

CHARACTERIZATION OF TEACHING PERFORMANCE IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE SPECIALIZED IN THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

CARACTERIZAÇÃO DA ATUAÇÃO DOCENTE NO ATENDIMENTO EDUCACIONAL ESPECIALIZADO NA EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS DURANTE A PANDEMIA DO COVID-19

CARACTERIZACIÓN DEL DESEMPEÑO DOCENTE EN EL SERVICIO EDUCATIVO ESPECIALIZADO EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE JÓVENES Y ADULTOS DURANTE LA PANDEMIA COVID-19



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ABSTRACT: The study aimed to analyze the perspectives of teachers on their performance in specialized educational services (AEE) for target students of special education (PAEE) in the teaching modality for young people and adults (EJA) during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven AEE teachers participated, who attended PAEE enrolled at EJA. For data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was used, and the analysis was based on content analysis. The results were presented in five categories: activity planning; activities, resources, and support during the pandemic; frequency of activities carried out by teachers and feedback from students during the pandemic; articulation of teaching activities with the reality of families during the pandemic; teaching activity in the education of young people and adults in times of pandemic. It is concluded that remote teaching brought possibilities and needs for changes that can favor teaching in AEE at EJA.

KEYWORDS: Special education. Specialized educational service. Education of young people and adults. COVID-19.

RESUMO: O estudo teve como objetivo analisar as perspectivas dos docentes sobre a atuação no atendimento educacional especializado (AEE) para os alunos público-alvo da educação especial (PAEE) na modalidade de ensino de jovens e adultos (EJA), no período da pandemia da COVID-19. Participaram da pesquisa sete professores do AEE, que atendiam PAEE matriculados na EJA. Para coleta de dados, utilizou-se um roteiro de entrevista semiestruturado, e a análise baseou-se em análise de conteúdo. Os resultados foram apresentados em cinco categorias: planejamento das atividades; atividades, recursos e apoio na pandemia; frequência das atividades passadas pelos professores e devolutiva dos estudantes na pandemia; articulação da atuação docente com a realidade das famílias na pandemia; atuação docente na educação de jovens e adultos em tempos de pandemia. Conclui-se que, o ensino remoto trouxe possibilidades e necessidades de mudanças que podem favorecer o ensino no AEE na EJA.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação Especial. Atendimento educacional especializado. Educação de jovens e adultos. COVID-19.

RESUMEN: El estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las perspectivas de los docentes sobre su desempeño en los servicios educativos especializados (AEE) para estudiantes destinatarios de educación especial (PAEE) en la modalidad de enseñanza para jóvenes y adultos (EJA), durante el período de la pandemia de COVID-19. Participaron siete docentes de la AEE, que cursan el PAEE matriculados en la EJA. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó una guía de entrevista semiestructurada y el análisis se basó en el análisis de contenido. Los resultados se presentaron en cinco categorías: planificación de actividades; actividades, recursos y apoyo durante la pandemia; frecuencia de actividades realizadas por docentes y retroalimentación de estudiantes durante la pandemia; articulación de las actividades docentes con la realidad de las familias durante la pandemia; Actividad docente en la educación de jóvenes y adultos en tiempos de pandemia. Se concluye que la enseñanza remota trajo posibilidades y necesidades de cambios que puedan favorecer la docencia en AEE en la EJA.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación especial. Servicio educativo especializado. Educación de jóvenes y adultos. COVID-19.

Introduction

The theme of this study focuses on the performance of teachers and their experiences in Special Education Services (AEE) in Youth and Adult Education (EJA) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supported by Article 205 of the Federal Constitution of 1988, the guarantee of education is a right for all and must be ensured by the State and the family, free of charge (BRASIL, 1988). The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, Law No. 9.394 of 1996, in its Article 58, emphasizes that Special Education is a form of education that should preferably be offered in regular education, and should encompass all modalities, levels, and stages of education, providing specialized educational assistance (AEE) (BRASIL, 2008).

There are efforts to consolidate AEE in EJA through legislation, which indicates a transition in the educational landscape aimed at promoting individual development and social inclusion, as well as seeking opportunities for participation and learning for students with disabilities (GLAT; ESTEF, 2021; HOLANDA; PEREIRA; FERREIRA, 2021). However, despite legislation guaranteeing the rights of individuals targeted by special education and specialized educational assistance, the (in)visibility of this population in EJA persists, along with the lack of normative and guiding documents for this group (SIEMS, 2012; CAMPOS; DUARTE, 2011; HASS, 2013; LIMA, 2015).

Amid this context, there is the provision and operation of AEE in EJA and the difficulties encountered by students with disabilities in accessing services. For example, the lack of AEE offerings in the evening shift of regular schools is highlighted, which prevents many students with disabilities who require this assistance from accessing it because they cannot attend the opposite shift (as required by the legislation) due to work commitments (CAMPOS; DUARTE, 2011).

Holanda, Pereira, and Ferreira (2021) emphasize that there are numerous intertwined challenges in social dynamics, which require broader engagement from the entire community, both in terms of structural transformations and attitude changes to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in EJA.

The study by Bueno and Olivera (2022) addresses the education of young people, adults, or elderly individuals with disabilities in the final years of Elementary and/or High School, which lacks representation and is negligible compared to other forms of education, noting that the early years concentrate the highest number of research studies. The authors also question

the policies of permanence, continuity, and development of Specialized Educational Assistance (AEE) in EJA and conclude that this topic is seldom discussed and constructed under a structure that overlooks the specificities and needs of this modality, dissolving them in a generalized manner.

In addition to the lack of studies and the difficulties identified in AEE in EJA, this work highlights the aggravating factor of the COVID-19 pandemic scenario, in which many sectors were affected due to social distancing and adopted sanitary measures. The educational system stands out here, as face-to-face activities were suspended, and remote activities began using Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDIC) (RONDINI; PEDRO; DUARTE, 2020).

According to Nicodemos and Serra (2020), it is a concerning situation to relate EJA in the context of the pandemic, as remote teaching requires access to and knowledge of TDICs, which differs from the reality of many teachers and students. Before the pandemic, there were already problems in the provision of EJA, and with the pandemic, these problems became more evident (MARTINS CORREIA; NASCIMENTO, 2021).

Additionally, the literature review study by Martins Correia and Nascimento (2021) aimed to reflect on the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on EJA and concluded that, as it is composed of young people and adults of different ages and experiences, it is necessary to rethink the actions of the teaching process, especially regarding the use of TDICs, respecting the pace and knowledge of the students to ensure meaningful learning.

Given the challenges faced by Youth and Adult Education (EJA) and Specialized Educational Assistance (AEE), especially for historically marginalized populations, and considering the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, the study aimed to characterize the performance of teachers in AEE for students with Special Education Target Audience (PAEE) in the EJA modality during the pandemic period.

Method

The study, of a qualitative nature, is characterized by an exploratory field research approach, employing a case study strategy (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2003).

The study was submitted to the Federal University of São Carlos Ethics Committee and approved under protocol number CAEE 39393820.7.0000.5504.

Sample

Seven teachers who carried out their activities in Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) in the Youth and Adult Education (YAE) modality in regular schools in Brazil participated in the study. The selection of participants was conducted through contact established via social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Email, and WhatsApp), using specific groups of these platforms composed of SEA teachers. The characteristics of the participants will be detailed below.

Table 1 - Characterization of participants

	Age	Formation	Continuing Education and Year
P1	34	Pedagogy	Specialization: Psychopedagogy; Literacy and Reading; Special and Inclusive Education
P2	-	Geography Pedagogy	Specialization: Educational Planning; Psychopedagogy; Applied Neuroscience to Education; Specialized Educational Assistance Courses: Art Therapy; Emotional Art Master's degree in gifted assessment.
P3	34	Performing Arts (Licentiate and Bachelor) Pedagogy	Specialization: Autism Course: Physical Education for Inclusion
P4	40	Pedagogy	Specialization: History of Brazilian Education; School Management; Special Education Master's degree in sustainable rural development
P5	28	Geography Pedagogy	Specialization: Specialized Educational Assistance Course: Continuing Education in Inclusive Education and Sign Language Master's degree in Geography Teaching
P6	39	Pedagogy	Specialization: Visual Impairment; Autism; Deafblindness
P7	52	Pedagogy and Mathematics	Specialization: Inclusive Education; Psychopedagogy

Source: Compiled by the authors.

It was observed in Table 1 that the age range of the participants ranged from 28 to 52 years old. Representatives from all five regions of Brazil were present, with two from the Southeast region (P1, P6), two from the Midwest region (P3, P5), one from the Northeast region (P2), one from the South region (P4), and one from the North region (P7). Regarding their education, all seven teachers had a degree in pedagogy, four had a second degree in another area, and all had continued education in the field of special education.

Instrument and Data Collection

For data collection, a semi-structured interview script was used to characterize the participants, aiming to bring researchers and AEE teachers closer together and to understand teaching practices in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the EJA modality.

Data collection was conducted online, and participants responded to the instrument in a location and application of their preference. Transcription and validation of the interviews were performed, with participants verifying for consent or alterations.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was performed based on Franco (2005), and five categories were identified: 1- Planning of activities; 2- Activities, resources, and support during the pandemic; 3- Frequency of activities given by teachers and feedback from students during the pandemic; 4- Articulation of teaching practices with the reality of families during the pandemic; 5- Teaching practices in adult and youth education during the pandemic.

Results

Below, the research findings are described according to the analysis categories. Table 3 presents how teachers planned activities during remote teaching during the pandemic, divided into interviews with parents, student profiles, student feedback, projects, teacher materials, and diagnostic assessments with the students.

Table 3 - Planning activities during the pandemic

Planning activities during the pandemic	Participants'	Illustrative quotes
Interviews with parents	P1, P2	"I conducted some interviews at school with some families, and the rest were done over the phone. I prepared based on what I knew, the initial interview that I did, and the difficulties that the family reported to me. So, I will work on the difficulties that I already knew at the beginning." (P1)
Student profile	P4, P7	"[...] first by the characteristics of each one, the profile of each one of them, I am assembling activities [...] I have to work starting from things

		they already know, like errorless learning, also with things they like" (P7)
Through student feedback	P1	"After I saw his video doing the activity, I modified his activity a little more, because I had a different view. I modified it a little more to make it simpler for him to do, to make it easier and accessible for him [...]" (P1).
Projects	P6	"The sessions during the pandemic are focusing on project themes, so we had projects for the first, second, third, and fourth quarters." (P6)
Teacher's material	P5	"We agree with the teachers, the teacher sets it and we work with the teacher's material." (P5)
Diagnostic assessment with student	P2	"I do a preliminary diagnosis of them, I do this work [...] So, I do this survey to know how he is in various aspects [...]" (P2)

Source: Compiled by the authors.

In the pandemic context, school planning has gained more importance due to the difficulty teachers have maintaining contact with their students, requiring them to modify their practice and planning approach (BITENCOURT, 2021). In this case, it is noted that teachers have adopted different methods to carry out teaching planning during the pandemic.

Activities, resources, and support during the pandemic

In this section, the most utilized resources by teachers to ensure students' access to education during remote learning were presented.

Table 4 - Resources used by teachers during the pandemic

Resources	Participants	Illustrative phrases
Activity workbook	P2, P4, P7	We formulated these activity workbooks, as I mentioned, and they were made available for parents to take home." (P7)
Workbook	P1, P5	"I look at other workbooks to see which ones are easier for them." (P1)
Printed material	P1, P6	"The school is offering him specific printed activities because of his difficulty with technology." (P6)
Municipality material	P1, P4,	"Our AEE coordinator suggested that we prepare our activities based on the municipality's material." (P1)
Internet material	P1	"There's something I find on the internet and then modify a few things." (P1)
School blog	P1	I prepare the material, then I send it to the school by email, and the school posts it on the blog." (P1)
Bank of permanent activities	P2	"I create a bank of permanent, physical activities so that they have activities, workbooks, so I always have the bank of activities for them to do at home." (P2)
WhatsApp	P2, P4, P5, P6, P7	"So I have to stay in touch via WhatsApp, via phone to explain all these issues [...] I have a 'zap' where I have all the moms." (P2)
Telephone	P2, P5	"We try to talk, I call, I have more contact with the parents, I ask how they are." (P5)
Videos	P2, P4, P7	"Like a cool, short YouTube video that can be watched on a cell phone, I share those with them." (P2)

School TV	P1	"The municipality started 'TV in school' through the local channel. Every day has a fixed time for each age group, and every week they provide the program and the subject that will be covered." (P1)
Google Meet	P7	"[...] it provides videos and has online meetings through Meet." (P7)
Google Classroom	P6	We have Google Classroom, but it doesn't actually work; it's just to fulfill protocol." (P6)
Microsoft Teams Platform	P5	"We're using Teams, but there's a lot of bureaucracy with creating institutional emails, and the platform's organization isn't very instructional; it's confusing, even for us." (P5)
Games	P2, P3	"The mother picked up some games from the school like puzzles, tangrams, mobile alphabet, word formation[...]" (P3)

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Teachers have adopted various resources to ensure students have access to educational activities during the pandemic, ranging from printed materials to online resources. Thus, the most utilized resource was WhatsApp, which five teachers reported as the most practical channel for communicating with students and families and for sending activities.

Due to the influence and social and cultural integration of social networks in normal times, considering the pandemic, educators believe in enhancing these resources to reach learning and exchange among students (MANCA, 2020), which justifies WhatsApp as one of the most used options.

Also noteworthy are activity workbooks, where three teachers reported that they developed materials for families to carry out activities at home. Teaching applications during a pandemic should provide access to education for all social strata of the country in a way that no student is disadvantaged (CUNHA-JUNIOR *et al.*, 2020; MOREIRA *et al.*, 2020).

Regarding the support provided to teachers for their work and access to resources offered by the school for the development of materials and activities, five teachers indicated that they were able to use materials in various formats (digital, printed) and adapted the curriculum as necessary. However, teachers P3 and P7 mentioned that they needed to purchase materials with their resources.

According to Almeida, Cavalcante, and Mello (2021), one of the greatest challenges during remote teaching is related to inclusive practices, so that PAEE students participate in activities and are assured of learning the content just like other students. As shown in the present study, teachers adopted various resources to ensure PAEE students had access to education, but not all locations and institutions have the financial means to purchase adequate materials and provide for all students, or to print materials among other things. In these cases, teachers have gone to great lengths to fulfill their duties, especially in remote teaching.

We no longer have weekends, we keep giving a few breaks, but we know that sometimes there are students who only have that Saturday, that Sunday when the parent is available to teach, and there are days when it's ten o'clock at night and we're talking to a student or a crying parent (P6, our translation).

In agreement, Saraiva, Traversini, and Lockmann (2020) point out that teachers are working beyond the scheduled hours, being available to answer online questions, planning, sending, and correcting student activities.

Frequency of activities assigned by teachers and feedback from students during the pandemic

The table below shows the frequency of activity submission by teachers, how they organized the content to be covered, and whether there was feedback from students.

Table 5 - Frequency and return of activities submitted during the pandemic

Activity routine		Participants	Illustrative phrases
	Weekly	P1, P6, P7	"The agreement is to assign the activity once a week." (P6) "For some students who had financial means, I would send the file weekly." (P7)
	No routine	P2, P5, P3	"The mother goes to the school, at a certain time, and picks up these activities." (P2)
Feedback on activities	Positive	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7	"The feedback decreased a bit, but the feedback I mean is sending activities for that week or fortnight, because they used to send me every week. But now they say they are doing them. So, I believe they are doing them. But I'm not getting that feedback." (P1). "They film them doing the little work. I have this feedback. [...]. And the mother films, takes pictures of the drawings." (P2) "To return the activity, it's my photo, he doesn't type, he does everything in the notebook, takes a photo, and sends it." (P6)
	Negative	P3	"But nobody contacts me [...] When I go after helping the teachers, I help with something, I don't see the return of the activities done by the students [...]" (P3)

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Regarding frequency, three teachers sent materials weekly, while the other three did not establish a specific routine, delivering materials according to the families' availability. Regarding the feedback on activities, the majority of teachers (six of them) reported receiving feedback, sometimes through photos and videos and, in other cases, through the families' reports. As Ries, Rocha, and Silva (2020) highlighted, receiving feedback on activities is crucial for the teaching-learning process, especially during remote teaching, as it allows for monitoring and guiding students.

However, despite the positive feedback on activities, teachers emphasized the difficulty in determining if learning was taking place. Even though students were completing and returning the proposed activities to teachers, it was not feasible to fully monitor and evaluate the entire teaching and learning process.

Alignment of teaching practice with the reality of families during the pandemic

This theme addressed the reality of families during the pandemic in terms of implementing activities at home.

Table 6 - Reality of families during the pandemic

Family Reality for Activity Implementation	Participants	Illustrative Phrases
Lack of proficiency to assist with activities	P1, P2	For the families of these children who lack education, providing support for them to learn is unfeasible." (P2)
Unavailability to assist	P2	"At home, they don't have this, the mother works, has other children, and has to take care of the house." (P2)
Financial difficulty (lack of materials/equipment, no internet access)	P1, P2, P3, P5, P7	"In remote work, first, they don't have a computer, the family doesn't know how to use the computer, they don't know how to use the phone, there's no internet. When there is internet, it's the kind where you have to add more credit when it runs out." (P2) "The majority don't have internet access, they're really humble, there's no computer at home, some have a phone, others don't." (P5)
Difficulty with technology	P2, P6,	"There's the case of C. and two other mothers who don't get along with technology, they can't, they have difficulty and end up doing the bare minimum because of this difficulty." (P6)
Family assists students with activities	P4	"Their mother assists them at home, so the activities come out perfect, colorful, very well done." (P4)
Difficulty in printing materials	P7	"The printing of materials as well, because it's either not happening or it's happening two months later." (P7)

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The greatest difficulties pointed out by the teachers were related to some families lacking access to the internet and the necessary equipment for remote learning. There were also challenges on the part of parents in using electronic devices and accessing platforms.

In the study conducted by Dias-Trindade, Correia, and Henriques (2020), aimed at understanding the transition from face-to-face to digital education in primary education, it was highlighted that one of the negative aspects is the disparity in the socioeconomic conditions of

families. This includes the lack of adult assistance during activities, the scarcity of equipment and internet access, and families' difficulty with technology.

Moreover, as Cordeiro (2020) pointed out, families had to adapt their routines to take care of the house, work from home, and support and assist their children with school activities. Some families faced difficulties in keeping up with school activities due to lack of time, teaching inexperience, or mastery of academic content. Additionally, the lack of technological resources or unfamiliarity with technology made it difficult to follow classes and activities.

Teacher Performance in Youth and Adult Education During the Pandemic

Several studies between 2020 and 2022, the years with the greatest social impacts due to the pandemic in Brazil, indicate that teacher performance in Youth and Adult Education (YAE) was challenging, whether in Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) or in other teaching methods (CARNEIRO, 2020; CUNHA-JÚNIOR *et al.*, 2020; FANTINATO; FREITAS; DIAS, 2020; LIMA; PIRES; SOUZA, 2020; SANTOS, 2020; BITENCOURT *et al.* 2021; MACHADO *et al.*, 2021; SILVA; FREITAS; ALMEIDA, 2021; BOLFE; PORTILHO, 2022; LAERCIO-FILHO; SILVA, 2023).

Teacher performance became more intense in terms of actions and responsibilities that teachers had to take on themselves during the period when the pandemic was imminent (MACHADO *et al.*, 2021; LAERCIO-FILHO; SILVA, 2023). These responsibilities involved teaching actions and dealing with curricular adaptations and a new way of communicating with students and other individuals involved in their teaching and learning process (SILVA; FREITAS; ALMEIDA, 2021).

As an example, Bitencourt *et al.* (2021, p. 20, our translation) present that "the teacher as a mediator of knowledge needs to be in constant learning and, in the current pandemic scenario, needs to have knowledge of technological tools." This is because, the author reveals in their study that teachers have difficulties articulating the use of technological materials with students, as these students lack these resources, often due to economic and social disadvantages. The difficulty with technology use in Brazil is not a situational issue, as many studies indicate, as well as the data collected in this research (DELFINO *et al.*, 2020; FARIAS *et al.*, 2020; SILVA; FREITAS; ALMEIDA, 2021).

This was a reality highlighted by most participants, however, P1, P2, and P6 emphasized it more acutely, complaining about the difficulties caused by the absence of these resources.

Many of them were negative novelties for teachers because they were not accustomed to using technologies in such a massive way as during the COVID-19 pandemic period (BOLFE; PORTILHO, 2022). Moreover, there is still the fact that "teachers were compelled to develop new practices, in environments previously used mainly for simple information exchanges, or even for recreations" (FANTINATO; FREITAS; DIAS, 2020, p. 111, our translation).

In this regard, the question arises of how to overcome these challenges or supplement the solutions some of the participants mentioned in their accounts. Bolfe and Portilho (2022, p. 239) present in their study that "Teachers reported that as difficulties arose, dialogue with colleagues and students became fundamental for learning something that is still new." Thus, it can be inferred that dialogues underpin various fundamental factors for implementing the inclusion perspective, such as collaboration and dialogues among those involved with the inclusion of students enrolled in EJA.

When asked about receiving additional training during the pandemic, of the seven participating teachers, only one responded that they did not receive training, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7 - Additional teacher training during the pandemic

Additional Training During the Pandemic	Participants	Exemplary Phrases
Received	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7	"We teachers are currently receiving training on the integration of new technologies, so we are learning a lot right now." (P4) "This week the specialized unit already started the course on digital tools." (P7)
Did not receive	P3	"I did not receive any support from the management or training course for the pandemic, or how to work... I take separate courses [...]" (P3)

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The teachers who reported receiving training said that it was aimed at integrating new technologies into remote teaching and enhancing skills. Cordeiro (2020) emphasizes that not all teachers in Brazil have adequate training to use new digital tools, thus needing to reinvent themselves and learn new teaching and learning approaches. Lima *et al.* (2020) support this idea, highlighting the importance and necessity for professionals working in schools to be trained in the use of information technologies, as many do not master them or have insufficient knowledge to apply them in teaching.

Final considerations

Based on the results presented, it was possible to analyze the teaching performance in Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D) in the Youth and Adult Education (YAE) modality during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was observed that through different technological resources and support materials, it was possible to maintain the teaching-learning process of the students, showing that the efforts of the teachers were successful, as six out of seven participants mentioned positive feedback from students regarding the activities provided.

One of the difficulties identified by the teachers was related to the financial situation of the students. In some cases, families did not have access to the internet, did not have resources to acquire the necessary electronic equipment to participate in remote learning, or faced difficulties with technology. Additionally, there was a lack of support for teachers to work remotely; in some cases, they did not receive support from school management. However, it is important to note that not all institutions have the financial resources to acquire materials and provide them to all students. This may be related to the lack of support received by the institution itself, which prevents the allocation of resources to professionals and families.

Therefore, remote teaching brought other possibilities and demands for changes that can benefit teaching in Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA) in Youth and Adult Education (YAE). It is important to emphasize that this population requires special attention, as well as different forms of support, resources, and strategies to maintain the teaching and learning process. In this sense, it is suggested that more studies be conducted addressing the theme of SEA in YAE, exploring the equipment, materials, and strategies necessary to promote inclusion and the effective participation of this population in the school context.

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