

Youth and Adult Education for students with disabilities: practices and reflections¹

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyse the pedagogical practices directed at special education students served by special education in the Youth and Adult Education (YAE) type, as well as to investigate the articulation between YAE and Special Education. With a qualitative and bibliographic approach, the research was conducted through a survey on the CAPES Portal, resulting in the selection of 15 scientific articles. The data were organized into two categories: pedagogical practices and the articulation between Youth and Adult Education and Special Education. The results show that teachers in Youth and Adult Education face challenges in supporting students with disabilities, mainly due to gaps in their initial training and limited opportunities for continuing education, which affects the quality of their pedagogical practices. It was also observed that access to Specialized Educational Services (SES) is limited for this group. The study concludes that it is essential to invest in teacher training, promote collaboration between educators, and strengthen public policies that ensure the right to inclusive education.

KEYWORDS: Special Education. Inclusion. Youth and Adult Education. Educational Practices.

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Educação de Jovens e Adultos para estudantes com deficiência: práticas e reflexões

RESUMO

Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar as práticas pedagógicas voltadas aos estudantes Público da Educação Especial (PEE) na modalidade da Educação de Jovens e Adultos (EJA), além de investigar a articulação entre a EJA e a Educação Especial. Com abordagem qualitativa e bibliográfica, a pesquisa foi realizada no Portal de Periódicos da CAPES, resultando na seleção de 15 artigos. Os dados foram organizados em duas categorias: práticas pedagógicas e articulação entre EJA e Educação Especial. Os resultados apontam que os professores da EJA enfrentam desafios no atendimento a estudantes com deficiência, principalmente devido a lacunas na formação inicial e à escassez de formação continuada, comprometendo a qualidade das práticas. Observou-se também o acesso restrito ao Atendimento Educacional Especializado (AEE). Conclui-se que é essencial investir na qualificação docente, promover o trabalho colaborativo entre professores da EJA e da Educação Especial e fortalecer políticas públicas que garantam o direito à educação inclusiva.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação Especial. Inclusão. Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Práticas Educativas.

Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos para estudiantes con discapacidad: prácticas y reflexiones

RESUMEN

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las prácticas pedagógicas dirigidas a los estudiantes atendidos por la educación especial en la modalidad de Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos, así como investigar la articulación entre estas dos modalidades educativas. Con un enfoque cualitativo y bibliográfico, la investigación se realizó mediante un relevamiento en el Portal de Periódicos de CAPES, que resultó en la selección de 15 artículos científicos. Los datos se organizaron en dos categorías: prácticas pedagógicas y articulación entre la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos y la Educación Especial. Los resultados muestran que

los docentes de la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos enfrentan dificultades para atender a estudiantes con discapacidad, principalmente debido a lagunas en la formación inicial y a la escasa oferta de formación continua, lo que afecta la calidad de las prácticas pedagógicas. También se observó un acceso limitado al apoyo educativo especializado. Se concluye que es fundamental invertir en la formación docente, fomentar la colaboración entre profesionales y fortalecer las políticas públicas que garanticen el derecho a una educación inclusiva.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Especial. Inclusión. Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos. Prácticas Educativas.

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Introduction

Youth and Adult Education (YAE) and Special Education share a long historical background in Brazil, established even before the current legal frameworks that regulate them. In common, both types of education had their emergence constituted by segments parallel to general education, marked by the predominance of the welfare and compensatory perspective aimed at its public (Siems, 2012). From the 1990s onwards, significant progress was made in the legal instruments that regulate YAE and Special Education, such as the Federal Constitution of 1988 and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (1996), which establishes YAE as an educational space for those who did not have access to school or who interrupted their studies earlier (Brazil, 1988; Brazil, 1996; Brazil, 2000). This period marked an important milestone in the recognition and guarantee of the right to education for all.

According to Article 37 of Law No. 13.632/18 (Brazil, 2018, p. 1), YAE is intended for young people and adults who “[...] did not have access to or continuity in their studies at the elementary and secondary levels at the appropriate age, and shall constitute an instrument for education and lifelong learning.” Historically, as a type of education that has encompassed

a large number of socially excluded people, YAE assumes reparative, equalizing, and qualifying functions, according to the National Education Council Opinion No. 11/2000 (Brasil, 2000).

In 2008, the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education established the right of special education students to schooling, promoting their access to regular schools and guaranteeing specialised educational support (Brazil, 2008).

According to Trentin (2017, p. 2), the document reflected “[...] a political, cultural, social, and educational action in defence of the right to quality education and the organisation of an inclusive educational system capable of addressing the diversity present in regular classrooms and in the Youth and Adult Education type.” Since then, there has been an increase in the number of special education students enrolled in YAE in regular schools, resulting from the expansion of access and the recognition of education as a human right at any stage of life (Siems, 2012; Trentin, 2017). Consequently, educational practices aimed at special education students have become an emerging topic in research, exploring how teaching for these students has been developed within YAE. An important aspect identified in studies is the need for teaching to be meaningful to these learners (Siems, 2012; Tassinari, 2019).

Much has been discussed about school inclusion, especially in mainstream education, considering that special education students have a legal guarantee to be present in all levels and types of education, in addition to the right to lifelong learning (Brazil, 2015).

Siems (2012) emphasises the importance of developing specific practices capable of meeting the demands and differences of these individuals. Tassinari (2019) notes that teachers working in this type are often unprepared to address this context and to design educational practices that promote development. It is essential to consider the plurality of these subjects “[...] people with cultural, ethnic, gender, and religious differences,

with diverse trajectories and life stories, and who therefore aspire to a truly flexible curriculum consistent with their realities” (Tassinari, 2019, p. 63).

It is common to observe infantilizing practices within the context of YAE, which can compromise students’ development and self-esteem. One of the most evident forms of this is the use of teaching materials and educational activities inappropriate for the students’ age group, often treating them as children rather than as learning adults (Fernandes; Gomes, 2015).

The infantilization of activities in YAE can also occur through teaching methodologies that underestimate students’ experiences and prior knowledge, disregarding their life contexts and making meaningful learning more difficult. This can create a demotivating environment and foster feelings of devaluation and inadequacy, hindering students’ engagement and academic progress (Reus, 2017).

Infantilised content often stems from a naive approach to adult education, described by Pinto (2007) as a “regressive view” that considers the illiterate adult as a child who stopped developing culturally, applying to them the same teaching methods and even the same textbooks used in childhood. This perspective implies a supposed “resumption” of mental development for an individual who has remained culturally stagnant at a childlike stage, regarding the adult as a “late learner“.

When the adult is also a person with intellectual disabilities, infantilisation intensifies, as society perpetuates stereotypes about their abilities, needs, and lack of autonomy. Infantilisation can be reinforced by the lack of access to resources and opportunities that allow for the full development of the skills and potential of people with disabilities. The absence of appropriate adaptations in educational settings and the underestimation of their abilities contribute to this cycle, denying them the opportunity to participate fully in society as independent and autonomous adults (Trevisana, 2022).

Contextualisation plays an important role in the teaching and learning process for YAE students, allowing for a more meaningful connection between classroom content and students' real-life experiences. In a context where many learners return to school after being away for some time, contextualisation helps make concepts more accessible and relevant, facilitating comprehension and knowledge assimilation. By relating study topics to everyday situations, professional, family, or social learning becomes more engaging and motivating (Santos; Barreto, 2020).

Contextualising learning enables students to perceive the importance and knowledge application in their daily lives, contributing to the development of practical and critical skills. When they understand how concepts learned at school can be useful in various contexts, students feel more engaged and confident, increasing their autonomy in the learning process. Thus, contextualisation makes learning more interesting, effective, and long-lasting (Melo, 2020).

This practice becomes even more crucial for special education students, as contextualisation in YAE for learners with disabilities helps break stereotypes and prejudices by recognising and valuing the diversity of experiences and abilities present in the classroom (Alves; Santos, 2021).

Another important aspect is preparing special education students for more active and independent participation in society. Through contextualisation, YAE students with disabilities can achieve holistic development and acquire practical and social skills relevant to daily life and employment. By connecting school content to real-life situations, such as the use of assistive technologies or daily living activities, students are empowered to apply their knowledge more effectively across contexts (Fantacini; Campos, 2017).

Given this, the present study aimed to analyse scientific articles published between 2015 and 2023 concerning educational practices for special education students in Youth and Adult Education (YAE) and the articulation between these two educational types.

Method

This is a qualitative study conducted through bibliographic research. According to Pradanov and Freitas (2013), bibliographic research is important because it encompasses the main theories that guide scientific work. Its purpose is to place the researcher in direct contact with all the material that has already been written on the subject in question.

The data were collected from the CAPES Portal (Portal of Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel). The search terms used were “youth and adult education” *and* “special education” *and* “educational practices”. A total of 58 papers were initially found. After the search, the authors of this study read the abstract of each paper found to identify those that met the inclusion criteria, that is, studies addressing educational practices for special education students in Youth and Adult Education (YAE) between 2015 and June 2025. This time frame was established in accordance with the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Brazil, 2015), which promotes lifelong learning opportunities for people with disabilities.

Duplicate papers, review papers, or those that did not address the topic were excluded. In total, 15 articles were included.

For data analysis, all articles were read in full by the authors of this study, and the data was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet containing fields for registering information relevant to the research focus, such as the title, author, year, objectives, method, and main results. After data extraction, the results were organised into thematic categories following the framework proposed by Franco (2008), involving the stages of pre-analysis, coding, categorisation, and interpretation.

Results and discussion

The results were organised into two thematic categories. The first category included eight articles that discussed educational practices in Youth and Adult Education (YAE). The second category comprised seven studies that focused on the articulation between the two educational types, YAE and Special Education.

Educational Practice in YAE

According to the findings of a study conducted by Tassinari, Galvani, and Campos (2019), regarding the educational planning of activities developed for students in YAE, the authors found that, in many cases, no prior planning took place. The activities carried out often lacked relevance or connection to the students' current contexts and realities. Furthermore, teachers reported being unaware of the need for curricular adaptations or differentiations that could benefit these students' learning processes. They felt unprepared and demonstrated a lack of knowledge about how to work with students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in YAE.

Trentin (2021) highlights that educational practices encompass the structuring of the curriculum, the teaching of content, and the way knowledge is transmitted, including initiatives focused on diversity. These practices aim to promote interaction among different individuals and types of knowledge, making it essential to assign meaning to purpose and actions in order to create processes that make learning meaningful.

For Bueno and Oliveira (2019), teachers recognise the importance of curricular adaptation as a key element for developing more effective educational practices with YAE students who have ID. At the same time, they express concern about how these students will cope after completing school, acknowledging that they may face social barriers. The authors emphasise that families play a crucial mediating role in this context.

Teachers act as mediators between students and the curriculum. Therefore, it is important that educators understand how to make curricular adaptations that can enhance the learning process of students with intellectual disabilities.

In a later study, Bueno and Oliveira (2023) found that teachers reported implementing curricular adaptations in assessments and providing additional time for activities. They also recognised that such adaptations positively contribute to teaching and learning processes. However, teachers still expressed the need for greater classroom support, particularly regarding the development of curricular components involving abstract concepts, which are the most difficult for students with ID to learn.

Bastos (2022) argues that educational practices in YAE should consider the importance of psychosocial aspects. It is fundamental to understand each learner's uniqueness, individuality, culture, diversity, personal history, physical characteristics, and the dynamic interaction between the individual and their social environment. These aspects must be respected so that students are not seen as incapable or helpless. Therefore, the school must go beyond its physical structures or furniture, it should be a space of opportunity, reconstruction, and a second chance.

Despite existing challenges, students tend to have positive interactions with peers, and their main motivations for completing their studies relate to the opportunity to continue their education after YAE, enter and remain in the labour market, and achieve social development (Bueno; Oliveira, 2023). In this sense, both school and YAE represent valuable opportunities for developing autonomy, for example, in managing money, shopping, preparing for employment, and achieving social integration (Bueno; Oliveira, 2019).

Furthermore, Bueno and Oliveira (2019) reinforce that teachers acknowledge the importance of curricular adaptation as a key factor for developing assertive educational practices with students with ID in YAE. However, they also express concern about the post-school transition and the

social barriers that these students may face, recognising families as essential mediators in this process (Bueno; Oliveira, 2019).

Regarding the perception of YAE, it is viewed not only as an opportunity for literacy and learning to read and write but also as a means for expanding knowledge, promoting personal and professional development, and exercising full citizenship. In addition, it serves as a space for interaction and socialisation that values students' life stories and experiential knowledge. Nevertheless, learners face several barriers, such as difficulties balancing work and study, and lack of family support to continue or remain in school. At the same time, some teachers and institutions still resist including students with ID in this environment. Therefore, teachers require initial and ongoing training that equips them to effectively support these students (Fantacin; Campos, 2017).

Barbosa and Keller-Franco (2020) highlight the importance of educational practices oriented toward a functional curriculum, encompassing activities aimed at developing essential life skills. These include promoting self-awareness, personal care, multisensory training, and the exercise of independence, as well as interpersonal relationship skills that enable participation in daily life with autonomy. The authors emphasise the "YAE Interventive" educational approach, which seeks to design a curriculum that meets students' needs, including adaptations and flexible learning times, along with the provision of Specialised Educational Services (SES), a special education service designed to remove barriers and ensure full participation of special education students. Such practices should facilitate the educational trajectory of students with disabilities, supporting their academic development, easing their learning process, and preparing them for the labour market, thus promoting their integration into society as full citizens with rights.

It is crucial to rethink and adapt educational practices to meet students' individual needs, including those of young people and adults with disabilities in the YAE context. This involves considering individual

educational trajectories and integrating students' social knowledge with academic learning, moving away from infantilising approaches. Educational practices should go beyond limitations and vulnerabilities. The school can become an effective environment for fostering human and social development when there is a clear understanding of students' specific needs and an inclusive educational approach (Hass, 2015).

There is a pressing need to create and implement new educational approaches in YAE for special education students that promote their holistic development and encourage the exchange of information and knowledge among all participants in the educational process, without discrimination, by valuing diversity and individuality and ensuring equitable participation for all learners (Ortiz, 2019).

Educational practices in YAE thus represent a significant field of investigation and intervention within the contemporary educational context. By recognising the diversity of students' needs and potential, as well as the challenges faced by educators in promoting inclusive and quality education, it is possible through student-centred approaches, proper teacher training, and the use of innovative and adaptive educational strategies to provide meaningful learning experiences and opportunities for comprehensive development for all learners.

The Articulation between YAE and Special Education

YAE students with disabilities constitute a diverse group, with distinct life experiences and learning paces. This diversity highlights the need for a reflective approach by teachers, who must understand that each student brings their own needs and internal challenges (Laercio Filho & Silva, 2023).

Regarding the articulation between YAE and Special Education teachers, the absence of collaboration among professionals or the unavailability of SES for these students is a common issue (Tassinari,

Galvani & Campos, 2019). The scheduling of SES during the opposite school shift has also been identified as a major obstacle. Bueno and Oliveira (2023) found that YAE students often struggle to attend the service during the opposite shift, as many are employed during that time. Access to SES is therefore one of the main challenges reported in the literature. For Holanda, Pereira and Ferreira (2021), the lack of access to such services affects the schooling process of students, so it is essential to expand the SES offer for those who work and can only attend school at night.

School administrators recognize that access to quality education for people with disabilities must be guaranteed as a right. However, they also admit that inclusion still has a long way to go, meaning that governments, schools and society must develop more effective practices to promote genuine inclusion. As the authors emphasize, there is a need for the YAE curriculum to be adapted to the characteristics and demands of its students. Likewise, schools must provide conditions that ensure the permanence and success of YAE learners throughout their schooling process. Furthermore, significant investment is required, since educators play a crucial role in the inclusion and schooling of these students (Holanda, Pereira & Ferreira, 2021).

Hass and Baptista (2017) argue for the need to understand the interaction between the individual and collective histories of students with disabilities enrolled in YAE to enhance the educational process and pedagogical practices directed at this group. This requires contextual understanding to develop flexible approaches that foster active student participation rather than limiting it in advance. It is necessary to create an inclusive environment that values and accepts diverse voices, promotes individual responsibility and encourages an ethical understanding of life.

Teachers working in YAE contexts must possess special skills and heightened sensitivity in their pedagogical practices, as many students face challenges such as low self-esteem and experiences of failure in their

personal and community lives. Therefore, a differentiated approach is needed, one that prioritizes the recovery of self-esteem and citizenship. Teachers must become familiar with each student's life story, believe in their potential and continuously encourage their personal and professional growth. They should also seek continuing education opportunities to improve their pedagogical practices, as they often lack the confidence to apply more specific teaching strategies suited to their students' contexts (Rodríguez, Dutra & Storto, 2017).

Leite and Campos (2019) observed a significant lack of public policies that take into account the specific characteristics of students with disabilities in YAE. According to the authors, this negatively affects the pedagogical practices adopted in schools, causing YAE to maintain a traditional curriculum disconnected from students' daily experiences and realities. Moreover, teachers are often unprepared to deal with the current needs of these students.

The articulation between YAE and Special Education promotes greater social and educational inclusion by providing equal opportunities for access to education and by encouraging active and meaningful participation for all students. In this sense, strengthening and improving the interface between these two modalities is essential to ensure quality and inclusive education.

The analysis of studies addressing pedagogical practices in YAE for students with disabilities indicated that not all teachers carry out prior planning of activities or lessons. There is also a lack of knowledge about how to adapt the curriculum for these students, combined with insufficient preparation to work in this context with this group. As a result, many activities become disconnected from the students' realities and actual learning needs.

The Brazilian Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008) establishes that education should promote social participation and the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market. Moreover, it guarantees access to

inclusive education systems and lifelong learning at all levels for all people with disabilities (Brazil, 2015). However, in the context of YAE, there is still a need to provide more resources to support teachers who work with students with disabilities, giving them the opportunity for an education that promotes social inclusion, preparation for work, further studies, and life after school.

Bueno and Campos (2020) observed that the main challenges faced by teachers working in YAE with students with disabilities relate to how to develop pedagogical practices that effectively meet this group's needs. Teachers must have a better understanding of each student's specificities to adequately respond to their educational needs. In this context, collaboration between the Special Education teacher and the regular classroom teacher is essential. Although their roles are distinct, they can work together effectively. According to Brazilian legislation (2009), the responsibilities of the Special Education teacher include developing and implementing special education plans together with regular classroom teachers, as well as collaborating with them to create strategies that benefit the inclusion process of students with disabilities.

In this regard, collaborative teaching represents a valuable approach, as both Special Education and regular classroom teachers share responsibility for planning, assessing, and developing activities for all students, not only for those with disabilities (Mendes, Villalonga & Zerbato, 2014).

Furthermore, the limited opportunities for continuing education for these teachers compromise the schooling process of students with disabilities, many of whom receive pedagogical practices that are disconnected from their realities, lack meaningfulness, or fail to meet their needs. According to Pereira (2020), it is necessary to understand that inclusion requires collective work from different agents within society.

As a priority for an inclusive education proposal, it is necessary that the work be developed collectively, involving inclusion policies, the school team, curriculum flexibility, adaptation of the regular school, and professional development so that educators can deepen their knowledge to improve their practices and teaching methods based on students' differences (Pereira, 2020, p.143).

To this end, the legislation guarantees students with disabilities an inclusive educational system and specialized educational services, providing “[...]other services and reasonable accommodations to meet the characteristics of students with disabilities and ensure their full access to the curriculum on an equal basis, promoting the achievement and exercise of their autonomy” (Brazil, 2015, p.13).

Thus, inclusion requires the development of a school culture that recognizes and values differences and is capable of providing meaningful pedagogical practices in accordance with the specific demands of its student population.

Conclusion

This article analyzed how pedagogical practices have been developed in the national scientific literature in the context of YAE for students with disabilities, as well as the articulation between YAE and Special Education.

Even with an established inclusion policy over the past decades, several challenges were identified in this scenario. These include gaps in initial teacher education and the lack of continuing professional development for those working in this modality, which affects the organization of pedagogical practices, often making them inadequate for this student population. In addition, teachers face difficulties in organizing

pedagogical processes that make the school a meaningful space for meeting students' needs and promoting their social and educational inclusion. This is compounded by the absence of an inclusive culture that recognizes the importance of collaboration between regular classroom teachers and Special Education teachers, which is essential to support the schooling process of students with disabilities.

In this context, schools face the significant challenge of responding to the primary needs of their students, ensuring that the formative process in YAE provides real opportunities for social and occupational inclusion and fosters autonomy for adult life after school.

The relevance of this topic is evident, highlighting the need for further discussions on pedagogical practices for students with disabilities in YAE. In light of this, future research is suggested on interventions related to YAE and Special Education, as well as the role of initial and continuing teacher education in this modality, identifying gaps and specific needs for the development of more effective teaching and learning strategies.

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