

Navigating the Educational Landscape: Enhancing Youth Adult Education (EJA) in Brazil
Through the Paulo Freire Method

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the historical significance and contemporary dynamics of *Educação de Jovens e Adultos* (EJA) [Youth and Adult Education] in Brazil. I aim to comprehensively understand the socio-political contexts that have shaped EJA by tracing its evolution from the colonial era to today. Then, I investigate the literacy dynamics within EJA settings and explore Paulo Freire's pedagogical method to see if it can enhance literacy inside EJA. Using the relevant literature and legal Brazilian documents, drawing on personal experiences and insights gained from an internship in a public school in Brazil, and the narrative of my mother's journey through EJA literacy, I offer valuable perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in adult education. Through this research, I aim to underscore the importance of EJA in promoting social justice, empowerment, and inclusive growth in Brazil while highlighting the enduring legacy of Paulo Freire's pedagogical philosophy in shaping educational practices and policies in the country.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved mother, Lucilene.

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List of Abbreviations

CEPLAR	<i>Campanha de Educação Popular na Paraíba</i> [Campaign for Popular Education in Paraíba]
CNE	<i>Conselho Nacional de Educação No. 11/00</i> [National Council of Education No. 11/00]
ENCEJA	<i>Exame Nacional para Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos</i> [National Examination for Certification of Youth and Adult Competencies]
FHC	<i>Fernando Henrique Cardoso</i>
FNEP	<i>Fundo Nacional de Educação Primária</i> [National Fund for Primary Education]
FUNDEB	<i>Fundo de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica</i> [Federal Education Development Fund]
HDI	<i>Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano</i> [Human Development Index]
IBGE	<i>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística</i> [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics]
INAF	<i>Indicador de Alfabetismo Funcional</i> [Functional Literacy Indicator]
INEP	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira</i> [National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira]
LDB	<i>Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional</i> [Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education]
MCP	<i>Movimento de Cultura Popular</i> [Popular Culture Movement]
MEB	<i>Movimento de Educação de Base</i> [Method; the Basic Education Movement]
MOBRAL	<i>Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização</i> [Brazilian Literacy Movement]
PAF	<i>Programa de Alfabetização Funcional</i> [Functional Literacy Program]
PAS	<i>Programa Alfabetização Solidária</i> [Solidary Literacy Program]

PBA	<i>Programa Brasil Alfabetizado</i> [Brazil Literate Adults Program]
PEI	<i>Programa de Educação Integrada</i> [Integrated Education Program]
PNE	<i>Plano Nacional de Educação</i> [National Education Plan]
PRONATEC	<i>Programa Nacional de Acesso ao Ensino Técnico e Emprego</i> [National Program of Access to Technical Education and Employment]
PROEJA	<i>Educação Básica na Modalidade de Educação de Jovens e Adultos</i> [Basic Education in the Modality of Youth and Adult Education]
PROJOVEM	<i>Programa Nacional de Inclusão de Jovens</i> [National Program of Inclusion of Youth]
SECAD	<i>Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização, Diversidade e Inclusão</i> [Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, and Diversity]
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

The right to education is essential and can significantly impact an individual's future achievements. However, access to education remained particularly challenging in Brazil for youth and adults who missed earlier opportunities due to various socioeconomic and personal reasons or never had the chance to study. The EJA program was established on April 24, 2007, through Decree No. 6093 to address this concern. In 2008, EJA became part of the *Leis das Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (LDB) [Laws of guidelines and bases of Education] and was recognized as a public right. The EJA program was created to ensure educational rights for people unable to complete primary education earlier in life, offering them a second chance to obtain essential literacy and educational skills. Although the foundations of EJA in Brazil have their origins with the arrival of the Portuguese in the country, the program has evolved through various historical changes and was officially established in 2007. For many people, adult education means making up for the primary education they missed. For the many individuals who received only a very incomplete education, it complements elementary or professional education. For those whom it helps respond to their environment's new demands, it is the prolongation of schooling. It offers further education to those who have already received high-level training. And it is a means of individual development for everybody (Faure, 1972).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2018) accentuated the critical role of education in addressing poverty and inequality and fostering sustainable development, a message particularly pertinent in Brazil's complex educational landscape shaped by historical, social, and gender-based factors. These factors have entrenched significant barriers to inclusive growth, perpetuating educational difficulties, particularly for adult learners, and hindering social progress in Brazil. Education is widely regarded as a primary

instrument for individuals to transform their circumstances. Reflecting on the experiences of EJA students like my mother highlights education's role in rectifying historical injustices and restoring the denied right to education. Despite a notable advancement in educating young people and adults, this thesis aims to understand how the past shaped the current educational model in EJA classrooms to comprehend how literacy is happening inside this setting and how Paulo Freire's method can be beneficial in enhancing literacy inside EJA classrooms.

My Interest in the Topic

My interest in this topic stems from its inherent significance to a substantial portion of the Brazilian population, particularly those unable to complete primary education earlier in life. This interest deepened during an internship where I had the opportunity to witness firsthand how EJA literacy unfolds daily. As a future educator, I witnessed the impact of literacy education, and it developed in my indignation. This feeling came to fruition when my mother enrolled in an adult literacy program. Several obstacles prevent people in Brazil from accessing education, including poverty, early marriage, early parenthood, lack of access to schools, and the need to support oneself or one's family. Gender inequality and social norms also play a significant role in the high illiteracy rate in Brazil. Women, in particular, face limited or non-existent access to education and opportunities due to gender discrimination. My mother's experience is a compelling example of this. As a result, most illiterate individuals in Brazil are women. Persistent gender inequality in education leads to higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment for women compared to men (UNESCO, 2022).

Additionally, poverty is identified as the primary reason for the high number of youths and adults dropping out of school before completing primary education. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes that education is a fundamental and

universal right (United Nations, 1948). Here, universal means in all countries, for all girls and all boys, and, as we often forget, at all ages.

I believe in improving adult education by providing literacy classes that relate to students' experiences and offering flexible and relevant learning opportunities. Making learning engaging, meaningful, and relevant to learners is crucial to their success. Students in adult education have hopes for a better future and have the right to receive a quality education. Moreover, as someone from a family with an illiterate mother, as an educator and a student, I understand that the classroom is where dreams, hopes, and learning come together. I see the classroom as a place that weaves these elements into the lives of its students.

Research Questions

This thesis aims to delve into the literacy process within the EJA context and explore avenues for its enhancement. Specifically, the research aims to understand how literacy occurs within EJA settings and how it can be bolstered. To achieve its purpose, the research will be guided by the following questions:

How does literacy unfold within the EJA setting?

Understanding the intricacies of literacy development within EJA classrooms is paramount for devising effective interventions. A comprehensive analysis of this process is vital for pinpointing areas requiring improvement. Investigating the dynamics of literacy in EJA settings is crucial to devising practical strategies to address literacy challenges.

Can the Paulo Freire method enhance literacy in EJA settings?

Another pivotal aspect of the research involves exploring the potential of the Paulo Freire method for improving literacy outcomes within EJA contexts. Following an understanding of literacy dynamics within these settings, evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of Freire's

pedagogical approach is imperative. This investigation seeks to ascertain whether implementing Freire's methodology can elevate literacy outcomes in EJA settings.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into four chapters. The first chapter examines the history of Education EJA in Brazil, from the colonial period to the present, including EJA during the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso to Jair Bolsonaro. It highlights the considerable influence of Jesuit priests during the colonial era and the subsequent transition of educational responsibilities to the state. Throughout history, there have been several periods that have perpetuated educational inequality in Brazil. However, on March 29th, the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização* (MOBRAL) [Brazilian Literacy Movement] was introduced through Decree No. 62,484 and established during the military regime to address illiteracy. According to Di Pierro (2005), in 1969, MOBRAL underwent significant changes, moving away from its original pedagogical focus. Pressured by the tightening grip of the military regime, MOBRAL initiated a mass campaign, distancing itself from technical proposals that were based on the pre-1964 experiences of its employees. Instead, it reshaped itself into a program addressing marginalized individuals' educational needs while aligning with the military governments' political objectives. The proposal assumed education as an investment to qualify the workforce for the country's economic development. Rodrigues (2011) argued that MOBRAL was much more focused on literacy, within a mechanical perspective of literacy instruction, marking a regression compared to previous Freirean experiences. It is worth noting that the learners were prevented from human formation. The chapter also explores the transformative potential of social movements like the Paulo Freire Method, disrupted by the 1964 military coup. Drawing lessons from historical

experiences, the chapter stresses the importance of informing future educational policies grounded in inclusivity and social justice, promising a brighter future for Brazilian learners.

The second chapter thoroughly explores literacy within the Brazilian context, focusing on EJA. The chapter begins by tracing the historical evolution of literacy in Brazil, highlighting its definition, and understanding its transformations throughout history. Drawing on scholarly perspectives from Schwartz (2006, 2012) and UNESCO (2006). Then, I analyze literacy rates and classifications, utilizing data from reliable sources such as Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) (2022) [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] and INAF (2018) to grasp the intricacies of literacy rates in Brazil and their implications. Additionally, it integrates legal documents, scholarly insights, and firsthand experiences to present a comprehensive analysis of literacy dynamics in practice. By highlighting teachers' and EJA students' challenges, this chapter advocates for comprehensive government policy reforms and increased investment in teacher training to address literacy disparities effectively.

The third chapter delves into the potential of Paulo Freire's pedagogical method to enhance literacy within the EJA. Building upon the historical backdrop of EJA in Brazil explored in previous chapters; it scrutinizes how Freire's educational philosophy can effectively address the complex challenges of literacy within the EJA framework, uncovering the transformative impact of Freire's methods, prioritizing critical thinking, reflective action, and empowerment among adult learners. In its broadest sense, education should enable a crucial world reading. Regarding the purpose of education, according to Paulo Freire (1983), literacy is more than just the mechanical mastery of techniques for writing and reading. Then, I navigate Freire's rich legacy, elucidating his enduring commitment to transformative education and social justice and examining Freire's specific relevance for EJA, elucidating how his method has profoundly

influenced this educational domain. By reviewing the stages of the Paulo Freire Method and its application, the chapter will reflect on its adaptability, particularly within the specific context of EJA, aiming to unveil how Freire's method can revolutionize literacy education and empower learners within the EJA framework. Thus, this chapter investigates Freire's method to understand its principles and applicability comprehensively. Focusing is on exploring if it can be effectively utilized to enhance literacy within the context of EJA, aiming to empower learners and foster social transformation.

The fourth chapter delves into the historical patterns shaping adult and youth education in Brazil, shedding light on how those in power have used education to serve their interests. From the colonial era to present-day policies, education has often favored the ruling elite, perpetuating social inequality (Freire, 2005). Moreover, for Freire,

In Brazil, democratic aspirations have been almost nonexistent. Such was the submission in which the Portuguese Metropolis raised us, such as the aping of colonial methods by those who governed after Independence, that even today, such aspirations are only incipient (Freire, 2005, p. 23).

Despite constitutional promises of universal education, implementation often fell short, leaving marginalized groups underserved. The chapter examines the impact of industrialization, the MOBREAL program, and Freire's pedagogical legacy on literacy enhancement efforts. Freire's methodology challenged traditional teaching models, emphasizing critical thinking and empowerment. The so-called banking model of education, coined by Paulo Freire, is a term that offers criticism of the traditional teacher-centered approach, where knowledge is simply deposited from teacher to learners without active engagement. Freire adamantly opposes this

passive model of education. In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," Freire uses a metaphor to scrutinize traditional education, which he labels as the banking model of education.

...banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole: (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;(d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly; (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher; (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it; (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (Freire, 1970, p. 71-73)

In this model, students are viewed as empty vessels awaiting the deposit of knowledge, akin to coin banks. Freire (1970) described banking education as an act of depositing, with students merely serving as receptacles and the teacher as the depositor. This one-sided dynamic restricts students to passive roles, confined to receiving, storing, and regurgitating the deposited knowledge. Sadly, the banking education model is still being used, hindering meaningful educational progress. By exploring Freire's principles and applying his literacy method, the chapter advocates for a transformative approach to EJA that values dialogue, critical consciousness, and learner-centered education. Freire implemented his method with five students; three successfully learned to write within 30 hours; the remaining two dropped out

before completion. Subsequently, the Freirean approach was employed in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, resulting in 300 individuals becoming literate within 45 days (Caputo, 2016).

Therefore, I firmly believe that embracing Freire's methodology in EJA programs holds the potential to transcend traditional constraints, empowering adult learners and catalyzing societal change, thereby advancing the goal of inclusive education in Brazil.

Methodology

This thesis employed a traditional literature review approach to deepen understanding of the literacy process within Brazil's EJA settings. The review encompassed an analysis of legal documents and firsthand experiences. The primary focus was to elucidate how literacy unfolds within EJA and explore the potential of Paulo Freire's pedagogical approach to enhance the literacy process in this educational context. The sources selected for this thesis were chosen based on critical keywords such as literacy, EJA, and adult education, aiming to identify relevant literature from sources such as Google Scholar, Scielo, IBGE, INAF, UNESCO, and Brazilian legal documents. After selecting these sources, a thorough analysis of the literature was conducted.

In Chapter One, historical scholars and legal documents were utilized to provide insight into the historical evolution of EJA in Brazil. Chapter Two primarily relied on literature and sources defining literacy in Brazil, national and international data to evaluate literacy in Brazil works conducted within EJA settings, and firsthand experiences to connect theory to practice. In Chapter Three, Paulo Freire's literature was extensively studied to understand his theoretical and practical contributions and how his methodology could be applied within EJA settings. Chapter Four synthesized the findings to draw conclusions and identify patterns within EJA, examining the potential benefits of implementing Freire's methodology.

The traditional literature review methodology systematically explored relevant scholarly literature, legal documents, and personal experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of literacy education within EJA and the potential impact of Freire's pedagogy. By integrating theoretical frameworks, legal documents, and firsthand experiences, this research aimed to offer valuable insights and contribute to Brazil's adult literacy field.

Chapter One: Historical Significance in Brazilian Youth and Adult Education (EJA)

EJA during the Colonial Era (1500-1822)

The history of education for young people and adults in Brazil dates back to the colonial era. In 1549, Jesuit priests arrived from Portugal and became the first educators in the country. They had a dual role as religious proselytizers and cultural instructors. Their mission went beyond spreading Christian doctrine; they also instilled prescribed codes of conduct. They established basic literacy and catechism classes for children, while adult education was mainly confined to religious instruction. It also included basic agricultural training, focusing on the practical aspects of farming rather than literacy skills.

As Paiva (2003) pointed out, adults' learning was limited to catechism, agricultural education, and the handling of essential agrarian tools, with little emphasis on reading and writing. This limited scope of education shows how the system was in its early stages, but it eventually evolved into a broader educational mandate. The Jesuits taught the necessary trades for the functioning of the colonial economy, initially to indigenous peoples and later to black slaves. Later, they took charge of humanities schools for the colonizers and their children (Di Pierro, 2005). Education during this period was the church's responsibility, not the state, with the primary goal of teaching newcomers the simple tasks of reading and writing and catechizing the natives in Brazil.

In 1759, the Jesuits were banned from Portugal and its colonies, including Brazil, by the Marquis of Pombal. This event led to significant changes in the Brazilian education structure as the responsibility of education was transferred to the state. As a result, the entire organizational structure of education transformed. The diversity of isolated disciplines replaced the previous uniformity of pedagogical action, seamless transition from one educational level to another, and graduation. Therefore, we can say that public schooling in Brazil started with Pombal's reforms.

However, the less affluent adults who aimed to study were not included in the Pombalian reform because elementary education was a privilege for few, and this reform was primarily focused on higher education. (Moura, 2003). The educational changes brought by Pombal had the unfortunate consequence of reversing progress in education, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations like the poor, who were denied access to top-notch educational resources due to the establishment of separate institutions reserved for the privileged few while providing subpar education for the public.

As I recall, in the colonial era in Brazil, a complex story of power can be seen, such as manipulation and changing educational priorities. Initially, Jesuit priests tried to convert the population to Catholicism to assert control. With the expulsion of the Jesuits and the Pombaline Reforms, adult education suffered a significant setback. The royal classes (Latin, Greek, rhetoric, and philosophy) were sporadic and isolated, available to the colonists' children and in various places across the country, thus making access difficult for black people and indigenous populations (Silva, 2019). This change marked a significant turning point as the state began prioritizing the needs of the elite over the underprivileged's educational needs.

These reforms changed the educational landscape and created disparities in access to education. The once-unified Jesuit model was replaced with a fragmented system that favored isolated disciplines and exacerbated inequalities in educational opportunities. This was particularly harmful to vulnerable populations who were excluded from quality education. The pursuit of exceptional educational standards was no longer a priority, which led to a system that perpetuated inequality, reinforced social hierarchies, and limited opportunities for those in rural areas, indigenous communities, and marginalized populations.

EJA During the Imperial Era (1822-1889)

The period following the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Brazil in 1808, “A series of reforms following upon the arrival of the Portuguese court encouraged urban industry and activity and established schools, press, libraries, and technical education. The cities grew in power, as the rural nobility declined” (Freire, 2005, p. 23). Subsequently, in 1822, independence continued to move toward educational priorities for the elite. There was a pressing need to establish a comprehensive national education system, creating higher education institutions that served the ruling classes while leaving out many Brazilians. As the royal family settled in Brazil during the Empire, the focus on education continued to revolve around developing higher education courses tailored to the interests of the monarchic elite. This emphasis played a crucial role in shaping the political "independence" of the nation. However, despite these advancements, little attention was given to education for young adults during this period.

Dom Pedro, I authorized and promulgated the Brazilian Constitution, also known as the Political Constitution of the Empire of Brazil, in 1824 (*Constituição política do Império do Brasil*, 1824). During the Imperial period, the Magna Carta of March 25, 1824, guaranteed in its Article 179, Paragraph XXXII, that primary education was free for all citizens (as cited in Rodrigues, 2011). However, as noted by Moura (2003), the proposals made in the law did not come to fruition due to insufficient schools to accommodate all those seeking education. Additionally, the empire focused on granting privileges exclusively to the nobility. During this period, only a small portion of the population belonging to the economic elite had citizenship and the right to administration and primary education. This provision excluded Black people, Indigenous individuals, and a sizable portion of women (Haddad & Di Pierro, 2000). Therefore, most of the enslaved population was excluded from education. Education during this time

primarily served the elite, and despite the theoretical commitment to inclusivity, it remained inaccessible to many. Therefore, the Constitution of 1824 established an authoritarian state, and despite theoretical commitments to inclusivity, education remained inaccessible for many. The limited concern for primary education during this political period left a legacy of silence and undervaluation of education in Brazil for decades.

Moreover, according to Haddad and Pierro (2000), in 1872, the first census revealed that 82.3% of individuals aged five and older were illiterate. Throughout the imperial period, the persistently high illiteracy rates were a conspicuous feature, with estimates consistently hovering around 82% for the population above five. This educational deficit was sustained into the 1890s, marked by a noteworthy juncture – the Proclamation of the Republic. The system catered to a mere 250,000 children in an estimated population of 14 million (i.e., about twice the population of Arizona) inhabitants. The alarming nature of these statistics illustrates the precarious state of the educational scenario.

The Imperial period in Brazil has left a legacy of negative educational consequences, as evidenced by the profound and enduring impacts of the Brazilian Constitution of 1824. Despite its professed commitment to providing free primary education for all citizens, the practical implementation fell significantly short. Promulgated during the Imperial period, the constitution, rather than fostering an inclusive educational environment, primarily served the interests of the elite. The exclusion of specific demographics, notably enslaved people, and poor people, from access to education rendered the constitutional guarantee inefficient. Thus, the absence of a planned national education system perpetuated inequalities, exemplified by the creation of higher education institutions catering exclusively to the ruling elites, excluding a substantial segment of the Brazilian population.

EJA During the Republic in Brazil (1889-1930)

Transitioning to the Republic era in Brazil, a significant parallel emerged with the second Brazilian Constitution of 1891, which cast a negative shadow over adult education. The Republican Constitution stipulated that only literate individuals were eligible to vote (Article 70, Paragraph 2). Haddad and Di Pierro (2000) underscored that this decision occurred when most adults were illiterate, suggesting the prevalence of governmental interests that did not prioritize education. Until then, the educational landscape in Brazil reflected historical episodes that primarily addressed education for young and adult individuals, lacking initiatives with an explicit educational focus. Various interests influenced educational policies throughout each era, including political, economic, and religious considerations. Notably, adult literacy received emphasis due to the absence of a concept of educational continuity in a society where the majority needed more formal schooling.

At the end of the 19th century, Brazilian society identified illiteracy as a problem requiring eradication. However, only some effective measures had been implemented until then, perpetuating the ongoing marginalization of this population segment, which remained robbed of access to education. Entering the 20th century, only some significant advancements were made in educating young people and adults. The country's socioeconomic context led to specific initiatives that served as the foundation for future public education policies in EJA. During this period, coffee production stood as the primary source of income, driving internal capital, and supplying the external market through coffee exports. This product gradually gave rise to limited local commercial activities, gaining momentum with the burst of urbanization experienced by the country. This marked the beginning of an economic shift towards industrialization as a source, as noted by Fausto (1995). As the Brazilian economy grew stronger, there was a need to prepare

adults to work in this system. However, a significant obstacle was that many Brazilians were illiterate, and to meet the economic demands, individuals needed to be literate. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a skilled workforce to effectively drive this new area of economic growth in Brazil and meet the period's demand.

Addressing this issue, the Federal Government united educational leaders from the states to the Interstate Conference of 1921, held in Rio de Janeiro. Among the primary objectives was the urgent need to devise practical literacy proposals for the adult population. This conference introduced emergency measures, including establishing evening schools, enabling students to work during the day and study at night (in so-called "Supplementary Education"). There was also a commitment to developing a pedagogical plan to ensure literacy within one year. In 1925, the Brazilian government introduced a significant initiative to support state school education. This initiative was known as the João Alves/Rocha Vaz Reform and was established through Decree no—16782/A, dated January 13, 1925. The main objective of this reform was to promote primary education by providing federal support. As per Article 25 of the decree, the federal government would subsidize a portion of the salary of primary teachers in rural schools. The state governments would then be responsible for paying the remaining amount of the salary, as well as providing accommodations, facilities, and textbooks for the teachers (as cited in Cury, 2018)

In the 1930s, a significant period of transformation began in Brazil. During the Presidency of Getulio Vargas, the 1934 Constitution was proclaimed, which led to the creation of the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (PNE) [National Education Plan] focusing on education. This marked a significant moment as the right to education was guaranteed nationally for the first time (Article 149). The Constitution specifically emphasized the right of adult students to pursue

free primary education (Article 150) (*Constituição da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil*, 1934). According to Haddad and Di Pierro (2000), this historical outcome marked the recognition of adult and youth education, giving them distinct treatment. However, the 1937 Constitution was later designed to strengthen the State's authority, reflecting this perspective. Prioritizing limited education in the populace facilitated control and political stability, serving the government's interests in shaping ideologies. Critical knowledge propagation took a backseat to the professionalization of teaching, catering to the needs of the emerging industry and replacing the agrarian-export model (Haddad & Di Pierro, 2000).

Conversely, despite the progress of the 1930s, Di Pierro, Joia, and Ribeiro (2001) stated that it was only from the 1940s onwards that adult education consolidated as a public educational policy in reality and to address the persistent high illiteracy rates, the government established the *Fundo Nacional do Ensino Primário* (FNEP) [National Fund for Primary Education] in 1940, explicitly allocating funds for adult literacy. In 1942, Capanema presented the FNEP as crucial for eradicating illiteracy and enhancing primary education quality. The FNEP incorporated Supplementary education for adults in 1945, with 25% of resources dedicated to a comprehensive youth and adult education plan (Fávero & Freitas, 2011).

Brazil's first national educational policy, EJA, experienced some progress in this time limit. However, these advances were more in line with the interests of the emerging industrial development model rather than a sincere commitment to acknowledge the right to education for those excluded from formal schooling. Historically, EJA was marginalized as an avenue for education access, with funding considerations absent from relevant educational policies (Haddad & Di Pierro, 2000). The Constitution primarily focused on preparing individuals, both young and old, for employment in industries of the time. However, it failed to recognize them as individuals

who could contribute more to society beyond manual labor. The government's sole interest was in promoting work and labor.

In 1945, a significant moment occurred when Getulio Vargas ended his presidency in Brazilian politics and the global discussion on education. At this time, UNESCO (1976) introduced several initiatives highlighting the considerable discrepancies between nations regarding access to high-quality education. This sparked greater acknowledgment of the essential function that education—particularly adult education—plays in driving economic development and social advancement at the national level. These international efforts, including lofty literacy targets, contributed to a worldwide push to increase adult and youth education.

A critical observation has emerged despite noteworthy progress in education, particularly with the introduction of EJA during the Republic period and the subsequent establishment of laws and programs to combat illiteracy. According to Rodrigues (2011), Adult and Youth Education in Brazil is closely tied to the political and economic interests of the elites. In other words, policies directed towards EJA in Brazil have always been characterized by a utilitarian and pragmatic approach. To maintain the status quo and the established social order, the elites have consistently favored superficial literacy (reading and writing skills) for adults. Thus, it is evident that, unfortunately, the underprivileged population was being used to fulfill the needs of the elite or those in power. The literacy programs of the past were designed to educate people, but they had a hidden agenda. The primary focus was creating a workforce that could meet the demands of the industrialization process. This perspective sheds light on the complex nature of educational initiatives during that time.

EJA in the Context of Social and Popular Movements (1930-1964)

According to Braga and Mazzeu (2017), in the late 1950s, various regions of the country witnessed social mobilizations, student movements, and labor movements that aimed to foster political awareness among the working classes and advocate for implementing foundational reforms. These movements proposed social changes, condemned inequality, and criticized society's injustices. The Northeast was a region that brought together many of these movements, such as, in 1960, the *Movimento de Cultura Popular* (MCP) [Culture Popular Movement] in Recife; in 1961, the emergence of the Paulo Freire Method; the *Movimento de Educação Basica* (MEB) [Basic Education Movement]; the Campaign Barefoot, and it is Also Possible to Learn to Read. (Di Pierro, 2005). According to Feitosa (1999), the latter spread to three more cities: Natal and Angicos in the Northeast and Osasco in the Southeast; she also pointed out the *Campanha de Educação Popular* (CEPLAR) [Campaign for Popular Education] in Paraíba in João Pessoa. All these actions had the Paulo Freire Method in common.

Freire was already independently conducting his work in an informal capacity when:

After six months of experience with the culture circles, we asked ourselves if it would not be possible to do something in the field of adult literacy that would give us similar results to those we were achieving in analyzing aspects of Brazilian reality. We started with some data and added more, aided by the Service of Cultural Extension of the University of Recife, which I directed at the time and under whose auspices the experiment was conducted (Freire, 2005, p.38)

The initial results obtained from Paulo Freire's literacy work led to the popular empowerment of workers, who, aware of their oppressed condition, began to organize themselves in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. In 1962, Freire's work was

implemented in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, in northeastern Brazil. This educational program resulted in 300 literate workers within 45 days, profoundly impressing the public and expanding the system across the country under the federal government. (Caputo, 2016). In his work, Freire (1970) clarified that education is a political act; teaching is inseparable from learning; he criticizes the banking concept of education, denounces the oppressor-oppressed relationship, and advocates for the necessary critical awareness of learners, among other aspects, emphasizing that education can either lead people to adapt to the world they live in or engage them in transforming it, making education either conservative or transformative of reality.

According to Freire, when educators lack clarity about whom they are serving or choose neutrality, they are, even if unconsciously, opting for one side, in this case, conservation. Feitosa (2012) called attention to the fact that the pedagogical proposal of the Paulo Freire Method was and continues to be revolutionary precisely due to its liberating conception. Choosing transformative education involves problematizing and presupposing creativity and reflection about reality to commit to making changes. The Paulo Freire Method is a significant breakthrough in adult education. It breaks away from compensatory teaching and characterizes education politically as a field of rights and methodologically as a specific modality.

Paulo Freire (1970) asserted that popular educators aim to empower individuals by helping them recognize their agency in shaping their lives and communities. This involves fostering critical and reflective attitudes towards their realities, transforming the world into a more just and equitable place. Similarly, Knowles (1990) emphasized the importance of addressing adult learners' unique learning needs and experiences. He suggests that a learner-centered approach to literacy classes can empower adult learners to actively participate in their

learning, resulting in increased motivation, engagement, and improved literacy outcomes.

Effective literacy instruction should be tailored to adult learners' goals and interests.

Paulo Freire's method revolutionized how we think about adult education by offering a unique perspective by redefining concepts, creating categories, and providing a new vision. The method introduced a more equitable approach to challenging illiteracy in an unequal and unjust society. From this perspective, adult education should contribute to the transformation of society, making adult education an instrument of political action (Feitosa, 1999). However, to change this reality of the political, social, economic, and educational crisis, the Popular Education Movements, the Paulo Freire Method from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, have waged war against illiteracy. They demonstrate that illiteracy and the impoverishment of the population stem from this crisis rather than being the cause of it. These educational movements aimed to raise awareness among the people through education and culture, including the process of adult literacy, as previously mentioned.

The National Literacy Program of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which I coordinated, planned to extend and strengthen this education work throughout Brazil. Obviously, we could not confine that work to a literacy program, even one which was critical rather than mechanical. With the same spirit of a pedagogy of communication, we were therefore planning a post-literacy stage, which would vary only as to curriculum. (Freire, 2005, p. 48)

Unfortunately, after eighty days, the National Literacy Campaign was interrupted. Freire stated, "If the National Literacy Program had not been terminated by the military coup, in 1964 there would have been more than 20,000 culture circles functioning throughout the country" (Freire, 2005, p. 48). After all, a method capable of achieving literacy for the illiterate in such a

short time and promoting a critical understanding of the world was considered dangerous due to its potential to alter the political power dynamics in a society where political rights were subject to literacy. There was no time for implementing this education plan, as due to the coup d'état in Brazil in April 1964, all this social mobilization was repressed, and Paulo Freire was arrested and later exiled. The National Literacy Campaign, conceived and led by Freire, was transformed into something dangerous and subversive (Brandão, 1985). The 1964 coup halted the efforts towards democratizing education with an emancipatory teaching vision and repressed popular education projects and adult literacy due to their political ideal.

EJA Under the Military Regime and MOBRAL (1964-1985)

On April 1st, 1964, Brazil entered a new phase in its history. For 21 years, the country lived under a military-political regime that left its mark on its people and institutions. It was a period when the military governed Brazil, characterized by a lack of democracy, repression, the absence of constitutional rights, and political persecution of those opposed to this form of governance. One of the darkest moments in Brazilian history where the authoritarian rule has profoundly impacted Brazil's social, political, and cultural scenery, influencing the country's course for the near future. However, I will examine how this period impacted the EJA course, elucidating its lasting effects on educational policies and practices.

My concern for the democratization of culture, within the context of fundamental democratization, required special attention to the quantitative and qualitative deficits in our education. In 1964, approximately four million school-age children lacked schools; there were sixteen million illiterates of fourteen years and older. These truly alarming deficits constituted obstacles to the development of the country and to the creation of a democratic mentality. (Freire, 2005, p. 37)

The military coup of 1964 produced a political rupture as a result of which popular education and cultural movements were repressed, their leaders persecuted, and their ideals censored. The National Literacy Program was interrupted and dismantled, its leaders arrested, and materials seized. The Municipal Education Secretariat of Natal was occupied, the activities of the *De Pé no Chão Campanha* [Foot on the Floor Campaign] were interrupted, and its prominent leaders were arrested (Di Pierro, 2005). Illiteracy remained a significant concern for the regime, as education is a crucial indicator of a country's development. As a result, some educational reforms emerged that favored the political moment in the country. Correa (1979) asserted that despite all the efforts, the situation of illiteracy in Brazil at the beginning of the 1970s was still in a state that could be considered highly contrasting with the aspirations of a country on the development path. In 1970, a census was conducted, and Brazil had 33.6% of its adult population illiterate.

Two programs were created to enhance people's education. The first program was the *Programa de Alfabetização Funcional* (PAF) [Functional Literacy Program]. According to Silva (2002), PAF was developed exclusively in 1970 and 1971, when the new community development programs and the Integrated Education program were created and established to support the continuity of this program. The second program was the *Programa de Educação Integrada* (PEI) [Integrated Education Program]. It offered primary education in a shorter time and provided opportunities for those who completed PAF to continue their studies. These programs aimed to equip the newly literate with the necessary skills to better integrate into the workforce. (Di Pierro, 2005).

The MOBRAL aimed to eradicate illiteracy in the country in the 1970s and 1980s, ensuring its students learned to read, write, and count to be integrated into society; however, it was severely criticized for promoting the ideology of the Military Government. Corrêa (1979) stated that MOBRAL emerged for its concept of functional literacy, which leads adolescents and adults to the practical and immediate application of reading, writing, and arithmetic techniques, providing them with progressive autonomy and a search for better living conditions. It should be emphasized that this principle is not only linked to transforming man into an agent of the development process but also to the idea of making him a beneficiary of this process. Following the same line of thought, Januzzi (1987) stated that the primary aim of MOBRAL was to promote economic development through education. In this conception of education, being illiterate meant being incapable, which MOBRAL sought to address. The individual must be literate to more easily receive the information and training that allow them to play the role assigned within development.

However, the program had two main functions: to encourage the fight against illiteracy and concentrate resources on one side, and the other, to maintain the political restrictions that have weighed on Paulo Freire's pedagogical thinking since '64. Therefore, the literacy process broke away from Freire's concepts, focusing instead on moral, social, political, and conscientious formation, taking on a centralizing character devoid of dialogue and political awareness—a purely functional character. The MOBRAL program primarily targeted rural and less privileged individuals who lacked political awareness had limited information and had restricted access to radio waves. For many, MOBRAL was a solution to poverty, an alternative to a better quality of life, and it was seen as a solution for a population that could barely study, having left school early to help their parents in the fields. Although becoming passive in the face

of social reality due to a lack of critical thinking or even fear of opposing the system, the most convenient path was oppressed silence.

It is important to note that MOBRAL created a negative perception of adult education in Brazil. Feitosa (2012) pointed out that MOBRAL had significant social discredit, and the inefficiency and incompetence that stigmatized the institution also affected the individuals involved. Regarding MOBRAL, it is noteworthy to understand Feitosa's (2012) experience when she worked for the organization as a teacher. As per the author, the program did not require any specific teacher training, nor did it provide any training courses for teachers. Feitosa explained that she was accepted to work as a teacher with only a high school education, and she was subjected to precarious working conditions, a lack of teaching materials, and low wages.

The ambitious effort of MOBRAL to eradicate illiteracy in Brazil garnered significant attention but fell short of its goal. Despite its focus on efficient solutions, the program's failure exposed inherent flaws within the initiative. Presently, illiteracy remains prevalent in Brazil, indicating that MOBRAL's innovative approach did not adequately address the root causes of the problem. By prioritizing an assistant-based, compensational, and ideologically driven strategy instead of promoting the fundamental right to education for both young people and adults, MOBRAL represented a setback in Brazil's educational development. With the end of the military regime in 1985, MOBRAL was abolished, and the Educar Foundation was established to eradicate illiteracy. However, according to Feitosa (1999), there were no significant changes in practice; the same problems persisted five years later; in 1990, the Educar Foundation was dissolved, symbolizing the decentralization of adult education, and shifting responsibility from the federal government to municipalities.

Reflecting on the MOBRAL program during the military regime, it becomes evident that the government's intentions were driven by a desire to eradicate illiteracy and display national development on the global stage. Education, considered crucial for a country's progress, was essential in addressing this challenge. However, as the program unfolded, inspired by the ideals of Paulo Freire, it deviated from its intended path, transforming into an instrument of oppression rather than empowerment for the illiterate population. Critical thinking, social awareness, and political consciousness were disregarded, and MOBRAL became an instrument for mechanically teaching basic literacy skills to the impoverished. An illiterate person critically learns the need to learn to read and write. They prepare themselves to be the agents of this learning. And they can do so to the extent that literacy is more than just a mechanical mastery of techniques for writing and reading. It is the mastery of these techniques in conscious terms. It is understanding what one reads and writing what one understands. It is communicating graphically. It is an incorporation. It implies not only mechanical memorization of sentences, words, and syllables, disconnected from an existential universe. (Freire, 1983)

Despite serving as a lifeline for many, particularly in rural areas, aligning with Freire's concept of literacy, it is evident that MOBRAL's underlying agenda was designated to meet the regime's purposes, neglecting the genuine well-being of the population. This legacy emphasizes the need for educational initiatives grounded in a sincere commitment to the population's fundamental rights, transcending narrow political interests. As I considered MOBRAL's impact, it stresses the importance of learning from history to shape inclusive, thoughtful educational policies for the future.

EJA in the Brazilian Federal Law (1996)

The *lei de diretrizes e bases da educação nacional* (LDB) [Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education] (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996) is a law that was introduced in Brazil to improve educational rights, give more autonomy to public education systems, and outline teaching responsibilities. The discussions around this law started in 1988 with the approval of the Federal Constitution. The LDB was approved in December 1996 and included 92 articles about significant educational changes. According to the law, education occurs within families, human interactions, work, educational and research institutions, social movements, civil society organizations, and cultural expressions.

The LDB (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996), in its Title V, Chapter II, Articles 37 and 38, addresses the issue of EJA as a modality of primary education that offers more than just supplementary education. The law stated that youth and adult education would be intended for those who did not have access to or continuity of elementary and high school studies at the proper age. The education system guarantees opportunities to young people and adults who cannot study at the age-appropriate level, considering their characteristics, interests, living conditions, and work, through courses and exams. The Public Power (government) will enable and encourage the access and permanence of the worker in school through integrated and complementary actions. The LDB (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996) considers primary education a public policy in the national education system. Therefore, EJA is now viewed as a state policy for individuals who do not have access to education. It is not only an educational policy but also a social policy to promote the person's full development as postulated in the Brazilian Constitution.

After the LDB/1996, adult education pursued reconfiguring itself, attempting to overcome its negative stigma of hurried and compensatory-based teaching and achieve its goal of social repair for these long centuries of illiteracy and exclusion. In this sense, Feitosa (2012) contributed a critical reflection, highlighting that although the LDB (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996) guarantees education for those who did not complete their studies at the appropriate age, she drew attention to the idea that there is no age that is inappropriate for learning, as every age is suitable. From this perspective, the aim is to replace the compensatory teaching paradigm with the concept of lifelong education, reaffirming the State's responsibility to ensure the right to education at any age. The LDB draft was initiated in 1988, but it was not until April 2007 that EJA was established. Until 2018, it continued to be modified. In 2018, the LDB (Brazil, 2018) was amended by Law 13.632 to include this concept in the text.

Consequently, Article 37 was rewritten, stating that youth and adult education must be provided to those unable to access or continue elementary and secondary education at the appropriate age. It should serve as a means of education and lifelong learning. (Brazil, 2018). The LDB (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996) was a significant achievement in Brazil's education history. However, it is noteworthy that despite the widespread recognition of its importance, EJA was the last educational modality to be established within the LDB, underscoring the lack of significance attributed to it by the federal government.

EJA in Brazil from Presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) to Bolsonaro (1998-2022)

In the 2000s, the National Basic Education Council formulated an opinion on EJA and contributed to establishing the national curriculum guidelines for this modality in the same year.

According to this opinion, EJA serves a reparative function, aiming to restore a right denied over the centuries in the country, considered a fundamental human right, essential for constituting citizenship. It also serves an equalizing function based on the principle of equality before the law and equity in the distribution of social goods; equity rectifies the law when it proves insufficient due to its universal nature. Therefore, to correct inequalities, it is necessary to provide more opportunities for the disadvantaged, aiming for equality. Lastly, there is a qualifying function whose task is to facilitate updating knowledge throughout life.

During his presidency from (1995 to 2003), former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso tried to implement an innovative educational framework called EJA, yet struggled to gain sufficient political support for these initiatives. Even with this challenge, his administration achieved significant accomplishments, such as enacting the LDB (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996); this legislation marked a turning point by prioritizing greater accessibility to quality education for disadvantaged populations, signifying a notable departure from previous policies.

In 1997, the government introduced the Programa Alfabetização Solidária (PAS) [Solidary Literacy Program]. The program addressed illiteracy, particularly in Brazil's Northern and Northeastern regions. Besides being a rushed program with semi-prepared educators, reinforcing the idea that anyone can teach, with the ongoing campaign 'Adopt an Illiterate,' PAS contributed to reinforcing the image of illiterate individuals as incapable persons, susceptible to adoption, help, and charitable action (Stephanou & Bastos, 2005). However, PAS faced severe criticism for its rushed and paternalistic nature, where illiterate individuals were not considered rights-bearing subjects, hindering the continuity of the educational process. The program, lasting

six months, portrayed illiterate individuals as ignorant and naive, reinforcing the notion that anyone could teach.

Another significant initiative during FHC's government was the *Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária* (PRONERA) [National Program for Education in Agrarian Reform], created in 1998, with a focus on raising the educational level of young and adult individuals in agrarian reform settlement projects. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education implemented the *Recomeço* program to support education systems for Youth and Adult Education in states with low *Índice de Desenvolvimento Humano* (HDI) [Human Development Index] in the Northern and Northeastern regions. Following these programs, Catelli Jr. (2013) states that on August 14, 2002, the *Exame Nacional para Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos* (ENCEJA) [National Examination for Certification of Youth and Adult Competencies] was established by Ministerial Order No. 2,270 from the Ministry of Education. Thus, the ENCEJA was created within the context of the significant development of large-scale external assessments in the years, also aiming to serve as an instrument for evaluating public policies for EJA to improve its quality in Brazil (Catelli Jr., 2013).

During Lula's presidency (2003–2011), there was hope for valuing EJA appropriately and urgently. According to Carvalho (2012) important initiatives included the *Programa Brasil Alfabetizado* (PBA) [Brazil Literate Adults Program], the *Programa Nacional de Inclusão de Jovens* (PROJOVEM) [National Program of Inclusion of Youth], and the *Educação Básica na Modalidade de Educação de Jovens e Adultos* (PROEJA) [Basic Education in the Modality of Youth and Adult Education]. The PBA, initiated in 2003, aimed to financially support non-profit private entities and higher education institutions to open and maintain literacy courses for young

and adult individuals in municipalities with over 35% illiteracy rates. (Carvalho, 2012). In 2005, the PROJOVEM program was launched to assist young people excluded from school and professional training. It combined six existing programs to provide a solution to this issue. Another program, PROEJA, was also launched and made significant progress in its early years. PROEJA focused on integrating young and adult individuals into schools owned by the Federal Network of Professional and Technological Education. Despite challenges like limited enrollment, teacher training, and curricular proposals, PROEJA represented a significant step forward for EJA (Carvalho, 2012). The *Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização, Diversidade e Inclusão* (SECAD) [Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, and Diversity] was established to address the specific requirements of EJA participants. Unfortunately, the SECAD failed to fulfill its commitment, as it lacked a standardized curriculum for institutions providing this mode of education.

The *Fundo de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* (FUNDEB) [Federal Education Development Fund] was created in 2007 to improve basic education in Brazil. It increased the money allocated to basic education and raised the federal government's financial contribution to its maintenance. However, according to Carvalho (2012), there were two points of contention in its regulation: 1) a maximum of fifteen percent of the fund's resources could be allocated to this mode of education, and 2) the weighting factor assigned to EJA was fixed at 0.7 of the reference value established for the initial grades of regular urban elementary education, which is the lowest among all stages and modalities of basic education. Despite being crucial in allocating resources to basic education, including EJA, concerns were raised about discriminatory actions due to the scarcity of resources compared to other education sectors.

When analyzing the EJA policies during the Lula governments, we can see that many of its historical weaknesses have continued. These include the low quality of courses and programs offered, a lack of integration with other social policies, the adoption of fragmented and secondary policies, the limited institutionalization of EJA policies, the lack of symbolic importance of education for young and adult individuals by many managers, and the federal government's insufficient efforts in constructing more aggressive policies aimed at schooling this public.

During Dilma Rousseff's presidency from 2011 to 2016, the government followed the educational policies of her predecessor, Lula. One of the significant developments during this time was the creation of the *Programa Nacional de Acesso ao Ensino Técnico e Emprego* (PRONATEC) [National Program of Access to Technical Education and Employment] in 2011. Although criticized for its privatizing tendency, PRONATEC was designed to offer free technical and technological education courses to young and adult individuals. The PRONATEC program aimed to provide free professional and technological education courses to the population of workers, students, and people in social vulnerability, with the right to food assistance, transportation assistance, and school supplies (Saviani, 2019). However, according to Di Pierro and Haddad (2000), offering short-term, job-specific courses separate from basic education breaks from the integrated education approach tested in other programs.

Additionally, the second National Education Plan (PNE) ratified by Law No. 13,005/2014 reinforced the importance of EJA but faced challenges related to its objectives and strategies (Lei nº 13.005 de 2014). During President Dilma's administration, there were extensive debates in Congress about workforce qualification and its scope, which goes beyond the

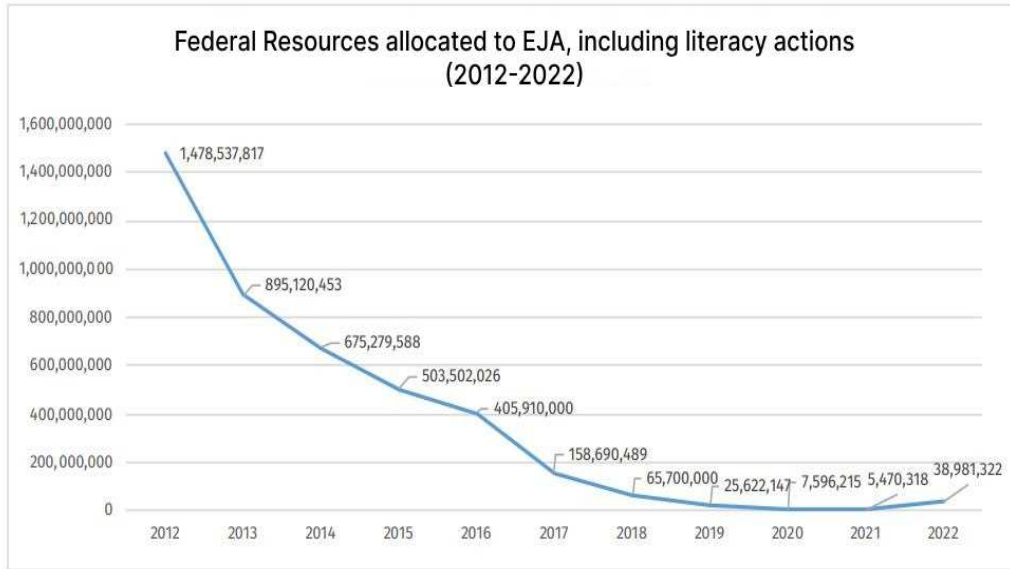
PRONATEC program. This approach also extends to EJA within the framework of PNE.

Although the concept of lifelong learning is not explicitly adopted, the plan includes overcoming illiteracy.

Transitioning to the government of Jair Bolsonaro and his Education Ministers witnessed a crisis in EJA, resulting in a loss of millions of students in the first three years of his administration. Investments hit the lowest point of the century, and during the pandemic, funds allocated to EJA significantly decreased, leading to a decline in enrollments, numbers of teachers, and classes. According to the Ministry of Education (2017), resources allocated to EJA fell by 70% in 2020 and 67% in 2021. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), over 72 million people between 18 and 85 have not completed high school or elementary school and could benefit from the program.

Figure 1

Federal Resources Allocated to EJA



Source: Integrated System of Planning and Budget (SIOP)

Note. This graph illustrates a significant decline in government funding for Youth and Adult Education (EJA), including literacy programs in Brazil, from 2012 to 2022. Indicating a decrease in resources, highlighting the dismantling of EJA policies. This information is from a report titled "In Search of Solutions for the Crisis of Public Policies of EJA," published by Educação Integral in 2022. Educação Integral, <https://educacaointegral.org.br/reportagens/eja-perde-97-de-recursos-e-vive-crise-de-politicas-publicas/>. Copyright 2022 by Educação Integral. In the public domain. Translated by the author.

The graph above demonstrates the committed spending for the year 2022, which represents 3% of what was spent in 2012. Since 2013, resources have been reduced for Youth and Adult Education (EJA). However, in 2017, the decline has become more pronounced,

reaching negligible levels in terms of public investment in 2021. It is also essential to consider that, even in 2012, when the highest federal government spending on EJA during this period was recorded, the expenses on EJA were already relatively marginal, as they represented only about 2% of the total national expenditures on education. In 2021, EJA accounted for 0.04% of the national education expenses. Unfortunately, as reported by Di Pierro (2023), at the start of 2019, President Jair Bolsonaro terminated the SECAD, which had been functioning since then and was responsible for implementing the EJA program, PROJOVEM, and PBA programs. This decision disrupted the continuity of these programs.

After the approval of LDB/96 more than twenty years ago, evaluating the current status of EJA's historical trajectory is necessary. Despite the country's re-democratization and the affirmation of rights in the law, education plans, conferences, and international declarations aimed at achieving the goals of emancipatory education and democratization of adult education, the distant horizon of achieving the reparative, equalizing, and qualifying functions is still far away. Leite (2013) agreed that even today, EJA has not overcome its history marked by public policies in the form of campaigns or programs that aim to solve specific issues in a compensatory manner: EJA needs public policies that aim for continuous support, not just campaigns and actions with determined deadlines that do not address the actual demands of the target audience. Thus, based on the history of adult education, we have gained insight into how this program evolved and eventually became established. The stigma surrounding adult education has persisted for centuries, with literacy initiatives in each era often driven by hidden interests. How is EJA literacy occurring in the current era? To better understand this, examining EJA literacy within the classroom is essential. Transitioning to the next chapter, I aim to delve deeper into this understanding.

Chapter Two: Literacy Dynamics in Brazil: Exploring Education and Practice

In the EJA field, the literacy journey is a profound experience driven by aspirations beyond acquiring reading and writing skills. Students in this context are driven by several aspirations, including pursuing independence, career advancement, enriched social interactions, self-esteem enhancement, and combating the perceived exclusion from literate society. Their daily lives expose them to diverse codes of written language, prompting them to read and comprehend these linguistic nuances to fulfill their purposes. The classroom emerges as a unique space for these individuals to unravel language's concealed meanings and functions, fostering personal and professional growth.

Recognizing that literacy is intertwined with the social issues faced by young people and adults, this educational setting becomes a perfect environment for cultivating critical thinking skills, highlighting the connection between reading the world and comprehending written language. It involves attributing social significance to written codes, rendering them pertinent to everyday life, and empowering individuals through mastery of written communication. To complement this idea, Morais and Brito (2010) stated that it is essential to recognize that developing reading and writing skills is a fundamental aspect of being a responsible citizen and a means of social integration. These abilities empower everyone to think creatively and analyze the world discerningly. Mastering written and spoken language broadens perspectives and opens avenues to new information and knowledge.

In this chapter, I propose to explore the concept of literacy within the Brazilian context. To understand Brazil's historical nuances of literacy, I draw insights from Schwartz's works (2006 and 2012). Additionally, I analyze literacy rates and classifications using data from reliable sources such as UNESCO, IBGE, and INAF. The discussion incorporates Paulo Freire's

(1982–2006) framework to understand the political perspective on literacy. This will provide a holistic view that encompasses both historical and pedagogical dimensions.

Concept of Literacy

The concept of "alfabetização" (literacy) in Brazil has evolved significantly in meaning and application in the last century. As highlighted by Schwartz (2012), the definition underwent a noteworthy transformation; she notes that until 1940, literacy was primarily characterized by the ability to read, write, and sign one's name. However, a substantial modification occurred in the assessment criteria from 1950 to 2000, redefining literacy as the capacity to read and write a short and uncomplicated text. This change reflects a broader acknowledgment that true literacy extends beyond the mere ability to sign one's name, encompassing the proficiency to compose and comprehend basic written expressions. Furthermore, according to UNESCO (2006), literacy is a process that enables the attainment of competencies and skills consolidated through systematic use throughout life, fostering the personal development of individuals, communities, and society at large. Schwartz's insight exposes variations in the concepts and interpretations of a literate individual. Her definition of literacy adapts to the needs of each period in society, going from the ability to read a short text to integration into written culture and its diverse uses. Moreira (1993, as cited in Schwartz, 2012) accentuated that literacy involves the ability to decenter oneself, read between the lines, and understand others' thoughts.

According to the Paulo Montenegro Institute's Functional Literacy Indicator (INAF, 2018), literacy can be broadly classified into *illiteracy* and *functional literacy*. Functional illiteracy is further subdivided into two subgroups: *illiterate* and *rudimentary*. Illiterates cannot perform basic reading tasks, such as recognizing words and short phrases. The rudimentary group comprises those who understand explicit information in short texts, such as notes and brief

annotations. These individuals can recognize letters and numbers but struggle to comprehend complex texts and explain what they have read. Functional illiteracy, often associated with low educational attainment, can also affect individuals who have completed primary education but experience difficulties in reading and comprehension.

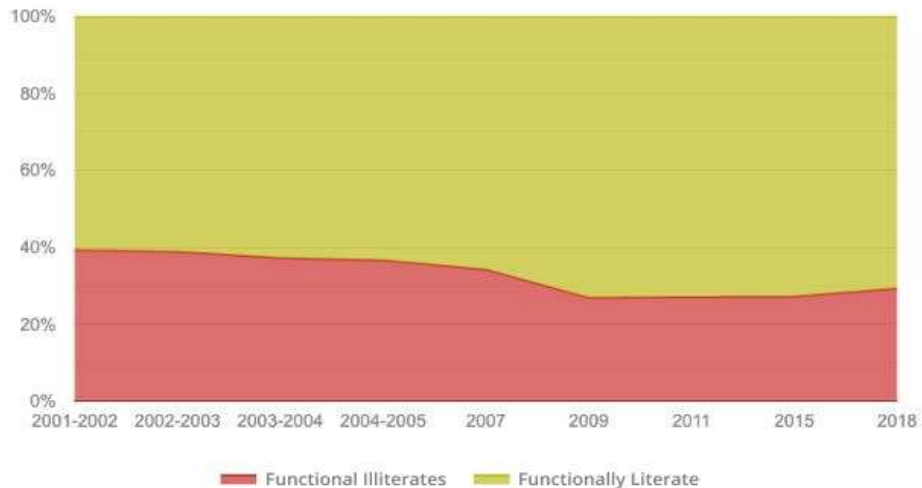
Among the functionally literate, three groups are elementary, intermediate, and proficient. The elementary group includes individuals who can read and comprehend medium-sized texts and locate and interpret some information. The intermediate group comprises individuals who can locate information in several types and sizes of texts and interpret and synthesize information, explaining what they have read. Lastly, there is the proficient group, including individuals who read complex texts, analyze text parts using every day or specialized knowledge, compare information from diverse sources, and distinguish distinct types of text and writing forms. No human process can be disarticulated from the social context in which it occurs. In this sense, I briefly contextualize education in Brazil and some indices related to the literacy of youth and adults. It is important to remember that any phenomenon depends not only on its determination or singular logic but also on the determinations or logic of its environment.

The data released by INAF (2018), collected between February and April of the same year, shows that the group of functional illiterates accounted for 29% of the Brazilian population. Within this percentage, 8% are illiterate, meaning individuals who cannot perform activities involving reading or writing short words and phrases or simple mathematical operations. 12% of functional illiterates are part of the rudimentary group, meaning they can already read simple texts, grasp explicit information, and perform more straightforward mathematical calculations. The group of functionally literate individuals accounts for 71% of the population and is divided into 34% elementary, 25% intermediate, and 12% proficient.

From 2001 to 2018, functional illiterates decreased from 39% to 29%. In this same group, the number of illiterates went from 12% to 8%, representing a significant decline. The number of functionally literate individuals increased from 61% to 71%. However, the elementary group jumped from 28% to 34%, and the intermediate group from 20% to 25%. The number of proficient individuals remained at 12%. Analyzing the data, it is possible to note that although the number of entirely illiterate individuals has decreased, a considerable portion still faces difficulties understanding texts and solving mathematical problems. The decrease in the number of illiterates shows some progress in eradicating illiteracy in the country. However, it is still necessary for the overall quality of education to improve, as evidenced by the considerable increase in elementary functionally literate individuals, especially in the 15 to 65 age group, as shown in the above data released by INAF (2018).

Figure 2

Number of Functional Illiterates and Functionally Literate According to INAF (2018)

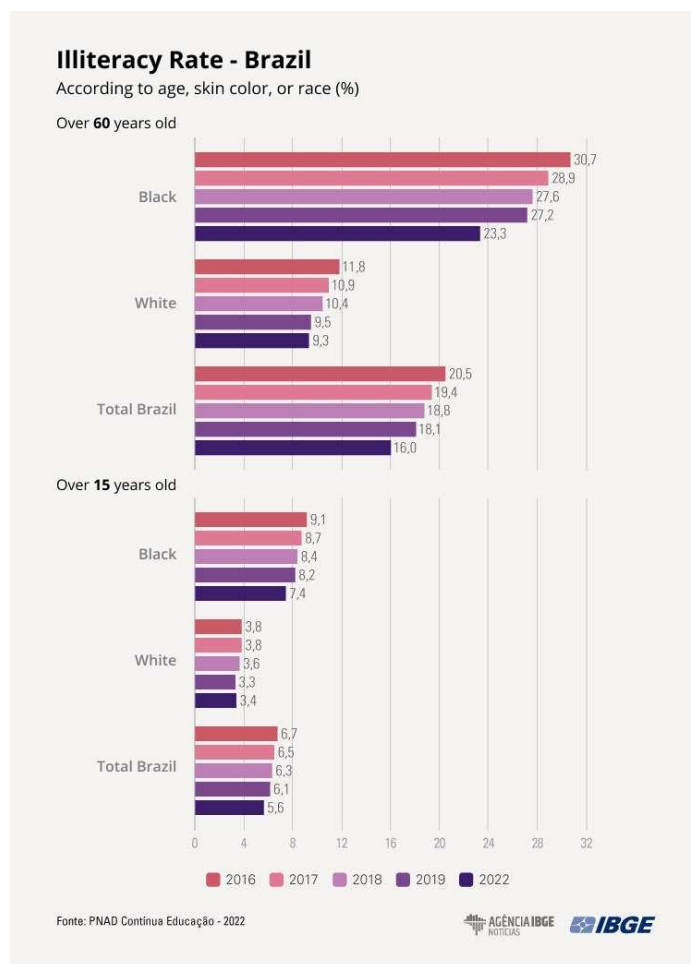


Note. The data from ten editions of the INAF over 17 years demonstrate a decline in the total illiteracy rate among the Brazilian population, although there has been a significant reduction in the number of people who cannot read or write. Number of Functional Illiterates and Functionally Literate According to INAF (2018) <https://alfabetismofuncional.org.br/alfabetismo-no-brasil/>. Copyright 2018 by INAF. In public domain. Translated by the author.

The results obtained over the ten editions of INAF, spanning 17 years, demonstrate a significant reduction in the number of entirely illiterate individuals in the Brazilian population. This figure declined from 12% in 2001-2002 to 4% in 2015. However, it is noteworthy that the 2018 edition observed a slight increase in this level. Unfortunately, the 2018 data is the most recently available, as INAF has conducted no further surveys since then. However, following INAF's recommendations, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) launched a new census in 2022 to assess literacy in Brazil.

Figure 3

Literacy Rate in Brazil According to IBGE (2022)



Note: This figure highlights disparities in illiteracy rates among Black or Brown and White Brazilians aged 15 and older in 2022. Literacy Rate in Brazil According to IBGE (2022). In the public domain <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-noticias/2012-agencia-de-noticias/noticias/37089-em-2022-analfabetismo-cai-mas-continua-mais-alto-entre-idosos-pretos-e-pardos-e-no-nordeste>. Translated by the author.

Based on the latest data released by the IBGE (2022), a significant percentage of the demographic group of 9.6 million individuals aged 15 years or older lacking proficiency in reading and writing can be attributed to an older age group. It was found that approximately 54.1% (5.2 million) of this population were aged 60 or older, representing a higher prevalence of

illiteracy within this age bracket compared to other age groups. The study analyzed illiteracy rates across different age groups to gain further insight into the prevalence of illiteracy within this demographic. The findings revealed that 16.0% of the population aged 60 or older, 9.8% aged 40 or older, 6.8% aged 25 or older, and 5.6% of the broader population aged 15 or older lacked reading and writing proficiency. These age-specific prevalence rates provide valuable insights into the spatial distribution of illiteracy within the population.

According to Beringuy (2022, as cited in IBGE, 2022), illiteracy continues to decline. Still, it maintains a structural characteristic: the older the population group, the higher the proportion of illiterates. This indicates that younger generations have greater access to education and become literate in childhood. At the same time, a contingent of illiterates persists, primarily composed of elderly individuals who did not have access to literacy earlier in life and remain illiterate in adulthood.

Thus, the evolution of literacy in Brazil has been characterized by changing conceptions and meanings influenced by various historical periods and interests. The INAF (2018) survey, reflecting a staggering 144.7 million Brazilians, and the IBGE (2022), comprising 9.6 million people, underscore the nation's significant population of both functionally literate and illiterate individuals. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the surveyed cohort represents only a fraction of the Brazilian population since the 2022 population stood at 203.1 million, indicating the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex literacy landscape in Brazil. While the surveyed data provides a glimpse into the literacy challenges and successes within the nation, it must provide a more comprehensive picture of Brazil's intricate tapestry of literacy issues.

How Does Literacy Happen Inside EJA Settings in Brazil?

Understanding the dynamics of literacy within EJA settings in Brazil is crucial for shedding light on the intricate processes that shape the acquisition of reading and writing skills in this unique educational EJA context. Exploring how literacy development unfolds in the EJA classroom is essential for assessing the alignment of the curriculum with the lived experiences within that setting. The present study draws upon academic research in the field, my firsthand experiences during a six-month pedagogy internship, and the unique perspective of my mother, who has been an EJA student for a significant period. By delving into various layers of insight, I aim to unravel the multifaceted nature of literacy development in the distinct educational landscape of EJA in Brazil.

Freire (2005) offered a profound critique of the conventional mechanical literacy approach within the educational system in Brazil. He stated that literacy transcends the basic ability to decode and encode text. Instead, he presented it as a promoter of critical consciousness, an empowering method that enables individuals to discern and question the societal, political, and economic inconsistencies that influence their existence. Literacy, therefore, becomes a means by which individuals can resist and break down the oppressive structures they encounter. In this transformative endeavor, schools are fundamental, as they not only foster the development of written language but can also facilitate learning experiences through interactive and meaningful engagement within the educational setting.

In the Brazilian education system, despite some improvement in the educational system past decades, promoting a critical understanding of literacy does not seem to be the purpose of literacy as the education system presented still aligns with Freire's first work *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* written in 1967, during Paulo Freire's forced exile in Chile, translate in

English as [Education for Critical Consciousness] where he stated that in the Brazilian education system has traditionally been focused on dictating ideas rather than exchanging them. Instead of debating and discussing themes, students are given lectures. The system does not work with the student but instead imposes an order that he or she must conform to. By providing students with formulas to memorize, we have failed to offer them the tools for genuine critical thinking. True knowledge comes from exploring and trying to recreate and reinvent concepts (Freire, 2005). Therefore, literacy educators are pivotal to this transformative process, serving as facilitators in the construction of knowledge.

Despite the progression of EJA throughout the years, we have reached the 21st century with problems like those of the past. When we identify classes that could be more appealing and interesting, as students arrive at school already tired and many are working, technology should be used to transform these classes into more dynamic ones (Fernandes, 2013). When it comes to teaching and learning, the teacher plays a crucial role in creating a conducive environment that fosters student motivation. This is done by reflecting critically, explaining the subject matter effectively, and understanding how teaching agendas can contribute to sparking the interest of learners. It is important to note that motivation levels are heavily influenced by the context in which individuals find themselves.

Unfortunately, many EJA classrooms still do not embrace engaging and varied teaching methods (Schwartz, 2006) observed in a four-year study during interviews noted that teachers frequently expressed other concerns: “What about cursive writing?”; “When can I introduce it?”; “They take a long time to copy!”; “How can I motivate students who come to class tired and unwilling to do anything?” or “How can I get them to accept working in groups?” While these concerns are significant, they notably deviate from the list of details that she considers a priority

for motivating the construction of learning. Furthermore, the changes in the modern world have made it clear that cursive writing is only used in the educational setting. Text carriers that circulate do not use this type of handwriting, indicating its lack of priority. Upon recognizing this difference in priorities, the desire to understand which details would be fundamental and productive for teachers' critical reflection and prioritized in their teaching agendas for the (re)construction of literacy learning in youth and adults arose.

Eventually, by listing the most frequently asked questions in the courses, classes, and meetings with literacy teachers, Schwartz realized that the details they deemed essential to address in their teaching agendas differed significantly from hers. Schwartz (2006) believed that fatigue would be pushed into the background if the classes were enjoyable. She also noted that students take a long time to copy, indicating a conception of teaching and learning in which copying and meaningless repetition seem evident and necessary for these teachers. This stands in contrast to conceptions of teaching and learning that consider the construction and perception of meaning and significance in learning indispensable.

The study's conclusion suggested that adult literacy teachers' teaching practices often need to be more concise in explaining complex concepts and neglect to motivate students when applying a traditional method to their literacy education. Schwartz (2006) believed that providing the required training for teachers to work with Youth and Adult Education is necessary, as only through appropriate training can teachers socialize their knowledge with students in a differentiated way. According to Arroyo (2005), this happens because the right to education and the advances of the working classes in the construction of knowledge, culture, and class identity are still systematically denied, repressed, and, although possible, not structured, as it is radically antagonistic to the movement of capital.

Navigating Challenges in Youth and Adult Education - Insights from an Internship in a School in Minas Gerais, Brazil

When I completed a six-month internship in a public school in Itanhandu, Minas Gerais, Brazil, I aimed to contribute to the unique context of EJA. As a student in the final semester of my bachelor's degree in Pedagogy, I was eager to immerse myself in the educational development of individuals and society. This experience resonated with the ideals of Freire (1996), who underscored the pivotal role of educators in teaching content and nurturing critical thinking.

What is education? Pinto (1982) defines education as the process by which society shapes its members, emphasizing the educator's vital role in reducing inequalities and encouraging students to reflect critically on their lives. Witnessing the transformative power of education during my internship, students actively engaged in learning through workshops and classes on recyclable and reusable materials. This experience-driven deep reflection on my role as an educator emphasizes the importance of personal growth, development, and community contribution. Freire (1996) noted that educators must be committed to shaping independent, critical individuals capable of reflecting on their daily practices and contributing to society.

I observed essential aspects of the EJA program throughout my internship. Firstly, many EJA teachers, working full-time and in the evenings, often faced exhaustion due to their demanding workload. Secondly, traditional teaching methods in EJA have remained unchanged since the 1990s, aligning with Freire's (1970) concept of the banking system of education, where the students are simpler receivers of information. What struck me even more was not the teaching method itself but that adult learners are still being taught in an overly infantilized way that needs to be more relevant to their real-life experiences.

Lopes (2009) noted a common misconception that teachers can effectively teach in EJA settings without specific training. However, the reality is that these teachers often need more initial and ongoing training to effectively teach young adults and seniors, who are unique learners in this context. This aligns with Freire's (as cited in Gadotti, 2010) idea that simply enrolling marginalized individuals in school is insufficient; their culture, desires, and dreams must also be enrolled. During the EJA internship, it became clear that schools are essential, especially for marginalized populations, but numerous factors hindered their ability to fulfill this role.

The Programmatic Curriculum for the EJA (Vale et al., 2022) provided recommendations for literacy, aiming to present learning goals for achieving Functional Literacy, meaning the ability to read simple and short sentences and texts, locate information identical or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive, and write simple personal information, such as that required for filling out information in documents and forms. Furthermore, Vilanova and Martins (2008) argued that the EJA curriculum, combined with reduced class hours and the lack of a national policy, reduces the education offered in EJA to a commodity for the workforce.

Thus, the lack of attention given to EJA and the subsequent burden placed upon educators without adequate support pose significant challenges to the effectiveness of this educational program. The current emphasis on developing functional illiteracy in the EJA curriculum raises questions about how teachers can be motivated to drive meaningful change. Moreover, inadequate training and working conditions for educators further exacerbate the challenges EJA students face. The existing Programmatic Curriculum for EJA, as reflected in the 2022 edition, indicates a disconnect between government objectives and the practical needs of adult learners. According to Arroyo (2005), those who historically attempted to educate young

and adult populations must abandon supplementary, compassionate, preventive, and moralizing orientations, redefining their actions by recognizing that each young person and adult is a subject of rights. This recognition will empower them to advocate for the state to fulfill its responsibility in ensuring the rights of both young people and adults.

My Mother's Journey through EJA Literacy

To complement the discussion on the literacy process within the EJA settings, I would like to share my mother's experience as a student in this program. Lucilene Rodrigues, my mother, grew up in the rural area of Minas Gerais, Brazil, in a remote location where access to her home was through walks or horse riding due to the absence of roads in some parts of the route. I have memories of my childhood, walking like a little girl to reach my grandparents' house. My mother, with three brothers and seven sisters, grew up in a reality where everyone worked in the fields alongside my grandparents from the age of seven. My uncles attended only four years of elementary school, learning to read and write simple texts.

On the other hand, my aunts, like my mother, did not have the opportunity to attend school despite it being a particularly significant dream for my mother. When I asked why she never went to school, she told me that my grandfather used to say that his daughters did not need to learn to read and write because they were being raised to become mothers and housewives and such activities; according to him, did not require the skill of reading and writing. Reflecting on my mother's words, I realize how much was denied to her, as the absence of the opportunity for literacy represented a loss of freedom, autonomy, and independence. At the age of nineteen, my mother got married, and in less than a year, she gave birth to me at the age of twenty, followed by the birth of my three siblings.

The literacy dream was gradually overshadowed by motherhood and marriage. After eight years of marriage, my mother divorced, and we moved from the countryside to a small town. At forty, through the EJA program, that once-forgotten dream began to come to life within her. I remember the hopeful look in her eyes when she decided to enroll in literacy classes at the EJA. Notebooks, pencils, and a backpack symbolized for her the hope of realizing this childhood longing. Despite working ten hours a day, I recall my mother attending classes every night for four hours, eager to achieve her dreams.

In the EJA environment, she found people she identified with, and there unfolded her social life and the prospect of a better future. EJA classes, like what I witnessed during my internship, consisted of repetition, memorization, and texts without connection to the students' reality. On a special night, my mother came home smiling, announcing that she had finally learned to read. However, she had memorized only a small text that she and her classmates had spent two weeks memorizing. At that moment, neither I nor my siblings dared to tell her it was memorization. Anger overwhelmed me because I believe my mother, like all EJA students, truly deserves to learn to read. After a year, my mother had to interrupt her classes due to a move to another city where the EJA program was not offered. However, even after attending classes five times a week for four hours a day for a year, she had yet to learn to read or write.

This chapter has comprehensively examined literacy within the Brazilian context, specifically focusing on EJA. Drawing on sources such as Schwartz (2006, 2012), UNESCO (2006), IBGE (2022), and INAF (2018), it explored historical transformations in the definition of literacy and an analysis of literacy rates and classifications. It is clear that the literacy numbers in Brazil, despite growth, are a reason for concern, especially when the results show that these numbers are higher in the older population. The discourse has seamlessly extended to the

political dimensions of literacy, aligning with Freire's (1982, 2006, 2011) and Macedo's (2006) perspectives, underscoring education's pivotal role in nurturing critical and politically aware citizens. Moreover, insights gleaned from my internship experience in a Brazilian public school, strengthened by the scholarly viewpoints of Lopes (2009) and Gadotti (2010), highlighted the enormous challenges faced by EJA teachers and students. This underscores the urgency for comprehensive reforms in government policies, emphasizing increased investment in teacher training and developing a curriculum adaptable to the unique experiences of adult learners. It is crucial to note that the existing Programmatic Curriculum for EJA (Vale et al., 2022) aims to cultivate functional literacy. However, the omission of critical thinking as an essential skill raises concerns. Without critical thinking, individuals may be susceptible to manipulation and exploitation, hindering their ability to understand the world around them critically (Freire, 1982).

Additionally, incorporating a personal narrative detailing my mother's journey through the EJA program humanizes individuals' challenges in pursuing literacy. This narrative reinforced the transformative potential of literacy education and shed light on systemic barriers, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and responsive educational approach. As we transition to the next chapter, the focus will shift to how Paulo Freire's pedagogical approaches, rooted in critical pedagogy, can significantly enhance the literacy process within the intricate context of EJA.

Chapter Three: How can Paulo Freire's Pedagogical Method Enhance Literacy in EJA?

The previous chapters have explored the history of EJA in Brazil, its origins, and its response to the educational needs of individuals who, for assorted reasons, found themselves outside the traditional schooling system. Specifically, we examined how this modality emerged to address the educational gaps for those who, for some motivation, dropped out of school or never had the opportunity to attend. In this present chapter, we focus on the educational legacy of Paulo Freire. We investigate whether Freire's educational philosophy, celebrated for its transformative impact worldwide, can effectively address the intricate literacy challenges within the EJA framework. The primary objective is to unveil how Freire's methods foster critical thinking, reflective action, and empowerment among adult learners in the unique context of EJA. We navigate the rich legacy of Paulo Freire, highlighting essential aspects of his contributions. The narrative illuminates his enduring commitment to transformative education and social justice, starting with acknowledging Freire's life. Subsequent sections delve into Freire's specific relevance for EJA, clarifying how his pedagogical philosophy has indelibly marked this educational field. Then, we explore the purpose and significance of the Paulo Freire Method, shedding light on its potential to address the distinctive challenges entrenched within EJA frameworks. After providing a thorough overview of the stages of the Paulo Freire Method and its application, we reflect on its adaptability, particularly within the specific context of EJA.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997): Pioneer Educator of Social Justice

Paulo Regulus Neves Freire was born on September 19, 1921, in Recife, a port city in the northeast region of Brazil and the capital of Pernambuco. This region is known to be one of the poorest in the country. Freire was the youngest of four children born into a middle-class family. His father, Joaquin Temistocles Freire, was an officer in the Pernambuco military police, while

his mother, Edeltrudis Veves Freire, was from Rio Grande de Notre and had a significant religious influence on the family. Freire recalled that his parents taught him how to read by writing letters and drawing pictures in the earthen yard under the mango tree (Freire, 1996). Freire's account that the concept of codification - an alternative to the traditional approach of learning letters, words, and sentences - originated from his early understanding of his personal and social reality. This insight became a fundamental philosophy of his teaching methodology. Freire's father's heart condition forced him into early retirement during the global economic crisis 1929."the precarious stability" of Freire's middle-class family finally gave way. Freire found himself "sharing the plight of the 'wretched of the earth'" (Freire, 1970, p. 30), an image Freire would often return to in his writing. The family moved from Recife to Jaboatao, where Freire settled and spent his childhood and early adolescence.

In 1934, Freire's father died, leaving the family struggling with poverty. "Many times, with no means to resist, I felt defeated by hunger while doing my homework ... It was as if the words became pieces of food" (Freire, 1970, p. 3). Thus, experiencing poverty led him to discover what he described as the culture of silence of the marginalized. He realized that their ignorance and weariness were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination—and of paternalism—of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and prepared to know and respond to their world's concrete realities, they were submerged in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were impossible. Moreover, it became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the primary instruments for maintaining this culture of silence.

Due to this situation, Freire struggled with his studies. Consequently, having a profound influence on his life as he came to know the gnawing pangs of hunger and fell behind in school

because of the slowness it produced; it also led him to make a vow, at age eleven, to dedicate his life to the struggle against hunger, so that other children would not have to know the agony he was then experiencing (Freire, 1970). Although he encountered numerous challenges, it did not deter him from pursuing his goals. In 1943, Freire enrolled in law school at the University of Recife, where he developed a strong interest in philosophy and linguistics. In addition to taking law courses, Freire studied philosophy, focusing on phenomenology, linguistics, and the psychology of language. While studying law, he changed his heart and decided to pursue a career in education after his graduation. Therefore,

... confronted by this problem in a very existential way, Freire turned his attention to the field of education and began to work on it. Over the years, he has engaged in a process of study and reflection that has produced something entirely new and creative in educational philosophy (Freire, p.30, 1970).

In his early twenties, Freire married Elza Oliveira, from whom he was to learn much that would inform his work as an adult educator (Roberts, 2017). Unfortunately, in 1987, Elza passed away, and Paulo was deeply affected by her death. However, he eventually married Anna Maria Araujo. Anna was one of his students who had written a dissertation on illiteracy in Brazil.

In 1946, Freire was chosen as Pernambuco's Department of Education and Culture of Social Services director, initiating his work with underprivileged illiterates. In 1961, he assumed the director role of the Cultural Extensions Department at the University of Recife. That same year, Freire and his team conducted groundbreaking experiments in widespread literacy, developing the Paulo Freire Method. Their efforts resulted in the literacy of 300 sugarcane cutters in a remarkable 45 days (Freire, 2005). After seeing the positive results, the Brazilian government, led by President João Goulart, who was dedicated to making important changes,

supported expanding these initial programs into a National Literacy Plan. However, this initiative was later interrupted by the military regime (Freire, 2005).

Freire's pioneering and interactive methods in literacy education commenced in the 1940s and persisted until his arrest in 1964. The *El Globo* newspaper in Rio de Janeiro accused him of disseminating foreign ideas, leading to his imprisonment for 75 days and an exhaustive 83-hour interrogation. Alongside 100 other prominent figures, he was exiled after being declared an international subversive by the military government. Notably, he was labeled a traitor to Christ and the Brazilian people, further accused of absolute ignorance and illiteracy (Moreira, 1973).

Because of the exile, Freire went to Chile initially, where he contributed to agrarian reform. In a move that unsettled the authorities, he was appointed to Harvard University's Center for Studies in Development in 1969. In 1970 he took up a role with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was to stay for a decade. With the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's life as an educationist would change forever. The book created an almost immediate impact and would go on to become one of the biggest selling texts ever written by an educationist (Roberts, 2017). Freire also traveled to Australia, New Zealand, and various other locations. After a brief return to Chile following the 1973 assassination of Allende, General Pinochet labeled him a subversive. In addition to a jail sentence in Brazil, Freire's influence in adult education only heightened. Despite the concerns of dictators like Pinochet, Freire did not join the ranks of the disappeared. Freire did not return to Brazil until 1980. During the 1980s, he was busier than ever, with academic responsibilities as a university professor, continuing requests to visit other parts of the world, and involvement with the Brazilian Workers' Party. Freire supported Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (Roberts, 2017). Although

Lula da Silva came close to winning, Freire, if successful, would have assumed the role of Minister of Education, a position he held before his exile in 1964 (Freire, 2005).

At the end of the 1980s, Freire took another significant step in his educational career, accepting a role as Secretary of Education in the municipality of São Paulo. This was a significant undertaking, with run-down schools and grinding poverty in many urban educational communities for which Freire was responsible (Roberts, 2017).

In 1986, Paulo Freire was awarded with the UNESCO Education for Peace Prize, among several other accolades. His commitment to transformative education and social justice was acknowledged again on April 13, 2012, with the enactment of Law 12.612, which declared him the Patron of Brazilian Education. Although Freire passed away on May 2, 1997, his legacy remains evidence of his resilience and dedication. A prominent Brazilian educator and philosopher, Freire's impact on literacy education for youth and adults is a compelling narrative of perseverance. Even within military repression in his country, he continued developing his pedagogical method, which subsequently found implementation in non-formal educational spaces by other educators. Freire's solid pursuit of a more just society serves as an inspiration to activists and educators globally. His renowned scholarship cements his status as one of Brazil's most celebrated figures, exemplifying the resilience and courage necessary to confront oppressive forces.

In 1991, the Paulo Freire Institute was established in São Paulo to extend and elaborate on Freire's ideas. The institute continues to preserve Freire's archives and conducts numerous activities related to the thinker's legacy, engaging with issues in Brazilian and global education. As a distinguished Brazilian educator, pedagogue, and philosopher, he is revered as one of the foremost thinkers in the global history of pedagogy, leaving an indelible mark on the field

through his influence on the critical pedagogy movement. Freire believed that students should actively shape their education by forging their unique paths instead of following pre-existing structures, liberating themselves from alienating clichés and learning charts, and creating their own learning process (Freire, 2005). Freire died of heart failure on May 2, 1997. He had been a smoker for much of his adult life, regretting this greatly in his later years as he contemplated the consequences his habit would have for his health and longevity. Freire's work continued to live on, with the posthumous publication of several books over the next decade (Roberts, 2017).

Paulo Freire Method: Exploring its Purposes and Significance

According to Freire (1970), education should be creative and recreational, aiming to liberate individuals through dialogue between educators and learners. To achieve this, there is a need for a shift in teaching practices, particularly for literacy teachers, who should initiate the process based on students' knowledge from their life experiences. Freire believed education was a political act, as when learners perceive their oppressed situation through dialogue within the educational space, they begin to intervene in their status as subjects. To complement this idea, Feitosa (1999) clarified that Paulo Freire's literacy method consists of two fundamental principles, which I enumerate based on this author's studies and in dialogue with my readings in Freire (1970; 1983; 2005), among other works, there were revisions made to Freire's contribution to education.

The first highlighted principle is the *political nature of the educational act*. Freire stated there is no neutral education because every educational act involves transformation. In other words, it is through reflective action that we can uncover social issues. He also emphasizes the importance of dialectics as a pedagogy that allows the oppressed to promote consciousness about social issues. In this understanding, through reflection on the forms of oppression attributed to

them, individuals can reclaim their lives as masters of themselves. One of the fundamental principles of the discussed method is that education is never neutral. Education is an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing meanings within a given reality, implying human agency in shaping that reality. This support can be driven by a fatalistic belief in causality, treating reality as static, unchangeable, and predetermined. Alternatively, it can be guided by the belief that causality is open to analysis, empowering individuals to influence, contextualize, and transform it (Feitosa, 1999).

Feitosa (1999) argued that education involves constructing and reconstructing meanings, which is opposite to the Brazilian curriculum. Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness. Indeed, its own. “Individuals can actively shape and transform their reality by engaging in a continuous process of (re)constructing meanings through reflective action.” (Freire, 2005, p. 33). This highlights the significance of a formative process that enables individuals to rightfully appropriate what they deserve, as emphasized by Freire's insights into the transformative potential of education.

The second principle of the method presented and discussed by Feitosa (1999) is *dialogue in the educational act*. According to Freire, regarding the literacy process of young adults, the educator and learners need to engage in a dialogue. Through this dialogue, they can exchange knowledge and perceptions from their experiences. Dialogue is a crucial starting point for any relationship because it allows the exchange of ideas and experiences. This helps us become more diverse individuals, no longer existing solely to meet the needs of others. This is especially true when we, as individuals, are still figuring out our place in the world and have yet to form our opinions about the challenges it presents. There must be a love for life and people for

a dialogical action between the individuals involved in the educational act. The desire, through transformation, to change the world that education enables us to achieve is also necessary, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is, at the same time, the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (Freire, 1970).

On the other hand, dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. In Freire's perception, "... dialogue thrives when fueled by self-love and empathy for others, evolving into an act of humility where individuals openly share experiences. This reciprocal exchange paves the way for collective purposes" (Freire, 1970, p. 90).

Consequently, when arrogance replaces humility, dialogue falters. Proper comprehension of others' needs emerges from thoughtful observation. Recognizing people holistically is pivotal because understanding is forged solely through dialogical engagement. Freire underlines two crucial concepts within this framework: *political awareness* and *dialogue*, which are the foundational principles in conscientious and emancipatory practices. As stressed by (Feitosa, 1999), these terminologies are interconnected; dialogue, fostered between educators and learners, with the explicit aim of challenging the perceived naivety of individuals, sparks an awakening to global consciousness. Thus, Freire's method has made a difference and continues to contribute to battling oppression, preserving essential human rights, and shaping contemporary educational practices. Its impact extends beyond literacy, aiming to teach reading and writing and cultivate a profound comprehension of the world.

Meaningful dialogue requires a deep love for the world, life, and humanity. Without this love, genuine communication cannot exist. Humility is crucial to bring together different

perspectives that converge in dialogue. Rather than making an arrogant assertion, the aim should be to understand and navigate the complexities of existence collectively. With humility, the poles of dialogue will continue, and the shared journey toward understanding and action will be maintained. Having Freire's concepts in mind, embracing love and humility is necessary to create a dialogue that transcends individual perspectives and contributes to the continuous recreation of our interconnected world.

Freire's method advocates for an education that shapes critical individuals through dialogue and problematized questions, replacing and surpassing the conception, understanding, and practices of literacy that merely decode what is read, transforming it into a reading of the world. This is because reading words is always preceded by reading the world. Learning to read, write, and become literate is learning to read the world and understand one's context, not in a mechanical manipulation of words but in a dynamic relationship that links language and reality. While teaching adults in Brazil, Freire stated "... even before teaching the illiterate to read, we could help him to overcome his magic or naive understanding and to develop an increasingly critical understanding (Freire, 2005, p. 41)". According to Freire, critical understanding can happen even before the literacy process itself. Paulo Freire reaffirmed the need for educators and learners to position themselves critically as they experience education, surpassing naive or "shrewd" stances and unequivocally rejecting the presumed neutrality of education (Freire, 1983).

In Freire's point of view, the educational system offers traditional banking education. It is an outdated teaching proposal as it does not allow for meaningful learning. According to Freire (2005), the education system fails to equip students with the tools for authentic thinking by providing students with formulas to memorize when learning comes from exploration and the

effort to recreate and reinvent. The process of teaching reproduction, where teachers simply transmit information without reflecting on it, can alienate individuals and create a narrow worldview. Students are often taught to mechanically reproduce what they have learned, without any room for dialogue or reflective thinking. On the other hand, Paulo Freire advocates for conscientization in his literacy method. This means education that makes individuals aware of their situation, leading to liberation. An education that seeks to develop awareness and a critical attitude, through which individuals choose and decide, liberates them instead of subjugating, domesticating, or conforming them, as often seen in the prevailing education in many countries worldwide, which tends to adjust the individual to society rather than promoting them (Freire, 1970).

Freire's literacy method was designed to address a social class of youth and adults living in situations of vulnerability and oppression caused by those in power who decide how they should perform. Oppressors invade the lives of the oppressed, presenting an ideal model to follow according to their intentions of manipulating individuals perceived as naive and disregarding their knowledge. Individuals must become aware that they have been imprisoned to break free from oppressive submission (Freire, 1970). As Freire has shown, education should not be imposed to submit or adapt individuals; instead, it should provide conditions for learners to gain critical awareness and understand themselves and the world, positioning themselves as subjects in control of their lives. Education should point out paths, but only individuals can choose according to their understanding.

The Paulo Freire Method: A Comprehensive Exploration of its Stages

Paulo Freire did not use the term method in the conventional sense as a prescribed way to achieve a goal. In an interview on April 14, 1993, Freire stated that his approach was based on

curiosity on one side and political commitment on the other, in the face of those who are rejected, denied, or forbidden to read the word, rereading the world (Pelandr , 1998). Freire believed in the critical or dialectical understanding of educational practice, within which there is a specific methodology, a method of knowing, not a teaching method. He called it a method of knowing because it focused on understanding the learner's perspective rather than simply imparting knowledge (Pelandr , 1998).

Feitosa (1999) explained that the method developed by Freire is called a "Method" or "System" because it has a dialectical structure that is not isolated but interconnected with other disciplines. Freire (1999), in discussing this methodological perspective, explains that the aim was to develop a valuable methodology for learners, not just educators. As a Brazilian sociologist pointed out, this methodology would identify the learning content with the very learning process. Based on Freire's writings, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2005), I outline the five phases of his Method.

The 1st Phase is known as the *Vocabulary Universe*. This phase involves the educator's informal approach to the learners, researching words with existential meaning for the group and enabling an understanding of the typical language of the community. These words are connected to the group's experiences, especially their professional experiences. "This research is carried out during informal encounters with the inhabitants of the area. One selects not only the words most weighted with existential meaning (and thus the greatest emotional content) but also typical sayings, as well as words and expressions linked to the experience of the groups in which the researcher participates (Freire, 2005, p. 43)". According to Brand o (1985), there are no questionnaires or predetermined scripts for the research. If there were, they would be like a textbook. They would bring the researchers' point of view ready-made. Questions about life,

events, work, and ways of seeing and understanding the world exist. Questions that emerge from an experience that is beginning to happen there. Brandão clarified that the research was conducted without predetermined interview scripts; everything occurred naturally.

The second phase is the *Selection of Words from the Researched Vocabulary Universe*. In this phase, three criteria are adopted for choosing words from the participants' vocabulary universe: “a) phonemic richness; b) phonetic difficulty (the words chosen should correspond to the phonetic difficulties of the language, placed in a sequence moving gradually from words of less to those of greater difficulty); c) pragmatic tone, which implies a greater engagement of a word in a given social, cultural and political reality (Freire, 2005, p. 44)”. Based on the collection of “words,” the research uncovers clues to an immediate world designed by the selection of symbols through which learners progress to the subsequent stages of collective and supportive learning—a dual reading of the social reality they experience and the written word that reinterprets it (Brandão, 1985). He believed learners could advance in collective and supportive learning of the lived reality and the written word by combining words and symbols.

The third phase involves the *creation of the “codifications”*. In this phase, the educator presents contextually relevant situations that were perceived as challenging by the learners to promote problematization and literacy awareness within the group. The educator carefully encoded these situations, encompassing local and national concerns, to facilitate decoding and debate among the learners. “These representations function as challenges, as coded situation-problems containing elements to be decoded by the groups with the collaboration of the coordinator. Discussion of these codifications will lead the groups toward a more critical consciousness at the same time that they begin to learn to read and write” (Freire, 2005, p. 45). Drawing on Freire's (1970) perception of “challenges,” the situations catalyzed the groups to

engage in critical reflection and problem-solving, with the educator playing a crucial role in facilitating the process. By doing so, the educator could advance the learners' literacy process and promote a deeper understanding of their local and national contexts.

The fourth phase is *the elaboration of agendas*. Script sheets are created to assist the educators in their discussions with the learners. This instructional material is crucial for the progress of pedagogical work. (Freire 1970) stated that the sheets are designed to help coordinators and are not rigid and imperative prescriptions. Each situation and the group's disposition allow advancements the literacy instructor cannot control. Therefore, “the elaboration of agendas, which should serve as mere aids to the coordinators, never as rigid schedules to be obeyed” (Freire, 2005, p. 45).

The fifth phase involves *the preparation of cards with the breakdown of the phonemic families which correspond to the generative words*. In this phase, there is a difference from traditional teaching, where pre-made content is presented through workbooks, booklets, and books. Instead, this stage creates cards containing phonetic families corresponding to generative words. (Freire, 2006) said that this phase marks the beginning of literacy work, which he calls the 'concrete act of literacy.' This process involves the following steps: a) The first generative word is presented graphically, and the object's perception is orally expressed to initiate a debate) The decoding process begins when the instructor proposes visualizing the word instead of memorizing it and establishing a semantic connection between the word and the object it refers to, represented in the situation. The student is shown the word alone without the corresponding object. c) The word is presented separated into syllables. Once the parts are recognized, the visualization of the syllabic families that compose the word under study is carried out in the analysis stage.

Following Freire (1970), these words were initially studied in isolation and later examined. In this process, from reading to writing, then to reading the world, and finally, to writing the world, it is necessary to guide the students first to become aware of self-literacy. Considering this process, (Feitosa, 1999) explained that Freire's pedagogical proposal can be divided into three main stages: *Investigation, Thematization, and problematization*.

The first stage is *investigation*. Firstly, a suitable location for the literacy program was chosen, and meetings were held with the group to understand their social context better. Direct engagement was made to investigate their life experiences related to family, work, religion, politics, and other aspects. An interview was conducted with the participants to learn the local vocabulary. Generic words were identified based on the most used themes in the community. The study of reality is more than just collecting data and facts. It involves understanding how learners perceive their reality, which requires constantly investigating their reality. Immersing oneself in the learners' lives allows educators to gain a deeper understanding of their group, interact with them, and help them define their starting point. This starting point becomes the overarching generative theme (Feitosa, 1999). Studying a group's reality is more than just collecting data. It is an ongoing exploration that requires educators to engage closely with learners' lives. This deep understanding of the group enables meaningful interactions and facilitates the selection of thought-provoking themes for discussions.

The second stage is *theming*. Starting from the general theme under discussion, words with phonetic difficulties for the coding and decoding process are selected to be part of new discussions. These words are presented in the culture circle through drawings or photographs, allowing learners to learn more about their social context. Feitosa (1999) stated that through the overarching generative theme, it is possible to go beyond the limits of knowledge that learners

have about their reality, thus better understanding it to intervene in it critically. According to the author, the theming phase enables learners to advance beyond what they already know about their reality. From this point, individuals can use critical thinking to transform their reality.

The third stage is *problematization*. Learners can develop a critical perspective to transform their reality by problematizing issues. This involves challenging their previous, potentially simplistic views by adopting a more critical stance that can lead to positive change. Overcoming the learners' naive view of a crucial perspective arises from and through problematization, stemming from awakening individuals' consciousness about themselves. In this sense, it is necessary to discover and problematize the individuals' understanding of themselves and their understanding of the reality in which they are situated (Feitosa, 1999).

A conventional literacy paradigm has marked the historical trajectory of EJA, insufficiently preparing learners to comprehend and transform their surroundings through the educational process. In the 1960s, Paulo Freire introduced a literacy method to foster a humanizing education. This approach, grounded in dialogue between educators and learners, aims to elevate the conditions of individuals previously considered naive. Freire (1970) emphasized that no one can be authentically human while preventing others from being so. Advocating for an education that goes beyond mere literacy to foster critical awareness and transformation. This research held significance as it revealed the intricacies of Freire's literacy method, which aspired to form politicized individuals through literacy. By delving into Freire's life and worldview, this study attempted to unravel his method's significant role in youth and adult education. Highlighting the need for a pedagogy that must be forged with, not for, the oppressed in pursuing their liberation and humanization (Freire, 1970).

Studying relevant texts that relate to the student reality allowed me to discern the substantial impact of Freire's method in nurturing critical thinking and reflective action among learners. His pedagogical proposition has left an unforgettable mark on education, transcending geographical boundaries, and advocating for a participatory, problem-centered approach to learning. Freire's method pushed an emancipatory educational paradigm from the mechanical schooling model that disseminates pre-packaged content. It catalyzes awakening consciousness and empowers learners to shape and reshape their knowledge. This work stressed the profound significance of Paulo Freire's educational philosophy, emphasizing the empowerment of learners through education.

I wish to emphasize that in educating adults, to avoid a rote, mechanical process, one must make it possible for them to achieve critical consciousness so that they can teach themselves to read and write. As an active educational method helps a person to become consciously aware of his context and his condition as a human being as Subject, it will become an instrument of choice. At that point, he will become politicized (Freire, 2005, p. 48).

Freire's methodology is strategically designed to confront social inequalities and instigate positive transformations in individuals' lives. According to Feitosa (1999), the Paulo Freire Method is concrete proof of his belief in the possibility of an enlightening, liberating, and de-alienating education, an education capable of promoting self-confidence, mutual trust to make History and building a future with equal and possible opportunities for everyone creating a future of possibilities. Thus, the Paulo Freire Method is more than just a way of teaching – it is a powerful instrument for bringing about social change and breaking down existing inequalities. Using education to promote a fairer society helps create a brighter future for everyone, going

beyond traditional teaching methods and advocating for a form of inherently political education that helps build a more democratic and just society.

Chapter Four: Exploring Patterns in EJA: Paulo Freire's Influence on Literacy

Enhancement

Reflecting on the history of EJA in Brazil, I observed a persistent pattern spanning various historical periods. In this pattern, those in power consistently manipulated adult education to align with their interests. This recurring theme, evident from the colonial era to the present, highlights a consistent pattern of education serving the political and economic needs of the ruling class. For example, during the colonial period, the Jesuits used education to convert Indigenous populations. However, their genuine drive was not to empower individuals but to make them submissive and more accessible to exploit. The Marquis of Pombal's era further exemplified this approach; education was selectively reserved for a privileged few, serving the broader interests of the Portuguese crown. This period exemplifies how education was strategically employed to maintain control, oppress certain groups, and fortify the existing power structure.

Despite the constitutional promises advocating education for all, these ideals often remained theoretical. For instance, the Constitution of 1824, during the imperial period of Brazil, professed to guarantee free primary education to all citizens. However, back then, the requirements to be considered a Brazilian citizen, according to Dom Pedro I, reached a few portions of the population, excluding people experiencing poverty and the enslaved people. Even during constitutional commitment to education, the implementation often favored the ruling elite, perpetuating social inequality.

In Brazil, democratic aspirations have been almost nonexistent. Such was the submission in which the Portuguese Metropolis raised us, such as the aping of colonial methods by

those who governed after Independence, that even today, such aspirations are only incipient (Freire, 2005, p. 23).

Across the historical epochs, the foundational motives behind adult education were instrumental in maintaining control and power structures. This manipulation persisted even when policies promised education for every individual because, in many instances, the promises often remained on paper, needing more substantial implementation, as subsequent governments hesitated to assume responsibility for education.

Additionally, as Brazil underwent industrialization in the 20th century, I observed a sudden emphasis on education as a strategic means for addressing labor market demands.

...indeed, it affect our entire national life. Culture, the arts, literature, and science showed new tendencies toward research, identification with Brazilian reality, and the planning of solutions rather than their importation. (The Superintendency of Development of the Northeast [SUDENE], directed by the economist Celso Furtado before the military coup, was an example of such planning.) The country had begun to find itself. The people emerged and began to participate in the historical process (Freire, 2005, p. 26).

However, rather than genuinely fostering individual learning and development, governmental policies prioritized education as an instrument to cultivate an obedient and skilled workforce that could serve broader political, economic, and societal interests. This perspective perpetuated the idea that education primarily focuses on preparing students for specific outcomes or goals rather than valuing learning as an end. Consequently, it marked a shift in the underlying motivations behind education, transforming it into a means for serving the interests of those in power. Unfortunately, this dynamic has persisted throughout Brazil's educational history, with

those in power using education policies to maintain their dominance and consolidate their influence. Despite changes over time, the enduring pattern of education shaped by the ruling classes' interests remains a constant feature of Brazil's educational landscape.

When analyzing the effects of industrialization and the MOBRAL program during the military regime, it becomes clear that education can be viewed through human capital theory. According to Schultz's (1972) human capital theory, investments in education and skills development are vital for economic growth, like investments made in machinery and equipment. Economists have tried to measure the returns on investment in human capital. However, it is essential to note that applying a narrow econometric analysis to educational inputs and outputs for individuals has been extensively criticized (Schuller & Field, 2013).

Paulo Freire is a prominent figure in Brazilian education who challenged the traditional teaching method, known as the banking model, which is discussed in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). This method obstructs critical thought and is dehumanizing. Unfortunately, it is prevalent not only in mainstream education but also in EJA in Brazil. Moreover, it is often treated as an instrument for producing human capital that serves the interests of the powerful rather than promoting high-quality education and nurturing critical thinking.

Despite nominal efforts to enhance access to quality education in Brazil, the harsh reality persists—EJA is sadly under-resourced. This discrepancy is rooted in a persistent historical pattern prioritizing power and societal control over education, hindering meaningful progress in EJA initiatives. Even with sporadic attempts to improve EJA, foundational issues endure, posing a formidable challenge in translating these efforts into tangible improvements for adult learners.

The modality of EJA holds a peripheral position within mainstream educational policies, needing more requisite investment for effective implementation and sustainability. Despite some

strides to enhance educational access in Brazil, the lingering inadequacy of resources allocated to EJA persists, stemming from a deeply rooted historical inclination to prioritize power and societal control over education, impeding substantial advancements in EJA initiatives. In this way, despite its undeniable social relevance, this modality still occupies a secondary position in so-called regular education, both in the academic sphere, with few research studies in the field and few authors delving into this theme, and in teacher training courses where its discussion and learning are optional. It also holds a marginal position on the public policy agenda, with international organizations and FUNDEB focusing on regular primary education. Without substantial investments to support continuous learning opportunities and student retention, EJA risks being relegated to a mere emergency rather than a well-supported educational imperative. adequate investment, EJA remains at risk of being a marginalized and insufficiently supported educational modality, falling short of the envisioned goals outlined in educational standards and the constitution.

The lingering effects of historical and social injustices, spanning centuries from slavery to present-day marginalization, continue to hinder access to education and literacy, particularly among the Black working class. Despite formal abolition and subsequent decades, the 21st century still sees significant gaps in access to social goods and basic literacy skills. For instance, in 2022, IBGE (2022) data revealed that 16.0% of the population aged 60 or older, 9.8% aged 40 or older, 6.8% aged 25 or older, and 5.6% of the broader population aged 15 or older lacked reading and writing proficiency.

Moreover, the EJA remains undervalued and faces substantial challenges. These include inadequate infrastructure, distant learning opportunities, and insufficient participant support. Additionally, a compensatory paradigm still prioritizes short-term solutions over lifelong

learning perspectives. The lack of proper educator training exacerbates issues such as dropout rates and high absenteeism, painting a concerning picture of the current state of EJA. As observed, during the formation of Brazil as a Modern National State and across various promulgations and amendments to its Constitutions, political rights have consistently been linked to literacy, resulting in the genuine civic-political marginalization of the illiterate. This historical phenomenon originated with the Imperial Decree of 1881, which prohibited illiterate individuals from voting. This practice was abolished in the latest Constitution of 1988, allowing illiterate individuals to register as voters.

In the context of democratization following three decades of corporate-military dictatorship, the 1994 Constitution reaffirmed civil and political rights while recognizing and expanding social rights. Notably, this Constitution guaranteed political rights to illiterate individuals for the first time and the right to free public education for all, including adults. The history of Education in Brazil revealed that universalizing education for all Brazilians, illiterate individuals, was a slow and challenging achievement. Consequently, the 1994 Constitution and the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education represented a victory in recognizing and regulating EJA as a distinct form of education despite its flaws.

However, despite the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education guaranteeing quality education, the practical reality reveals a banking education model within EJA in the present. In this format, the student is treated as a passive receptacle, absorbing prescribed information without consideration for their existing knowledge and experiences or fostering space for dialogue and critical thinking – ideals passionately advocated by Paulo Freire. This disjuncture between theory and practice underscores the need for reform in EJA to honor the principles outlined in the LDB truly. I hope that all students, like my mother, can have the

opportunity to learn in an environment that validates their previous experiences, encourages expression through dialogue, and fulfills their rights, as stated in the LDB.

Political Perspectives on Literacy and Empowerment

Within the dynamic of an EJA classroom setting, a heterogeneous mixture of identities, knowledge, and practices merge, giving rise to different life experiences and perspectives. This diversity is particularly pronounced in the modality of EJA, where students of varying ages, from youth to seniors, unite. The combination of different knowledge, cultures, and ideas makes viewing literacy as a neutral practice untenable. As Freire (1982) asserted, education is inherently political, with an inseparable connection between education and politics.

We are immersed in a literate society and, therefore, in constant contact with the codes of written language. Human relationships with the world are plural in nature. Whether facing widely different challenges of the environment or the same challenge, men are not limited to a single reaction pattern. They organize themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act, and change in the very act of responding. They do all this consciously, as one uses a tool to deal with a problem (Freire, 2005, p. 3).

From this perspective, the teacher should respect each student's knowledge in the classroom. They are not blank slates where teachers will imprint the initial impressions of written codes; instead, they carry a baggage of knowledge and experiences into the classrooms. This approach emphasizes the significance of considering students' existing knowledge and experiences in shaping literacy education, aligning to foster critical and politically aware citizens who resist complacency and advocate for their rights.

Recognizing itself as a political practice, education transcends the confines of bureaucratic school procedures. It is as dedicated to imparting content as raising awareness

(Freire, 2011). The educator, as a considerable influence, plays a pivotal role in either perpetuating the existing dominant culture and reinforcing inequalities or becoming an advocate for emancipatory, critical, and political education. This aligns with Freire's perspective, emphasizing students' agency as protagonists in their narratives, utilizing their experiences for a liberating education.

Macedo (2006) elevated literacy to a significant construct, evaluating whether it serves to reproduce existing social formations or functions as a set of cultural practices promoting democratic and emancipatory change. As highlighted by Macedo, the reduction of literacy to a mechanical emphasis on coding and decoding reveals an intentional aspect within educational practices. For instance, narrowing focus transforms illiteracy from a functional deficiency into a cultural indicator, perpetuating a disempowering cycle that fosters alienation among individuals. Freire's (2006) critique exposed how illiteracy is often portrayed as an expression of incapacity, framed as a problem to be eradicated. He contended that this innocent view is a calculated perspective propagated by those aware of their intentions. For Freire, the essence lies in promoting literacy for critical engagement, where students apply acquired knowledge in their daily lives, evolving into conscientious citizens aware of their actions. Moreover, Freire (1983) reaffirmed that adult literacy has always been seen as a political act and an act of knowledge. Freire believed that literacy through memorization could be a mechanical act, something empty to pass on to adults. He advocated for a broader literacy connected to student life, preparing them to be critical thinkers.

While Freire's work does not explicitly use the term literacy, his focus on educating young adults revolves around tailoring education to real-life situations. This emphasizes the essential need to begin literacy education by considering the specific context of the learners.

Freire opposed an approach that treats literacy as separate or disconnected from daily life. Instead, he advocated for an educational methodology firmly rooted in the experiences and circumstances of individuals learning to read and write (Freire, 2006). He emphasizes the importance of integrating literacy education seamlessly with the lived realities of the learners, making the process more meaningful and relevant to their lives. Thus, when literacy education is tailored to reflect the students' lived experiences, the educator strives to develop critical and politically conscious individuals capable of resisting complacency and actively advocating for their rights. This approach transforms literacy education into an instrument for cultivating citizens prepared to challenge the status quo and advocate for social justice. Furthermore, by prioritizing the students' reality, the teacher fosters a learning environment that encourages critical thinking, political awareness, and social activism, empowering students to become agents of change in their communities.

The Pedagogical Legacy of Paulo Freire in Youth and Adult Education (EJA)

Reflecting on the history of Brazilian EJA, I cannot help but notice how the education system has primarily served the elite, as has been reiterated many times before. This systemic bias has deep roots in my country, as it focuses on equipping young people and adults with skills for entering the workforce without adequately addressing the need to educate them to think critically about the world around them. Based on my findings thus far, Brazil's current state of education underscores the urgent need to enhance the literacy process within EJA classrooms. Providing students with the necessary tools to navigate society is imperative. Brazil's non-autonomous status had generated the theme of cultural alienation. Elite and masses alike lacked integration with Brazilian reality. According to Freire, “the elite lived ‘superimposed’ upon that reality; the people, submerged within it. To the elite fell the task of importing alien cultural

models; to the people, the task of following, of being under, of being ruled by the elite, of having no task of their own” (Freire, 2005, p.3).

In the 1960s, a method of literacy education inspired by Paulo Freire's work began to be part of Brazilian education. The primary objective of this method was to foster critical thinking and awareness among individuals, and it was especially significant for educating the youth and adults since his work was focused on this group. Freire's methodology challenged traditional educational frameworks and offered Brazilians a new perspective on the educational system. According to Freire (1970), consciousness-raising involves recognizing oneself and the reality around us and understanding how we are interconnected with others. Freire believed that consciousness-raising is essential for personal growth and social transformation, as it enables individuals to become agents of change.

Furthermore, Saviani (2019) accentuated that Freire viewed humans as dialogical and critical beings constructed through their relationships with others. This underlines the transformative power of interpersonal connections in shaping individual identities and collective understandings of the world. Freire's emphasis on dialogue and critical consciousness resonates as a call to recognize the shared journey of constructing meaning through our connections with others, fostering a more prosperous and enlightened human experience.

As mentioned in previous chapters, EJA has always aimed to provide literacy education to those who could not complete their education during the conventional period or who never had the opportunity to attend school, such as my mother. In Freire’s words,

Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness. Indeed, its own naive dependence on high-sounding phrases,

reliance on rote, and tendency toward abstractness actually intensified our naiveté (Freire, 2005, p. 23).

However, the education provided within this setting does not consider the importance of raising the learners' awareness of social issues in their context. The content is presented in a way ready to be transmitted without being critically thought through.

Freire held the belief that in Brazilian tradition, there was no exchange of ideas, only dictation; no discussion or debate, only lectures; no working with the student, only working on him, imposing an order to which he had to conform. In his view, this approach prevented the attainment of true authentic thought as it involved giving the student formulas to receive and assimilate. Freire (2005) argued that the existing form of education could not prepare men for integration into the process of democratization, as it opposed the emergence of people into Brazilian public life. Additionally, Brazilian cultural history has not provided the habits of political and social solidarity appropriate to our democratic form of government. Thus, education was necessary to teach the Brazilian people new attitudes and habits of participation and intervention instead of their old passivity. Furthermore, the high illiteracy rates were to be addressed by working on a literacy program and education for intervention simultaneously.

Freire ideas align with Knowles's (1990), which stressed promoting a learner-centered approach to literacy instruction, tailoring it to adult learners' goals and interests. This can empower them to participate actively in their learning, increasing motivation and engagement and improving literacy outcomes. In today's world, neoliberal ideology has shaped how we perceive education. It is commonly viewed as the process of developing human capital, primarily from an economic standpoint. This approach prioritizes acquiring skills that make individuals efficient and prepared for the job market, making it the dominant education model.

Creating an educational model that questions the dominant ideology and truly caters to the requirements of marginalized communities deprived of fundamental human rights and the ability to think critically and empower themselves involves an extensive examination of the theoretical foundations of such education. It entails an approach that considers the specific situations of the individuals it serves and is designed in collaboration with them.

Therefore, providing an education system that teaches individuals to think critically about their circumstances is essential. Thus, literacy should not be purely mechanical and mere memorization; it is necessary to guide adults towards first becoming aware, allowing them self-literacy. Consequently, this method - to the extent that it assists individuals in deepening their awareness of their issues and status as individuals and, thus, as subjects - becomes a path of choice for them. At this moment, individuals will politicize themselves (Freire, 1970).

The educational system provides a pre-established literacy model consisting of booklets, primers, books, and other teaching resources. The students would benefit from adjusting this material to create a proposal that allows them to gain a broader understanding of the world. Paulo Freire believed that education should not be merely depositing information into memory but rather a process that involves critical thinking to promote awareness. In his view, education should be dialogical, meaning that the teacher must create space for dialogue in the classroom to facilitate the process of conscientization during literacy education. When Freire developed his literacy method, he emphasized the importance of dialogue in the relationship between educator and learner. For him, educators and learners should jointly discover knowledge through dialogue, as both parties have valuable insights to exchange (Freire, 1970).

Freire's literacy method consistently prioritized the pre-existing knowledge that students bring from their life experiences and work backgrounds. To initiate the process, an in-depth

exploration of individuals' lives was conducted, involving literacy professionals immersing themselves in the community.

From the beginning, we rejected the hypothesis of a purely mechanistic literacy program and considered the problem of teaching adults how to read in relation to the awakening of their consciousness. We wished to design a project in which we would attempt to move from naiveté to a critical attitude at the same time we taught reading. We wanted a literacy program which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men as its Subjects rather than as patient recipients, a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterize search and invention (Freire, 2005, p. 38-39).

Through dialogue and understanding the commonly used vocabulary, they identified generative words most frequently employed by the group. In communal discussions, these words were deliberated, generating topics for debates. This literacy process aimed to acquire reading and writing skills and stimulate the awakening of individual consciousness. A fundamental principle of Freire's method revolves around the belief that no one educates another, and no one educates in isolation. For him, education, ideally, is conceived as a collaborative and empathetic endeavor—a compassionate act that should not be imposed. Education for Freire is a reciprocal exchange between people, and even self-education involves a form of distant dialogue. It cannot be the outcome of someone assuming they possess all knowledge and unilaterally teaching it to others who have been compelled to believe they possess none. Freire suitably noted that there are no pure educators or learners. In the teaching and learning dynamic, both sides are educators-

learners and learners-educators. The educational exchange occurs bidirectionally, fostering a collective journey where teaching and learning happen together (Brandão, 1985).

Freire's ideas on the literacy process highlight the significance of solidarity between educators and learners, emphasizing it as an exchange between both parties. Therefore, he argues that education is not an isolated process; nobody can be educated alone. Through communication, teaching and learning occur, becoming an exchange of knowledge. Both the teacher and learner have a chance to teach and learn from each other. This exchange creates a space for action and reflection, where dialogue between the teacher and the students becomes crucial. It is through dialogue that each person can understand themselves and others better.

Thinking about the five stages of the literacy method provided a unique perspective on its application, especially within EJA, and instilled the belief that its principles are adaptable to the EJA classroom. The profound insights from our exploration of Paulo Freire's literacy method reveal its potential to revolutionize EJA programs. Embracing Freire's approach enables these programs to transcend the constraints of traditional literacy methods, fostering critical thinking, reflective action, and empowerment among adult learners. Grounded in dialogue and participatory learning, this method becomes a strategic tool to address social inequalities and instigate positive societal transformations.

Implementing Freire's methodology in EJA settings not only reshapes the educational experience for adult learners but also contributes significantly to the overarching goal of cultivating well-informed, engaged, and empowered citizens. By acknowledging and valuing each learner's knowledge, experiences, desires, dreams, and hopes, the EJA program can elevate the educational process into a dynamic platform, meeting adult learners' unique needs and aspirations and paving the way for meaningful societal impact.

Conclusion

Exploring adult and youth education in Brazil requires a thorough analysis of critical issues to understand its contemporary evolution. This understanding was facilitated by examining the historical trajectory of education as a social practice, from the arrival of Jesuit priests to pivotal moments revealing struggles and resistance. In delving into the complexities of adult education, this thesis is rooted in personal experience through the lens of my mother's illiteracy within a literate society. My understanding of her struggles was initially limited. Still, I gained profound insights as I progressed through my Bachelor's in Pedagogy and immersed myself in an EJA classroom during my internship. Each student I encountered resonated with facets of my mother's challenges, highlighting the general obstacles faced by adult learners like her. My mother's decision to pursue education in her forties symbolizes the aspirations of millions of EJA students striving to acquire literacy skills and integration into society. However, the harsh reality she confronted, marked by unfulfilled expectations and unrealized dreams, exemplifies the systemic challenges adults face in education in Brazil and drove me to dig deeper inside EJA settings. External factors such as insufficient governmental support and the demands of employment often prevent the educational aspirations of EJA students, perpetuating cycles of inequality.

Upon analyzing the history of EJA, a recurring pattern emerges from the colonial era to the present: education has consistently served the interests of the ruling elites, neglecting the educational needs of the broader populace. The 1990s saw efforts to rectify this imbalance by enacting the LDB to safeguard young people's and adults' educational rights (Lei nº 9.394, de 20 de dezembro de 1996) and the Brasil (1998) that recognized that to ensure the full exercise of this right, primary education shall be encouraged and intensified to the extent possible for those

persons who have not received primary education or have not completed the entire primary education cycle (Article 13,1, d of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the UN General Assembly of 16.12.66, approved in Brazil by Legislative Decree No. 226 of 12.12.95 and promulgated by Decree No. 591 of 7.7.92).

Despite these advancements, significant setbacks occurred during the Bolsonaro administration, resulting in budget cuts and resource constraints for EJA. Addressing the myriad challenges facing EJA necessitates the government's concerted effort and commitment. Furthermore, an in-depth examination of the literacy process within EJA reveals a stark reality: the instructional approach in EJA classrooms remains traditional and detached from students' lived realities. Rather than active participants in their learning journey, students often find themselves in passive roles, highlighting the urgent need for pedagogical reform and a curriculum that resonates with their experiences and aspirations.

Paulo Freire's teaching method is a tremendous example of how literacy can be effectively taught with the necessary support or training for teachers. By implementing Freire's basic principles, significant improvements can be made in literacy levels for adults studying in EJA programs. His approach is based on critical thinking and empowerment, providing a viable path to revolutionize literacy education in EJA settings. Freire's method is centered on dialogue, reflection, and participatory learning, which challenges the traditional passive banking education model and encourages active engagement from learners. Adopting his methodology, which successfully taught literacy to 300 workers, is possible and can eliminate outdated practices, resulting in a more inclusive and effective learning environment for adult learners (Freire, 2005).

This thesis highlights the urgent need to reconsider adult education in Brazil. Despite the persistence of traditional models, which fail to empower learners, Paulo Freire's transformative

approach offers hope. His method, grounded in critical thinking and empowerment, presents a promising avenue for reshaping EJA settings and fostering social inclusion and empowerment. Through ongoing advocacy and research, we can strive towards a fairer educational system that enables all individuals to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. An illiterate person realizes the importance of learning to read and write and becomes determined to be the agent of their learning. As they progress, they understand that literacy is not just about mastering the mechanics of reading and writing but about consciously comprehending what they read and expressing their thoughts effectively in writing. It involves communicating graphically and becoming an embodiment of the written word. Literacy is more than just memorizing words and sentences; it involves connecting these skills to a broader and more meaningful existence (Freire, 2005).

Thorough examination of the research, the necessity for a revitalized approach to literacy within Brazil's EJA framework has become strikingly clear, one that resonates with the philosophy of Paulo Freire. Education must transcend the mere transmission of knowledge and evolve into a powerful catalyst for societal change and individual empowerment. I am firmly convinced that adopting Freire's pedagogical principles and methods within EJA settings can be the cornerstone of an equitable and just educational paradigm. Such a system would not only unlock the full potential of individuals but also harness that potential to make substantial and meaningful contributions to the fabric of society. Through this transformative educational experience, learners can be equipped to navigate and shape the world around them.

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