being at school every day.

Straight back to the replies of the teachers, it was also possible to notice that the learning and health disorders of the student are the third most indicated as responsible for contributing to the production of difficulties in the processes of teaching and learning factor. Such observation corroborates to demonstrate the presence of the phenomenon of medicalization and pathologization of learning on the researched campus. In their analyses, Collares and Moysés (1996) affirm that both the professionals of education and several sectors of society have the perception that health-related issues represent an obstacle to learning and, as a consequence, are one of the main causes of school failure.

Another relevant information ascertained by the research regards the fact that most of the respondents consider the medical report relevant to the development of the processes of teaching and learning. It is important to say that 50% of the respondent teachers affirm that the

report is very important and 43% say it is important. Only 7% of the respondents don't consider it relevant.

The relevance of the diagnoses, attributed by the teachers, to the development of their pedagogical practice is also an indication of the presence of the phenomenon of medicalization in the educational context. According to Angelucci (2014), the crescent dependence of education regarding medical knowledge is evident, since the teachers have sought support of medical knowledge in order to direct and conduct the processes of teaching and learning. The author considers that the medicalizing logic impregnated in education proposes that the access key to learning is made possible by knowing the characteristics, reasons and comorbidities of the subjects through their diagnoses, which ends up disregarding pedagogical knowledge and the way each individual interacts with knowledge. This way:

The medical logic is even more legitimized, by the discourse of the unnecessaryness of the educational knowledge, which should be substituted by triage processes, brief intervention and referral of students who have any pathologies to health services (Angelucci, 2014, p. 124).

In regards to the purpose of the diagnosis, to the respondents, the medical report can assist the teacher in the processes of teaching and learning in different ways: it contributes to indicate or supports in the adequation in the methodology and teaching strategy (49%), provides greater understanding of the difficulties and specific needs of the students (29%), assists the work of the technical pedagogical support teams and NAPNE's (13%), for the purposes of identification and classification of disorders 9%, supports the search for information/knowledge/training (7%) and helps in the adequation of the lesson plan to the needs of the student (4%). The answers are above 100% due to having been classified in more than one category.



In the face of the perception of the teachers on how the report can assist in the development of the processes of teaching and learning, it is important to be vigilant to the fact that the main factor to the adequation of methodologies and teaching strategies should be the teacher's experience, and not the diagnosis. In this search, Angelucci (2014) explains that it is necessary to have freedom and ethical and political commitment to think about school failure and about the school needs from the perspective of the educational sciences, in opposition to the crescent trend of the industry of creation and issuance of diagnoses related to learning.

The research also shows that, as well as the coordinator of NAPNE, the teachers affirm that the amount of learning-related diagnoses has been increasing: 86% answered that there has been increase in the number of dignoses, while 14% said they could not measure it. This increase in diagnosis is a recurrent topic of discussion of some authors, above all Moysés and Collares (2014, 2020). The authors emphasize that pathologization of life and learning has advanced in an alarming manner and warn that, constantly, "in downward spiral, each turn, more people are captured on this web of mental disorder diagnoses [...]" (Moysés; Collares, 2014, p. 61). In this perspective, 84% of the respondents classify this increase as positive, while 16% classify it as negative.

In the face of the answers given to justify the positive perception of the teachers regarding the increase in the number of diagnoses, some of them raise awareness and demonstrate how medical knowledge has become natural in the educational context. Such discourses show how urgent it is to discuss this subject so as not to lose focus of how important it is to value pedagogical knowledge and teaching experience. When evaluating the increase in diagnoses, a teacher affirmed that "[...] *the more diagnoses we have, the more effective actions we can take*" (Respondent 1), while another said that "[...] *every diagnosed person has the opportunity of receiving adequate support to their development and learning*" (Respondent 70).

On the other hand, in order to justify the negative perception on the increase in the number of diagnoses, the teachers pointed out many reasons. Among them, it is worth to highlight: “*it means our teenagers are getting sick*” (Respondent 59), “*not always are the diagnoses well developed by qualified professionals*” (Respondent 42) and “*the medicalization of the educational process has been, in many cases, accompanied by hurried diagnoses and abusive medication to the student*” (Respondent 55). It was observed that the discourses of respondents 42 and 55 indicate that teachers have a critical view over the diagnoses. In a similar direction, Bassani and Viégas (2020) reiterate that professionals of education and health who are worried with the development of the process of teaching and learning have, in the past few decades, mobilized to face the advance of medicalization. According to this positioning, it is worth to highlight the perception of respondent 25:

*[...] I confess that, sometimes, I ask myself about the quantity of medical reports, because many disorders can only be properly diagnosed with the follow-up of a multidisciplinary team and by means of the undertaking of many tests and examinations. I don't really know if all the cases of students who present a report to the schools have gone through this process. To be honest, sometimes I think that both the families and the schools want to have some sort of diagnosis in order to exempt themselves of the responsibility and the challenges that involve the education of children and teenagers.*

In their studies, Moysés and Collares (2020) report that some professionals have an uncritical academic background and that, when exercising the profession, issue diagnoses without adequate evaluation. These diagnoses do not consider the background of the person and anchor themselves in evaluation instruments with fragile scientific base. The authors also state that these professionals do not care about the consequences that the diagnosis may bring to the life of the

individual and, thus, “labels are weaved in the first impressions, in the biased look; labels that classify and support diagnoses which confirm them” (Moysés; Collares, 2020, p. 35).

It is evidenced that, so as to strengthen the resistance practices to the medicalizing and pathologizing logic in the educational environment, it is necessary to provide the education professionals with constant qualification to teach students bearing in mind the diversity of ways of being and learning. In the context of this investigation, this need is evidenced in the discourses of the teachers; when asked if teachers felt prepared to teach students having in mind their diversity, replies indicated that only 3% affirmed to be prepared, 75% indicated being partially prepared, and 22% did not consider themselves prepared to do this at all.

The arguments presented by the teachers to justify not considering themselves prepared or considering themselves partially prepared to teach students regarding diversity in ways of learning are presented on Chart 3. The answers presented by the respondents were organized in categories and, for analysis purposes, organized with the percentage of 100%.

**CHART 3** – Reasons why teachers consider themselves unprepared or consider themselves partially prepared to teach students regarding diversity in the ways of learning

<b>DON'T CONSIDER THEMSELVES PREPARED</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>CONSIDER THEMSELVES PARTIALLY PREPARED</b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of knowledge, qualification and training	44%	Lack of knowledge, qualification and training	50%
Vast diversity of students	25%	Vast diversity of students	25%
Complexity of the process of teaching and learning	6%	Lack of experience	11%
Lack of concrete actions by the institute	6%	Existence of different pathologies	6%
Difficulty to approach students	6%	Matters related to the teachers' workload	6%
Answered no, but did not justify	13%	Too many rules and institutional demands in the evaluation process	2%
Total	100%	Total	100%

**Source:** Research data (2023).

It is noted that the lack of knowledge, qualification and training made 44% of the respondents answer that they were not prepared, and 50% to consider they were partially prepared. Likewise, 25% of the respondents affirmed they were not prepared to teach or were partially prepared to teach due to the vast diversity of learners. The lack of experience was also pointed out as the cause of the unpreparedness of the teachers, resulting in 11% of the answers of those who considered themselves partially prepared.

Thinking about this subject, Insfran, Muniz and Araujo (2019) emphasize that the institutionalization of medical knowledge, in the educational context, makes professionals of education discredit the potential of their knowledge to deal with the daily matters of a classroom, causing feelings of anguish and despair. Many teachers do not feel prepared to deal with school problems, which are, many times, understood from individual matters of students or as demands of special educational service. Based on the above considerations, Insfran, Muniz and Araujo (2019) emphasize the

fact that, among other reasons, both the delegitimization of medical knowledge and the helplessness felt by the teachers have been reasons why teachers become ill.

Moreover, it matters to highlight that 87% of the respondents affirmed that, during their undergraduate years, they had not studied about difficulties, disorders and pathologies related to learning. Thus, only 13% of the respondents affirmed having studied about this subject when in college. This could be one of the reasons why many teachers have this feeling of helplessness to teach the diversity of students present at schools.

Furthermore, the teachers were asked if they had ever taken any training course or had contact with any pedagogical support material whose subject involved the difficulties and/or disorders that affect learning. It was observed that 33% of the respondents affirmed they had never had contact with the subject, while 21% affirmed they had contact only once. Nevertheless, 46% of the respondents affirmed that they had already had contact with the subject more than once. It is thus noted that, despite the fact that difficulties of learning impact decisively in the processes of teaching and learning, there are still many teachers with little or no training about the topic in this context. Insfran, Muniz and Araujo (2019, p. 103), when pondering over the gaps in the qualification of teachers of the country, explain that, even with the reforms and counter-reforms instituted by National Education over many years,

“[...] even so, we are not able to break the cruel principle of a scientific medical discourse being superior to that of a teacher, who lives, every day, the challenging hardships of the educational reality in effect”.

Reiterating the debate, the teachers had the opportunity of answering a question which asked specifically if they had ever heard about the phenomenon of medicalization and pathologization of

learning. It matters to say that more than half the respondents (51%) affirmed they had never heard about the subject, 46% had little information about it, and only 3% affirmed having knowledge about the subject. This observation strengthens the perception of Insfran, Muniz and Araujo (2019) that, despite the fact that the term medicalization emerged in the decade of 1970, its use is still not widely known by most people. Thus, this data indicated the necessity of approaching this subject in the context of educational institutions.

From the presented situation, the teachers were asked about their perception regarding the importance of discussing the topic of medicalization and pathologization of learning. The answers indicated that 74% affirmed they consider it important to discuss the topic, and 26% affirmed they did not know how to answer. In face of this scenario, the last question proposed in the questionnaire was about the interest of the respondents in receiving material about inclusion, medicalization and pathologization of learning: 99% affirmed being interested in it.

In order to meet this demand and give the campus some return, the researchers developed an educational product in the form of a manual named “Difficulties and disorders that affect learning in school: a depathologizing guide for the teacher”<sup>4</sup>. The product has free access and is available for consultation and propagation both by professionals of IFFluminense and the external public.

## Conclusion

The field research, developed on the campus Itaperuna of IFFluminense, showed that the medicalization and pathologization of learning have also been present in the scenario of institutions that offer

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<sup>4</sup> POTENTE, Ronia Carla de Oliveira Lima; FELIPPE, Jonis Manhães Sales. *Dificuldades e transtornos que afetam a aprendizagem na escola: um guia despatologizante para o professor*. 2024. Disponível em: [https://portal1.iff.edu.br/o-iffuminense/pesquisa/pos-graduacao-stricto-sensu/mestrado-profissional-em-educacao-profissional-e-tecnologica/produtos-educacionais/produto-educacional-ronia-potente\\_compressed.pdf/view](https://portal1.iff.edu.br/o-iffuminense/pesquisa/pos-graduacao-stricto-sensu/mestrado-profissional-em-educacao-profissional-e-tecnologica/produtos-educacionais/produto-educacional-ronia-potente_compressed.pdf/view).

Professional and Technological Education, as is the case of the researched campus. Discourses marked by this view have been used to justify the school failure of students who, even inserted in schools, have not been able to appropriate knowledge. It was observed that the medicalizing and pathologizing logic is progressively intertwined with the daily practices of the educational context.

A counterpoint to the individualization of school failure indubitably goes through the qualification of professionals of education. However, a solid qualification, able to break with the dominant ideas that control the educational system and undermine the autonomy of public schools will only be possible by means of critical thinking and encouragement of a well-reasoning ethical, political and intellectual qualification, as emphasized by Patto (2015). Nevertheless, while this qualification is not possible, it is necessary to report and fight against the establishment of medicalizing practices in every level of the educational institutions (Carvalho; Viégas, 2020).

The obtained conclusions confirm the necessity of thinking about the myriad factors which impact the processes of teaching and learning: political, cultural, economic, social, educational and individual factors. They also demonstrate that it is essential to build an educational system that considers the different ways of being, living and learning.

It is evident that a society that fights for respect for diversity must guarantee this respect is also present in the educational system. Thus, it is necessary to build a new paradigm which reinforces the comprehension that each individual has their own skills and characteristics in their school process. Recognizing and knowing how to work with the social and individual differences is a necessary way to an ever-inclusive education.

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