

## Special Education in the countryside: an analysis of profile and working conditions of teachers in the Piemonte Diamantina - Bahia

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**ABSTRACT.** The objective of this article was to describe the profile and the working conditions of the Special Education teachers who work in the rural schools of the municipalities of the Piedmont region of Diamantina, state of Bahia. A questionnaire with closed questions was applied to 11 teachers who work with Special Education in rural schools in the municipalities of the Piedmont region of Diamantina. It was possible to observe that, in general, the profile of the teachers is: women, mostly self-declared browns, most between 36 and 50 years of age; are married or live with partner; has mostly 2 children; with salary between 1 and 5 thousand *reais* and are satisfied with the remuneration; work in two schools at most; are Licensed in Pedagogy and Specialization, mostly attended by private institutions; most of them have more than 11 years of time in education but less than 5 years of work in Special Education; are mostly insolvent; most affiliated to the union of the category and consider their performance satisfactory; are generally satisfied with the teaching career.

**Keywords:** Teaching Work, Special Education, Rural Education.

## **Educação Especial no campo: uma análise do perfil e das condições de trabalho dos docentes no Piemonte da Diamantina - Bahia**

**RESUMO.** O objetivo deste artigo foi descrever o perfil e as condições de trabalho dos professores de Educação Especial que atuam nas escolas do campo dos municípios integrantes da região do Piemonte da Diamantina, estado da Bahia. Foi aplicado um questionário com perguntas fechadas a 11 docentes que atuam com Educação Especial nas escolas do campo nos municípios da região do Piemonte da Diamantina. Foi possível observar que, de forma geral o perfil dos professores é: mulheres, majoritariamente autodeclaradas pardas, a maioria entre 36 a 50 anos de idade; são casados ou vivem com companheiro(a); tem na maioria 2 filhos; com salário entre 1 a 5 mil reais e estão satisfeitas com a remuneração; trabalham no máximo em duas escolas; são Licenciadas em Pedagogia e Especialização, cursados na maior parte em Instituições privadas; possuem na maioria acima de 11 anos de tempo de atuação na educação mas menos de 5 anos de trabalho na Educação Especial; são em sua maioria concursados; na maioria filiados ao sindicato da categoria e consideram sua atuação satisfatória; de forma geral estão satisfeitos com a carreira docente.

**Palavras-chave:** Trabalho Docente, Educação Especial, Educação do Campo.

## **Educación Especial en el campo: un análisis del perfil y de las condiciones de trabajo de los docentes en el Piemonte Diamantina - Bahia**

**RESUMEN.** El objetivo de este artículo fue describir el perfil y las condiciones de trabajo de los profesores de Educación Especial que actúan en las escuelas del campo de los municipios integrantes de la región del Piemonte de Diamantina, estado de Bahía. Se aplicó un cuestionario con preguntas cerradas a 11 docentes que actúan con Educación Especial en las escuelas del campo en los municipios de la región del Piemonte de Diamantina. Es posible observar que, de forma general el perfil de los profesores es: mujeres, mayoritariamente autodeclaradas pardas, la mayoría entre 36 a 50 años de edad; son casados o viven con un compañero (a); tiene en su mayoría 2 hijos; con salario entre 1 a 5 mil *reais* y están satisfechas con la remuneración; trabajan en un máximo de dos escuelas; son Licenciadas en Pedagogía y Especialización, cursados sobre todo en Instituciones privadas; en la mayoría por encima de 11 años de tiempo de actuación en la educación pero menos de 5 años de trabajo en la Educación Especial; son en su mayoría concursados; en la mayoría afiliados al sindicato de la categoría y consideran su actuación satisfactoria; de forma general están satisfechos con la carrera docente.

**Palabras clave:** Trabajo Docente, Educación Especial, Educación del Campo.

## Introduction

This paper is an integral part of a study developed at the Doctoral level at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Bahia (FACED-UFBA) and funded through the Program of Support to Teacher Training (PAC-DT) of the State University of Bahia (UNEB).

Increasingly, the precariousness of teachers' work has intensified, largely because of the neoliberal policies of governments, especially since the 1990s in Brazil. Siade and Ximenes-Rocha (2018) explain that the teaching work is one of the most suffering, due to its particularity, generating a series of complications. And still:

The worker from the birth of the capitalist mode of production has been reduced to a commodity that can be discarded at any moment. And now, this condition is further intensified if it does not keep up with the new demands of capitalist society. The human being is forgotten and dispossessed of his means of subsistence - work - all in the name of the common good, morality, ethics and, above all, progress. These pressures cause or intensify a number of problems which result in various forms of malaise manifested in or out of the work environment in the form of a classical disease or in forms not yet known but which also affect quality of work, precarious. (Siade & Ximenes-Rocha, 2018, p 112).

According to Duarte (2011), working conditions are directly linked to the career of teachers in terms of salary, working hours, legal elements of hiring regimes, continuing education and so on.

For Arroyo (2011), if educational policies in Brazil do not have a defined course, it is even more complicated when referring to rural education, since traditionally the rural school is treated as a marginal element within of the educational system, accentuating in the countryside the problems already existing in the Brazilian educational system as a whole. Thought also ratified by Silva and Sena (2016):

In this sense, although there are many advances in the history of Brazilian education, it is possible to observe that there are many gaps to be repaired in order to ensure that the public policies directed to the education of the countryside are implemented. According to the propositions of the existing legal framework, the primary function of Rural Education is to guarantee all its subjects a quality education, assuring them the right to access knowledge without, for this, needing to leave their space and/or disparaging it (Silva & Sena, 2016, p. 241).

This is more serious when we observe that according to data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research, a body linked to the Ministry of Education, there are in Brazil about 285,850 teachers working in the rural area exclusively. This represents

14.5% of the almost two million basic education teachers in the country (Brasil, 2009).

For this study we use the term considered more current, which is rural education, to the detriment of the older and popular term, which is rural education, as explained by Pimentel *et al.* (2015):

The expression rural education has become inadequate in the last years, since it would designate a restrictive sense about the people and the activities in the rural environment. Based on the argument that rural schools were not priorities in governments and that policies for such schools were inebriated with urban conceptions that made rural school an extension of the city school, it was considered possible and necessary to make another term, namely, rural school, or rather, rural education (Pimenta *et al.*, 2015, p. 6).

Thus, within the Rural Education, we have Special Education teachers, who work with Specialized Educational Assistance (AEE) with students with disabilities, guaranteed in the National Policy of Special Education in the perspective of Inclusive Education (Brasil, 2008).

According to Rabelo and Caiado (2014), the Special Education teachers who work in the countryside must have guaranteed working conditions, in order to carry out their activities in a satisfactory

way, taking into account the specificities in the countryside:

The dialogue between rural education and special education has as its premise the recognition of the singularities of rural populations, including people with disabilities, developmental disorder and high skills or giftedness, which means understanding that the right to special education in rural schools, needs to be implemented, with the promotion of some basic conditions: provision of specialized educational services in multifunctional resource rooms, teacher training in the area, adapted school transportation, accessible school space, equipment and resources to meet educational demands special education students. (Rabelo & Caiado, 2014, p. 67).

Despite the importance, Palma (2016) states that there are still few studies that address the work of teachers and the schooling of students with disabilities in rural schools (Palma, 2016).

The purpose of this paper was to describe the profile and working conditions of Special Education teachers working in rural schools in the municipalities of Diamantina, in the state of Bahia.

## Methodology

For this research, a closed-ended survey was used, based on other studies on working conditions (Motta, 2009; Braga *et al.*, 2010, Carneiro, 2012, Ferro, 2012, Araújo, 2017) and adapted to the needs

related to the special education teachers who work in the rural schools.

According to Gil (2010) the survey is a research technique that uses a certain number of questions in writing to the participating subjects, with the purpose of knowing their opinions, interests, expectations and being "the fastest and cheapest means of obtaining information, and not requiring personnel training and guaranteeing anonymity". (Gil, 2010, p. 115).

The questions aim to know the profile of the teachers and the contractual and legal conditions, which according to Borges *et al.* (2015) are one of the elements that compose the working conditions and represent the aspects of valorization of the teaching work, such as career plan, job stability, salary, continuing education among others.

The research was developed in the region known as Piedmont of Diamantina, one of the 16 regions of the state of Bahia, which is subdivided into 9 municipalities, namely Caém, Jacobina, Miguel Calmon, Mirangaba, Ourolandia, Saúde, Serrolândia, Umburanas and Várzea Nova. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the Piedmont region of Diamantina has 217,226 habitants in its total population,

where 39.5% of the territory's population lives in the rural area (IBGE, 2017).

The selection of the subjects participating in the research considered the following criterion: that the teachers worked in 2017 with Specialized Educational Attendance of students with disabilities in municipal schools located in the countryside.

In order to determine the universe of our study, it was initially the collection of information, together with the Secretariats of Education of the municipalities, of data on the number of Special Education teachers who work in the municipal schools of the countryside, in the year 2017. Thus, the data indicated that 15 teachers meet this criterion. Of this universe, 11 teachers accepted to participate in the research, which corresponds to 73.33% of the total.

In accordance with the ethical norms of research with human beings and to legitimize voluntary participation, the subjects were presented with a free and informed consent form (TCLE), which guarantees, among other things, the confidentiality of the identity of the participating teachers, as well as guaranteeing the use of data collected strictly for academic purposes. The research was built pursuant to Resolution 466/2012, Resolution 510/2016 specific for

research in Human and Social Sciences and submitted to the Ethics Committee of the State University of Bahia (CEP/UNEB) under the CAAE protocol number: 79862917.6.0000.0057 and approved through Legal Opinion nº 2532.689.

## Results and discussion

Of the 11 teachers who participated in the research, 10 are female and 1 is male. This female predominance is also seen in other studies, such as those by Teles *et al.* (2012), where 95.4% were women and Brito *et al.* (2014), 96.66% were female. According to Souza *et al.* (2017) women are traditionally the vast majority of teachers working in the countryside, facing daily a series of problems, in an attempt to guarantee the education of children:

In the current conjuncture, thinking about the teaching work carried out with children in rural contexts is to understand that it has been protagonized bravely, almost always by women who engage in daily struggles, build resistances and face daily challenges in order to guarantee the learning of their students ... understanding that these places are often precarious and require the development of strategies of constant confrontation and (re) pedagogical inventions (Souza *et al.*, 2017, p. 1).

About the ethnicity of the teachers, the data indicated that 82% declared

themselves brown and 18% declared themselves black. The large number of teachers who self-professed browns to the detriment of the few black self-taught teachers are also seen in the studies of Teles *et al.* (2012) and Oliveira and Vieira (2012). Thus, Alves (2012) ratify the data found and also explains that "... the participation of blacks in the profession is reduced, and often black teachers are subjected to worse conditions of training and work". (Alves, 2012, p. 80).

According to Camargo and Rosa (2018), these data are important because "gender, race, ethnicity, training and precariousness remain only some of the many elements that we can take as objects of reflection on the teaching work and each of them presents itself as vast field of research". (Camargo & Rosa, 2018, p. 290).

Regarding the age of teachers, 46% are between 46 and 50 years of age, 27% are between 36 and 40 years of age, 18% are between 31 and 35 years of age, 9% are between 41 and 45. It is noted that teachers, study participants, are over 30 years of age.

Regarding the marital status of teachers, 46% are married, 18% are divorced, 18% are widowers, 9% live with a partner and 9% are single. These data are similar to other studies done in the same

region with urban teachers (Araújo, 2017, Santos, 2017). In the case of offspring, 73% of teachers have children. Of this amount, 50% of teachers have 2 children, 37% have 1 child and 13% have 3 children.

Regarding the category of legal contractual conditions, the first item refers to the salaries paid to teachers working in the countryside. Adding all the additional, gratuities etc, the data showed that 55% have a remuneration between R \$ 1,000 to R \$ 3,000, 36% of teachers with gains between R \$ 3,000 to R \$ 5,000, and 9% said to earn between R \$ 5,000 a R \$ 7,000.

These data are close to the data in the Faria Junior study (2014), where 52% of teachers reported receiving between 2 and 3 minimum salaries, 34% received between 3 and 4 minimum salaries, and 8% received more than 4 minimum salaries. Although the teachers consider that they have obtained a salary improvement "from the creation of the National Professional Salary Floor of the Professionals of the Public Magisterium of Basic Education ... they still consider the remuneration they receive". (Farias Júnior, 2014, p. 120).

According to the study by Siade and Ximenes-Rocha (2018), low wages represent the biggest problem regarding the working conditions of teachers working in

the countryside, according to the teachers interviewed, they "recognize that it does not correspond to work which exercise and is not sufficient to meet the basic needs of survival". (Siade & Ximenes-Rocha, 2018, 121).

Ramos, Moreira and Santos (2004) present a series of obstacles that hamper the working conditions of teachers working in the rural schools:

The literature has shown the importance of the teacher in the process of progression and learning of the students. Despite this finding, the working condition of these professionals has deteriorated more and more. In the specific case of the rural area, in addition to the low qualifications and salaries lower than those of the urban zone, they face, among others, the issues of work overload, high turnover and difficulties of access to the school, depending on the road conditions and the lack of travel allowance. (Ramos, Moreira & Santos, 2004, p. 27).

However, 82% of the teachers participating in the study said they were satisfied with the salary and 18% said they were dissatisfied. In a research produced at the University of Chicago in the United States, and published in Forbes magazine, presented a ranking of the 10 happiest professions in the world. In this research, the profession of Special Education teacher was listed in the fifth position (Denning, 2011). One of the possible reasons lies in the fact that satisfaction comes from



helping other people monitor the development of students with disabilities, although it often occurs slowly, which often ends up compensating for the low salaries of the area.

According to Gouveia *et al.* (2006), "another element that interferes with quality conditions and which has a quantitative impact and an important subjective dimension of the professionals' relationship with the school is the issue of the dedication, especially of the teachers, to a single school" (p. 263).

Thus, it was observed in our study that 46% of teachers work in only 1 school, 36% work in 2 schools, 9% work in 3 schools and 9% work in 4 schools. Gouveia *et al.* (2006) state that dedication to only one school is considered a quality factor of teachers' work, to the detriment of those teachers who need to work in more than one school, since the high workload directly affects not only the quality of classes, as well as teachers' health. And the authors further complement:

Thus, the possibilities of dedication of the education professional to only one school and of non-exhaustive days result in a satisfaction that, besides promoting conditions for a quality education offer, avoids damages to the health of the worker and allows time for those interested in processes consequently, in compliance with what the law defines as permanent training of education professionals, within or outside the

workload, as established in these existing forms of employment. (Gouveia *et al.*, 2006, p. 273).

The data show that all the teachers participating in the study have a Bachelor's degree, 91% of the professors have postgraduate courses at the *Lato Sensu* Specialization level and none have a Masters or Doctorate degree.

With regard to undergraduate courses, teachers' degree courses are divided into: 55% in Pedagogy, 18% in History, 9% in Vernacular Letters, 9% in Letters with English and 9% in Physical Education.

The findings can be compared with other studies that investigated the graduation of special education teachers from different municipalities (Brito *et al.*, 2014, Souza & Sousa, 2015, Matias, 2016, Menezes, 2016), and confirmed the predominance of the Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy as initial training of teachers in the area.

According to Deimling (2013) the Pedagogy courses in Brazil have a long tradition in Special Education because it was the precursor to insert curricular components that discussed the subject of the education of people with disabilities. Thus, the predominance of the Pedagogy course as the dominant graduation among Special Education teachers demonstrates that, due to its general and expanded

education, Pedagogy can be considered the most appropriate initial formation for Special Education (Kapitano-a Samba & Heinzen, 2014).

The data indicate that the initial formation of teachers was divided among private educational institutions, responsible for the graduation of 64% of the teachers and by the state public universities, with 36% of the teachers graduating.

All the professors graduated in the state public institutions, attended the University of the State of Bahia, that have campuses and poles in the municipalities of the Diamantina Piedmont and in nearby municipalities.

Silva and Sena (2016), when presenting an account about the curriculum of the Degree in Pedagogy obtained at a campus of the UNEB, near the Piedmont region of Diamantina, makes clear the importance that the study of the specificities of the rural education has in the formation:

Part of the training course as a student at the University was directed to the Rural Education. Throughout the course, we seek to understand, from the academic investigations, the way schools are inserted in the rural communities and the role they assume in these spaces, where in most cases it is the only state organ present. (Silva & Sena, 2016, p. 234).

On the one hand, this shows the importance of UNEB in the training of teachers in the region, on the other hand, it is clear that many teachers have had to seek higher education in the private sector because of the difficulty of being absorbed by public institutions.

This predominance of training in private institutions is maintained when it comes to Specialization courses. This is because 60% of the teachers participating in the study said that they did their specialization course in private institutions and 40% did it in a federal teaching institution.

However, in order for teachers to be able to take their undergraduate and postgraduate courses, it is imperative that the municipal management act in order to guarantee the necessary support to the teacher, through the reduction or total release of the teachers' hours during the training and until financial incentive through scholarships.

With this questioning teachers about the support given by the Municipal Secretariats of Education give the continued training of teachers, it was observed that 37% of teachers said that there is a lot of encouragement from municipal secretaries for teachers to take courses but without leave and financial aid, Twenty-seven percent of the teachers said

that there is no incentive for the secretariats to teach the teachers, 27% said that there is little incentive for the secretariats and only 9% said that there is a lot of encouragement from the secretariats, even with financial aid and remoteness.

According to Souza and Sousa (2015), there is a discredit regarding the support that the teachers receive from their respective Secretariats of Education, end up generating a series of difficulties that act entirely in the working conditions of teachers:

Undoubtedly, the working and support conditions they receive to carry out the teaching activity need attention from the education secretariats themselves. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand that the conditions of teaching work involve a diversity of aspects (hiring, salary, training, material resources, others), which add value to their development. Without such an understanding, it will continue in the blame game, where each one in his space blames the other for the failure of education, for the poor quality of public education and, consequently, for the victimization of rural school teachers and *multi-seriadas* classes as a maze of the educational system. (Souza & Sousa, 2015, p. 25).

According to the authors, Gonçalves (2009) affirms that the teachers working in the rural schools, in general, receive little support from their Municipal Department of Education. This is aggravated because, as teachers are linked to municipal

management, they end up being subject to instabilities caused by frequent alternations of municipal political groups, directly influencing their working conditions.

28% have between 21 and 25 years of career, 18% have 11 to 15 years, 18% have between 6 and 10 years of age, 18% have between 1 and 5 years of age. years and 18% are over 25 years old.

However, when analyzing the work time that the same teachers have in Special Education, it is possible to observe that there are substantial differences. The data indicate that 9% of teachers have over 10 years of work with Special Education, 18% of teachers have between 6 and 10 years of work, 27% have between 3 and 5 years and 46% have up to 2 years.

Eighty-two percent (82%) of teachers are bankrupt, 9% are substitutes and 9% work as service providers. However, none of them had a tender for the post of Special Education teacher, since none of the municipalities in Piedmont of Diamantina had a competition for this area. The findings of this study are different from that found in the study by Bitencourt and Zart (2017) who studied the working conditions of teachers from a rural school in the Brazil - Bolivia border, where it was found that most teachers are not effective and have contracts temporary. This makes the teaching staff of this school very

rotating, which makes it difficult to maintain experienced teachers.

According to Gouveia *et al.* (2006), the higher the number of substitute or only contracted teachers, it generates a high turnover of teachers, which is the professional experience, which is one of the most important elements regarding quality of teaching, since "Is one of the quantifiable categories that make up the possibility of evaluating the conditions for the provision of quality education". (p. 261).

According to Oliveira (2004), like the work in general, the work of teachers has been increasingly the target of precariousness, especially in relation to employment relations, so that the most elementary signs of precarious conditions of teacher work appear precisely in the increase of ties of temporary jobs:

The increase in temporary contracts in public education networks, with the number of workers in some states increasing, salary increases, respect for a national salary floor, inadequate or even lacking, in some cases, positions and wages, the loss of labor and social security guarantees arising from the reform processes of the State apparatus have made the instability and precariousness of employment in the public teaching profession ever more acute. (Oliveira 2004, p. 1140).

According to Jacomini and Penna (2016) city halls tend to create several

criteria for professional advancement of teachers within the road plan. This makes it difficult to progress, "even if it meets the criteria required to progress in the career, whatever it may be, it is conditioned by governmental decisions that may delay or even prevent what is foreseen in the plans". (p. 191).

Thus, there is often a clash between teachers and municipal managers, regarding the fulfillment of teachers' rights foreseen in the career plans. In this way, our study also sought to analyze the unionization of the Special Education teachers who work in the rural schools of the Piedmont region of Diamantina. It was analyzed that 73% of teachers are unionized and 27% are not affiliated to unions. From the analyzed teachers, was questioned about the satisfaction about the union's performance. 50% of teachers believe that the work of the union is very satisfactory, 25% of teachers consider the performance unsatisfactory and 25% are indifferent.

Diniz and Rocha (2014) reaffirm the importance of trade unions in the fight for workers' rights. However, it is notorious that trade union weakening due to the low teacher adherence:

But the same has lost some of its terrain and many teachers even unionized has moved away some of the movement and participation. We

find that there is an attempt by the trade union movement to raise the movement again. Participation strategies have advanced in many directions. The mobilizations, calls by the television and print press have been used as a new strategy to call education professionals to debate the quality of education. We have found that leaders have a history of participation and involvement with political movements, often even before joining the union. The union movement is weak, but not finished. The struggles continue, the leaders have played their part. The pedagogical political formation has been one of the forms of action of the trade union movement and the leaders have shown a clarity that is important the union formation for a greater clarification on the role of the public school and its influences on the formation of the teachers (Diniz & Rocha, 2014, p. 2209).

In agreement with the authors, Farias Júnior (2014) explains in his study that most teachers who are not union members understand the precariousness of their work as something natural or inevitable and do not see the necessity of union membership as an important instrument to face the loss of rights.

This only ratifies the importance of trade unions as an element of political formation, since according to Diniz and Rocha (2014) "the union is a space of construction, transformation and struggle. There are even advances we still realize that much still has to be done in favor of a more just, more humane and ethical

society, but the bases are being launched". (p. 2208).

There is a very close relationship between working conditions and teachers' satisfaction with their profession. Therefore, teachers were asked about their satisfaction regarding their career as a Special Education Teacher working in the rural school. It was noticed that 91% of teachers consider themselves satisfied with their profession and 9% consider themselves dissatisfied.

The data are similar to the findings of Siade and Ximenes-Rocha (2018) who also studied teachers who work in rural schools, and realized that, while teachers recognize the precariousness of their working conditions, on the other hand they show satisfaction with the profession, as they realize the importance of their work in the students' lives.

However, the same authors warn that "the teacher should not conform to the conditions under which he/she performs his/her work, with the justification that the students depend on him/her, because this conformism compromises achievement of achievement and professional appreciation". (Siade & Ximenes-Rocha, 2018, p. 122).

## **Final considerations**

The objective of this paper was to describe the profile and the working conditions of the Special Education teachers who work in the schools of the municipalities of the Piedmont region of Diamantina, state of Bahia, it was possible to group the answers that describe the scenario analyzed.

Briefly, the profile of the Special Education teachers who work in the countryside schools of the Piedmont region of Diamantina are: women, mostly self-declared browns, most between 36 and 50 years of age, are married or live with a partner and have majority 2 children.

Summarizing the findings of the category of legal contractual conditions, from the majority responses, it was possible to observe that teachers have remuneration between 1 to 5 thousand *reais* and are satisfied with salary and work in up to 2 schools; are teachers graduated in course degree in Pedagogy and with Post - graduation *Lato Sensu* attended mostly in private institutions; most of them have more than 11 years of education time but less than 5 years of special education; are mostly insolvent and with a plan of positions and salaries; are mostly affiliated to trade unions and consider trade union action to be satisfactory; and are mostly satisfied with the teaching career.

Thus, we hope that this article contributes to a permanent dialogue between the working conditions of Special Education teachers and the Rural Education, taking into account their specificities and recommend that more research on the working conditions of Special Education teachers who in the rural schools are carried out, in order to fill the gaps that this article could not account for.

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