

Educational assessment and the Encceja: paths and challenges

ARTICLE

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Abstract

Evaluation was, for a long time, confused with the practice of examining, but it was precisely as an “examination” that the act of evaluating had its first functions and, only with time and the improvement of evaluative types and conceptions, was it possible to understand the development and construction of educational evaluation identities. This study outlines the profile of this practice and proposes a reminder of its historicity based on bibliographical research of studies such as those by Bonamino and Sousa (2012) on the three generations of assessment, in addition to an explanation of large-scale assessments, among them, Encceja, with emphasis on the study by Santos and Santos (2021), about this examination, focused on Youth and Adult Education. It was possible to verify the importance of the evolution of large-scale assessments and the relevant role of Encceja in verifying learning.

Keywords: Educational Assessment. Encceja. Historicity.

Avaliação Educacional e o Encceja: trajetórias e desafios

Resumo

A avaliação foi, por muito tempo, confundida com a prática de examinar, mas foi precisamente como “exame” que o ato de avaliar teve suas primeiras funções e, somente com o tempo e o aprimoramento dos tipos e concepções avaliativas, foi possível compreender o desenvolvimento e a construção das identidades da avaliação educacional. Este estudo traça o perfil da referida prática e propõe um rememorar da sua historicidade a partir de uma pesquisa bibliográfica de estudos tais como os de Bonamino e Sousa (2012) sobre as três gerações da avaliação, além da explanação sobre as avaliações em larga escala, dentre elas, o Encceja, com destaque para o estudo de Santos e Santos (2021), acerca desse exame voltado à Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Foi possível verificar a importância da evolução das avaliações em larga escala e o papel relevante do Encceja na verificação da aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação educacional. Encceja. Historicidade.

1 Introduction

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Evaluative initiatives have been present since the earliest civilizations. As human forms of social organization evolved, so did the ways of assessing (Vianna, 2000). Before acquiring the definitions it holds today, evaluation was initially used to select individuals fit for work. In this context, it gradually took on characteristics of selection and even exclusion, depending on the purpose it served.

It was only in the last century, with the emergence of formal evaluation of processes taking place within educational settings, that assessment began to assume diverse classifications. Thus, it gained theoretical and methodological grounding according to the historical moment in which it occurred, serving different objectives and approaches.

The focus of evaluation may lie in the classroom, in programs and public policies, institutions, curricula, educational systems, or processes (Sousa, 2000). Although it encompasses such a wide range, evaluation is most commonly seen in the educational context. As an intrinsically school-based activity, it has been the subject of numerous studies and research aimed at improving its understanding and use in various situations.

Accordingly, evaluation may take the form of learning assessment (which occurs directly in the classroom and measures students' academic results), or institutional assessment, which examines aspects related to the institution itself. It may also take place on a large scale, since it evaluates educational performance on a macro level, applying tests to large groups of students simultaneously and assessing socio-economic, teacher training, and institutional factors as well.

With the advancement of concepts and applications of educational assessment, the *Exame Nacional de Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos* (ENCCEJA) emerged through Ordinance No. 111 of December 4, 2002, established by the *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais* (Inep) (Brasil, 2002). This exam is designed to assess students enrolled in youth and adult education on a large scale and to grant them certification for either Elementary or High School education, depending on

the level the participant chooses to complete and the score obtained in the subject-specific tests (for Elementary School) or by area of knowledge (for High School).

With a trajectory marked by discontinuities in test administration, ongoing debates regarding its purpose, and a significant youth participation each year it takes place, the Encceja celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2022, since its first administration. Recognizing the importance of this exam, the present study was designed to reflect on the history of Encceja, encompassing both educational assessment and large-scale evaluation.

Whether conducted in the classroom or on a large scale, assessments must be analyzed by teachers and specialists from various curricular areas in order to effectively contribute to education. Evaluation is not an end in itself; rather, it should serve the development of teaching and learning processes (Vianna, 2003).

Therefore, from this perspective, following the Methodology section, a brief reflection is presented on educational assessment and large-scale evaluation. Finally, a section is devoted to Encceja, as outlined in the objective above.

2 Methodology

This is a theoretical article, excerpted from the Master's Dissertation of Maria Irlene Alves dos Santos, entitled *Analysis of Mathematics Performance Associated with Contextual and Linguistic Factors in ENCCEJA 2019*, from the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of Ceará (PPGE/UFC), defended in 2021 (Santos, 2021). The research adopts a qualitative approach, as it examines studies on the theme of educational assessment, focusing on Encceja and its historical, political, and social aspects.

According to Godoy (1995), the qualitative approach is most suitable for studies that seek to understand a phenomenon as a whole, or when the objective is to analyze cultural and social aspects within a given organization. Therefore, this approach is considered appropriate.

The study is bibliographic in nature, involving the analysis of studies derived from scientific journals, books, and technical reports. The works selected were those most closely aligned with the object of study, such as those by Vianna (2003), Bonamino and Sousa (2012), and Santos and Santos (2021), among other significant contributions to the field of Assessment and, more specifically, to Encceja.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Large-Scale Assessment

Assessment, in terms of its scope, can be viewed on three distinct levels, which, however, must be articulated with one another in order to enable decisions grounded in real educational circumstances. These levels are: learning assessment, which takes place in the classroom and for which the teacher is responsible for measuring and monitoring students' learning; institutional assessment, which occurs within schools; and large-scale assessments. The latter aim to evaluate entire education networks and are called "large-scale" because they may encompass the national, state, or municipal levels (Freitas *et al.*, 2009).

Learning assessment is conducted by teachers through tests, observations, participation, among other instruments, and seeks to understand, on a micro level, what students are learning or failing to learn. This process serves not only to determine annual approval but also to ensure that, while at school, students have the right to revisit content and reinforce their knowledge of certain learning areas. Institutional assessment, in turn, seeks to evaluate the institutions themselves – the teaching staff, infrastructure, and all other components essential to ensuring quality education. There are also network-level, or large-scale, assessments, applied to large groups of people. These are typically standardized and include knowledge tests corresponding to specific stages or modalities, as well as a socioeconomic questionnaire for respondents.

The performance of educational systems is verified through large-scale assessments, which, broadly speaking, are developed by the government and other entities both in Brazil and abroad. Another purpose of this type of assessment is to formulate and/or influence public education policy (Hypolito; Jorge, 2020). The use of standardized tests began in the early 20th century, originally intended to assist in assigning grades (Giordano, 2005).

According to Bonamino and Sousa (2012), three generations of large-scale educational assessment can be identified in Brazil. The first generation sought to provide a diagnostic overview of Brazilian education through the *Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Básica* (Saeb). The subsequent two generations aimed to link observed results with accountability policies.

Saeb began in the 1990s as the country's main assessment system in basic education. It represents the first generation of evaluation, enabling the monitoring of education in Brazil every two years, through a sample-based evaluation of the 4th and 8th grades (6th and 9th years) and the 3rd year of High School. The *Prova Brasil*, which characterizes the second generation of assessment, was created later, in 2005. Although also applied biennially, it aimed to gather information about education in municipalities and schools to support decision-making by government officials concerning technical and financial resources, pedagogical and administrative goal revisions, and educational improvement.

The third generation of assessment, still in the early 2000s, according to Bonamino and Sousa (2012), includes state and municipal initiatives to create their own educational assessment systems. These systems provided Departments of Education and schools with relevant information about students' learning, especially in the pioneering states such as São Paulo and Pernambuco. These assessments were more directly related to using results for policy development and curriculum reform (Bonamino; Sousa, 2012).

Large-scale assessments emerged within a historical context of transformation, marked by a more democratic outlook in political, cultural, scientific, and educational

spheres during the 1980s. Such assessments are characterized by being external to the educational entity they evaluate (whether a network, system, or institution). They consist of standardized tests based on *item response theory* and are applied to large groups of people, such as grade levels or final stages of schooling (Esquinsani, 2019).

This type of assessment offers certain advantages. For instance, assessing a large number of individuals can be beneficial, as it allows for the collection of data on students' acquired knowledge and socioeconomic profiles in one or few test applications, thus producing results more efficiently than evaluating each student individually. However, they are also subject to criticism, as their focus on educational performance often overlooks individual student specificities due to the mass data collection process.

In this context, several federal initiatives were launched, such as Saeb in the 1990s, the first effort to measure student proficiency. Conducted through sampling in each federal unit, it focused on management. In 1998, the first edition of the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (Enem) was administered to graduating students (Sousa, 2014). It is worth noting that Enem later evolved to become not only an assessment tool but also an entry pathway to universities.

Among these initiatives, the *Exame Nacional dos Cursos* (ENC), applied to higher education and better known as *Provão*, was implemented in 1996. It was mandatory for all graduating students, and its results were used to rank the best programs (those whose students achieved the highest scores) (Vianna, 2003). Later, the *Exame Nacional de Desempenho dos Estudantes* (Enade) was developed, also targeting higher education. Enade became part of the *Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior* (Sinaes), established in 2004, which aimed to assess not only students, through Enade, but also academic programs and institutions.

Large-scale assessments have thus been developed for both Basic and Higher Education. However, in 2002, a specific exam was created for the *Educação de Jovens e Adultos* (EJA) modality – the *Exame Nacional para Certificação de Competências de Jovens e Adultos* (Encceja) – designed to measure the knowledge, skills, and

competencies of these students across different learning areas, including Mathematics. This made it possible to issue certification for levels within Basic Education.

Concerns regarding EJA from an evaluative perspective have been addressed in numerous studies over the years, such as research analyzing literacy processes and external challenges faced by youth and adult learners (Deffacci; Ribeiro, 2016). Dropout rates in EJA are also examined in another study, which found that curricula failing to consider EJA specificities, lack of local safety during classes, and absence of educational projects are factors contributing to dropout rates in a given state (Fernandes; Oliveira, 2020). The use of autobiographical methodology in certain EJA classes has also been studied, strengthening the identities of both students and researchers, among other benefits (Souza Maria; Fontoura, 2018).

Currently, large-scale assessments are part of a global educational reform movement. They often embody the principle of accountability, producing data that enable the State to hold different educational agents responsible for student performance and adherence to national curricula (Verger; Parcerisa; Fontdevila, 2018).

To assess on a large scale – or externally – implies a set of characteristics that reveal the macro dimension of evaluation, expressed through terms such as “performance,” “large student contingents,” and “educational policies.” If these terms denote breadth, they also suggest that the system overseeing such a vast educational landscape becomes more complex, precisely because it must address more variables and operate with greater scope.

The following section presents a more specific overview of one of these assessments: Encceja.

3.2 Encceja: Perspectives and Discontinuities

Among the wide range of assessments currently present in education, one can mention international programs such as the *Programme for International Student*

Assessment (Pisa), the *Teaching and Learning International Survey (Talis)*, the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio (Enem)*, and *Encceja*, which, like *Saeb*, comprises several exam modalities (Hypolito; Jorge, 2020). *Encceja* has three applications: a regular national edition, one for individuals deprived of liberty, and another held abroad.

One of the motivations behind the creation of this exam was to curb the lucrative “diploma-selling” industry associated with adult education programs. However, this justification is somewhat contradictory, as the Ministry of Education – entrusted with safeguarding national education and supported by legislation – could have empowered educational authorities to combat such fraud. It is also the responsibility of oversight bodies to supervise, penalize, or close institutions engaged in these illicit practices. Therefore, *Encceja* may not have been primarily justified as a tool to combat this issue (Serrao, 2014).

Consequently, *Encceja*'s public image has become strongly tied to certification, as if that were its sole purpose. This may lead potential participants to believe that it is unnecessary to resume formal studies – often due to common factors such as lack of time, work commitments, or family responsibilities. Although the exam did help reduce the prevalence of fraudulent diploma sales, its broader objectives must be more clearly disseminated so that certification is not seen as its only goal.

A study on *EJA* (Youth and Adult Education) reveals a decline in enrollment. According to the 2018 School Census (*Inep*, 2018), total enrollment in Basic Education within the *EJA* modality was 3.5 million students, representing a 1.5% decrease compared to the previous year. While this may initially seem positive, it is not, since the decline in enrollment does not reflect a reduction in the number of illiterate individuals. In 2018, the number of illiterate people in Brazil remained around 11.3 million (Ventura; Oliveira, 2020).

The aforementioned authors further highlight that this mismatch between enrollment figures and illiteracy rates points to a continuing downward trend in *EJA* participation. Ventura and Oliveira (2020) argue that governmental actions tend to use

certification as a strategy to reverse this situation, while in practice neglecting schooling as a more viable solution for addressing *EJA*'s educational challenges.

Encceja was established by Ordinance No. 2,270 on August 14, 2002 (Brasil, 2002). It is administered to young people and adults who did not complete their studies at the appropriate age and, according to Article 2 of this document, aims to:

serve as a means of self-assessment of both school knowledge and personal and social experiences; enable education departments to recognize knowledge acquired at the Elementary and High School levels by participants; correct educational flow; build a database containing pedagogical and socioeconomic information about participants; and act as a quality indicator (Brasil, 2002).

This exam was also developed under the authority of Brazilian legislation, such as the 1988 *Federal Constitution*, Article 205, which establishes education as a right of all and a duty of the State and the family (Brasil, 1988). Likewise, the *Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education* (LDB) No. 9,394/1996 stipulates, in Article 38, §§1 and 2, the minimum ages of 15 for Elementary and 18 for High School certification exams (Brasil, 1996). Additionally, the *National Education Plan* (PNE) 2014–2024 (Law No. 13,005/2014) (Brasil, 2014) guarantees the basic educational rights of children, adolescents, and adults alike, regarding access to and continuity in schooling. These legal frameworks arose within the broader context of large-scale assessments developed in Brazil during the late 20th and early 21st centuries and served to support and regulate their implementation.

The PNE (Law No. 13,005/2014), in effect until 2024, sets out goals 8, 9, and 10 directed toward *EJA*: Goal 8 (to raise the average years of schooling among 18–29-year-olds), Goal 9 (to increase the literacy rate of the population aged 15 and over), and Goal 10 (to ensure that at least 25% of *EJA* enrollments at the Elementary and High School levels are integrated with vocational education). These goals represent a legal commitment to improving *EJA*.

On one hand, *Encceja* aligns positively with Goal 8, as it broadens access to certification and promotes educational attainment. On the other, it conflicts with Goal 10,

which emphasizes that *EJA* integrated with vocational education should be grounded in formal schooling (Santos; Santos, 2021).

Over the years, various initiatives and policies have been created for youth and adults, aiming to include them in educational legislation and curricula beyond theoretical formulations. Although some programs were discontinued, other initiatives reached those most in need through literacy and social inclusion efforts. Nevertheless, many individuals continue to leave school before completion and return later seeking to finish their education.

The pilot edition of *Encceja* took place in 2002. Subsequently, Brazil did not hold the exam for two years. It was administered in Japan in 2004, but not domestically. With the support of the Paraná State Department of Education, *Encceja* was applied abroad between 2002 and 2009 (although in 2009, despite registration, there was once again no edition in Brazil). The 2010 exams were conducted in 2011, and the test was not held in 2012 but resumed in 2013 (Catelli Jr.; Gisi; Serrao, 2013).

On the *Inep* website, microdata (containing test items, answer keys, and results) for these early years are unavailable, but those from 2014 to 2019 are accessible (*Inep*, 2020). It is worth noting that in 2009, High School certification in Brazil began to be issued through *Enem*, while *Encceja* continued to provide Elementary-level certification. Abroad, however, it continued to certify both levels (Serrao, 2014). In 2017, with changes to *Enem*, responsibility for High School certification returned to *Encceja* (Santos; Santos, 2021).

Enem temporarily replaced *Encceja* as the certifying exam for High School between 2009 and 2016. During that period, *Encceja* assessed only Elementary-level competencies and skills. For Brazilians residing abroad, it continued to issue certification for both Elementary and High School levels (Almeida, 2020). However, as Almeida (2020) points out, the certifying function assigned to *Enem* did not align with its intended purpose as an evaluative exam. In other words, *Enem* was given a role – albeit for a relatively short period – that conflicted with its original objectives, thereby depriving *Encceja* of part of its true function.

Few scientific studies have been conducted on *Encceja*, and there is a notable scarcity of technical reports on its applications. One possible reason for *Encceja*'s diminished prominence in the early 21st century, when other educational programs were prioritized, may lie in the differing perspectives of successive presidents of *Inep*, the institution responsible for the exam (Serrao, 2014). The process thus experienced discontinuities and changes in implementation. Although in recent years it has been administered annually, *Encceja* still struggles to consolidate itself as a truly evaluative instrument, fulfilling its broader objectives beyond mere certification.

4 Final considerations

Educational assessment gained prominence in the 20th century and underwent significant transformations – from the creation and administration of the first standardized tests in the United States, designed to measure learning in a postwar context, to the establishment of assessment systems in Brazil structured for Basic Education (such as *Saeb*) and Higher Education (such as *Sinaes*). These systems also include exams for university admission, such as *Enem*, and certification exams for Basic Education, such as *Encceja*.

The three generations of assessment reflect the evolution of evaluation according to the educational needs of each period in the teaching and learning process. These comprise the development and implementation of *Saeb* (first generation), *Prova Brasil* (second generation), and the state-level educational assessments of São Paulo and Pernambuco (third generation). However, these generations are not confined to the specific historical moments in which they emerged; rather, they manifest across both public policy formulation and school practices.

Within this broad range of large-scale assessment initiatives, *Encceja* emerges as an instrument that not only enables the completion of Basic Education but also – perhaps more importantly – serves as a means to measure what students know and what they are learning. Ultimately, the different generations and developments in assessment do

not restrict evaluative action to a single way of understanding the act of evaluation; instead, they can complement one another and enrich new practices.

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