

Pontinha Quilombola Association: stories of struggles and resistance for the right to EJA

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This article is the result of research that sought to understand the sociopolitical activities of the Quilombola Association of Pontinha, located in Minas Gerais, with regard to the realization of the right to education for young people, adults, and the elderly (EJA). This is a qualitative study. The main methodological procedures used were: semi-structured interviews with leaders, teachers, and students; participant observation, literature review, and document analysis. The theoretical concepts presented by Gomes (2017), Da Silva (2021), Silva (2017, 2021, and 2024), among others, contributed to the reflections made. The results show that the Association contributed directly to the process of implementing EJA in the territory. It is noteworthy that the Association plays a central political role in relation to the achievement and guarantee of the right to education. The importance of valuing traditional knowledge and strengthening local black community socio-political activism is also highlighted.

Keywords: *Quilombola* School Education. Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations. Educational Policies.

Associação Quilombola da Pontinha: histórias de lutas e de resistências pelo direito à EJA

Resumo

Este artigo resulta de uma pesquisa que buscou compreender a atuação sociopolítica da Associação Quilombola da Pontinha localizada em MG no que concerne a efetivação do direito à Educação de pessoas Jovens, Adultas e Idosas (EJA). Trata-se de um estudo de caráter qualitativo. Os principais procedimentos metodológicos utilizados foram: a realização de entrevistas semiestruturadas com lideranças, docentes e discentes; a observação participante, revisão de literatura e análise documental. As concepções teóricas apresentadas por Gomes (2017), Da Silva (2021), Silva (2017, 2021 e 2024), entre outros, contribuíram para as reflexões realizadas. Os resultados evidenciam que a Associação contribuiu diretamente no processo de implementação da EJA no território. Notabilizou que a Associação exerce uma função política central em relação à conquista e a garantia referente ao direito à educação. Destaca-se ainda a importância da valorização dos saberes tradicionais e do fortalecimento do ativismo sociopolítico comunitário negro local.

Palavras-chave: Educação Escolar *Quilombola*. Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais. Políticas Educacionais.

1 Introduction

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This article is the result of a study conducted within the scope of a professional master's program in Education, which sought to understand the sociopolitical action of the *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha, located in the state of Minas Gerais, with regard to the implementation of the right to education for Youth, Adults, and Older People (EJA). The study is grounded in the recognition that achievements in public education policies are the outcome of struggles led by *quilombola* communities within their territories. Acknowledging, therefore, the sociopolitical agency of this Association in relation to securing the right to education, this research sought to address the following question: in what ways has the *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha contributed to the achievement of EJA within the community?

Thus, in order to investigate and understand EJA and the role of *quilombola* associations in addressing educational demands, a survey of authors who discuss this theme was conducted through the review of master's theses and doctoral dissertations. By referencing keywords such as "EJA struggles and achievements" and "*quilombola* community associations," placed within quotation marks, 26 master's and doctoral studies produced between 2019 and 2023 were identified. After refining the findings, it was observed that only a small number of studies focus on reflecting upon the articulation between the actions of *quilombola* associations and the defense of EJA. This finding highlights the originality of the present study, as well as the relevance of the struggles undertaken by *quilombola* communities in their territories to secure the right to EJA.

The *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha began its activities in 1988; however, its process of institutionalization was only formally completed in 2019. The Association has a headquarters building that is currently undergoing renovation. It constitutes an institution of fundamental importance for community development, as it functions as a space of

welcome and support, and it is through this Association that the community strengthens and articulates its collective demands. In this sense, the Association presents itself as a guardian of traditional and territorial knowledge, which encompasses meanings, values, beliefs, and ways of life.

It is important to highlight that the community was affected by what is considered the largest environmental crime in human history: the collapse of the Vale mining dam, one of the world's largest mining companies, which occurred in 2019 in the municipality of Brumadinho, Minas Gerais. The disaster resulted in the discharge of more than 13 million cubic meters of mining tailings into the Paraopeba River, which runs through the community's territory, causing profound and long-lasting socio-environmental impacts. The degradation of the river manifested progressively over time, compromising the community's way of life, which had always been closely connected to it. In terms of public administration, Pontinha belongs to the municipality of Paraopeba and falls under the jurisdiction of this judicial district.

From a historical perspective, the certification and recognition of *quilombola* struggles in Brazil are relatively recent. One of the milestones of this achievement is the Federal Constitution of 1988. The resemanticization of the term “quilombo” was implemented by the Federal Executive Branch through Decree No. 4,887, of November 20, 2003, which, after 15 years, regulated Article 68 of the Transitional Constitutional Provisions Act (ADCT/88). This decree introduced the designation “quilombo remnants,” marking the beginning of the struggle for the processes of legitimation and land titling of these communities.

In this regard, Article 68 of the Transitional Constitutional Provisions Act states that: “definitive ownership of the lands they occupy is recognized for the remnants of quilombo communities, and the State shall issue the respective land titles to them” (BRASIL, 1988).

Despite these constitutional advances, the broader incorporation of *quilombola* subjects' interests within the field of education only occurred in 2003, with the enactment of Law No. 10,639, later updated by Law No. 11,645/2008, which also came to include the teaching of Indigenous History and Culture. These legal instruments amended Article 26-

A of the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDBEN No. 9,394/1996), making the teaching of African History and Afro-Brazilian and African Culture compulsory in basic education (BRASIL, 2003; 2008).

Consequently, this legislation enabled the development of Opinion CNE/CEB No. 16/2012, approved on June 5, 2012, which established the National Curriculum Guidelines for *Quilombola* School Education, defining that:

Quilombola School Education is a modality of basic education whose purpose is to recognize *quilombola* communities as collective subjects of rights, endowed with their own identity, culture, and history, and therefore constitutes a policy aimed at strengthening these communities (BRASIL, 2012).

The National Coordination for the Articulation of Rural Black *Quilombola* Communities (CONAQ), established in 1996, is the body that strengthens *quilombola* struggles, particularly with regard to rights related to land, cultural identity, citizenship, and the fight against racism, among other demands arising from exclusion and discrimination within *quilombola* communities.

Since its creation, CONAQ has acted in social mobilization and in the defense of *quilombola* people's rights, emphasizing the importance of this collective in political and decision-making spaces. As Silva (2016, p. 36) emphasizes, it is essential that *quilombola* voices be heard in relation to their demands, as these directly affect their ways of life and their rights.

Situated in different regions across the national territory, *quilombola* communities cannot be understood as something that has merely "remained" or as a "remainder." Rather, they must be recognized as a population that has made a significant contribution to the formation of Brazilian society and that is capable of effecting real changes in the structure of the Brazilian State, breaking away from established regimes and imposed orders, and constructing their own alternatives for overcoming structural inequalities (Silva, 2016, p. 36).

Article 68 of the Transitional Constitutional Provisions Act (ADCT), together with Articles 215 and 216 of the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF/88), constitute fundamental milestones in the *quilombola* struggle, as they recognize the territorial and cultural rights of these peoples. In the same direction, Convention No. 169 of the International Labour

Organization (ILO), adopted in 1989 and ratified by Brazil, as well as Federal Decree No. 4,887/2003, represent important legal instruments for guaranteeing the culture, identity, and ways of life of *quilombola* peoples.

More specifically, the actions of the *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha with regard to the struggle to guarantee the right to EJAI have been of fundamental importance. We found that the provision of EJAI in the territory emerged from *quilombola* community mobilization through articulation with public education policies. In this article, EJAI is interpreted as an affirmative action and, therefore, as part of a social and human right aimed at historical reparation, intertwined with the construction of a society grounded in justice and racial equity, including for *quilombola* people.

2 Methodology

Qualitative research emerged as the most appropriate approach for achieving the objectives proposed in this investigation. Its relevance, particularly in the field of education, lies in the fact that it enables the researcher to engage in critical reflection on their own role and actions throughout the research process.

To conduct this study, the following data collection instruments were employed: (a) semi-structured interviews, with audio recording and subsequent transcription; (b) participant observation, accompanied by notes recorded in a field diary developed throughout the entire research process; (c) literature review; (d) document analysis; and (e) the use of photographic and journalistic records. All procedures were presented to the research participants so that they would feel comfortable with the process, ensuring that it was conducted with respect, ethical rigor, and without any form of embarrassment or coercion.

Establishing a dialogical relationship is fundamental in research conducted with *quilombola* communities. According to Minayo (2001, p. 55), in semi-structured interviews, the researcher seeks to capture information present in the discourse of social actors

through interaction. This is an intentional process rather than a casual or neutral conversation, as the researcher is directly implicated in the process of collecting narratives.

Thus, we engaged in dialogue with six subjects directly involved in the work of the *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha (AQP):

- 1) the former president of the AQP, who participated in the process of implementing EJAI in the community
- 2) the current secretary of the Association
- 3) a teacher who worked in EJAI
- 4) a teacher who worked during the school's initial years, contributing to an understanding of the process of EJAI implementation in the community and its transformations over time
- 5) a member of the Association, former secretary, and also a schoolteacher, whose role was significant in articulating relations between the school and the Association
- 6) a former EJAI student (2017–2021).

In addition to the interviews, we considered it essential to analyze both formal and informal documents and to promote active listening within the community through participant observation. These methodological procedures enabled a more in-depth understanding of the struggles and achievements related to the implementation of EJAI in the *quilombola* territory, valuing the knowledge and practices of the subjects involved.

Ultimately, it is essential to recognize that it is the methodological approach that enables meaningful immersion in the investigated context. Gil (2007, p. 17) defines research as a rational and systematic procedure aimed at providing answers to proposed problems. With regard to content analysis, we adopted a descriptive approach, seeking to present the developments, characteristics, and dimensions of the implementation of public education policies, as well as to understand how the school became integrated into the community. Bardin (2011, p. 36) emphasizes that, in content analysis, data are not

presented as complete and finalized; rather, what exists are “some basic rules, at times difficult to transpose.”

The entire research procedure was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (CEP/UFMG). Inspired by the conduct of collaborative, participatory, and educational research, partnerships were established with Sind-UTE (Single Union of Education Workers of Minas Gerais), the Municipal Health Secretariat—particularly the Family Health Strategy (ESF)—as well as with the administration and coordination of the municipal school, political agents, and other local leaders.

3 Results and Discussion

The study indicated that the sociopolitical action of the *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha was fundamental to securing the achievement of EJAI as part of the broader struggle for socio-racial justice in the territory (Gomes, 2017). This finding emerges from the following analytical categories produced from the interviews conducted, namely: (a) collective action as a pathway of resistance and transformation; and (b) the dialogical relationship between the Association and public authorities in favor of the right to education.

3.1 Collective action as a pathway of resistance and transformation

Collective action through associativism proves to be a vital instrument for strengthening traditional communities, as clearly illustrated by the case of the Association. These social dimensions are especially fundamental for enabling the community to overcome anonymity and to achieve representativeness in relation to public institutions. This perspective reinforces the propositions advanced by Nascimento (2007, p. 45), who states: “my space is my quilombo. Where I am, I am. When I am, I am,” a powerful reflection that reaffirms the *quilombola* territory as a space of belonging, identity construction, and (re)existence.

In this sense, the official registration of the Association does not constitute merely a bureaucratic procedure, but rather an essential prerequisite for the community to access its social and human rights and to participate in the various government programs available. It therefore represents both a symbolic and a practical achievement, legitimizing the community's political and social existence within the public sphere.

In addition to fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening collective identity, associativism also enables communities to qualify for the acquisition of resources through projects, whether public or private. In this regard, Dona Zizi (former president of the *Quilombola* Association of Pontinha, 2024) reports some of the achievements attained through community mobilization: “we managed to bring certain benefits to the community, such as the possible inclusion of Copasa, given that Pontinha lacks water supply and sewage treatment, the implementation of Youth and Adult Education, and the introduction of secondary education at the school within the territory.”

Such advances confirm the importance of social organization as a tool for transformation. This perspective corroborates the reflections of Silva (2021, p. 178), who argues that,

Unveiling the actions of social organizations that struggle for basic rights to life entails recognizing the significance of popular struggles that are deeply rooted within these collectives. For this reason, we believe that only through organized communities is it possible to fight for essential basic rights, such as education, particularly Youth, Adult, and Older People's Education (Silva, 2021, p.178).

One characteristic identified in this form of organization is the voluntary and collective participation in the struggles carried out within the Association. Accordingly, Ênio and Zizi reflect that participation in the Association takes place on a non-profit basis and is composed of individuals who work toward improving the quality of life in the community. As stated by Rodrigues (2022, p. 224):

these are subjects who have their own activities, mediate their relationship with concrete reality, create their own strategies of struggle, and respond to what happens to them and to their world under historically constituted conditions and determinations (Rodrigues, 2022, p.224).

As recorded in Ênio's testimony regarding the Association's members:

"We work as volunteers. We give up many things, we give up our own things, our own lives, to try to do the best for the quilombo. What is best for the community, because the community deserves it. It was forgotten for many years. And now, thank God, and thanks to many people like you, for example, who come here and look at the community, we are gaining visibility, gaining recognition, and that is rewarding" (Ênio, secretary of the Quilombola Association of Pontinha, 2024).

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The testimonies of Dona Euriza reveal her commitment to the *quilombola* community and to the education of the population of Paraopeba and Pontinha. Her memories bear witness to the challenges of the past, which are reflected in the achievements of the present, as can be observed in the following account:

"Oh, how I wish, my dear! If only it were the school of today. In the first school where I worked, there wasn't even drinking water for the students. No, there wasn't. I'm not praising today's governors, because you want the truth, don't you? That's the truth! You want the truth! So I won't say there were benefits there, because I know there weren't. There wasn't even water for us to drink, there wasn't even a place to store the water. We fetched water from the wells. And do you know how we drank it? We asked each student to bring their own cup. Then we would arrive, place the can of water on the school's porch. When someone was thirsty, they would go there, scoop the water with their own cup, and drink. Then another would do the same with their cup and drink. There was no filter, no clay jar, nothing. It was just taking the water from the can and drinking it" (Dona Euriza, one of the first teachers of the Quilombo of Pontinha, 2024).

The provision of public education in proximity to learners, as guaranteed by legislation, is fundamental to the realization of the social and human right to EJAI. The testimony of Erlane, a former EJAI student and a *quilombola* from Pontinha, highlights the collective effort required for this right to become a reality:

"Yes, I remember at the time that they needed a certain number to open the class. A number of people to be able to come to school. I remember that they were collecting the names of those who had not completed their studies. At the time, I think they needed around ten or twelve people, and they still only had about seven. I myself became almost frantic. 'Come on, everyone, let's go back,' and whoever I knew, I went after. Then, thank God, we reached the target, at least around ten students, so that the class could be opened. And once it opened, more and more people began to show up" (Erlane, former EJAI student, 2024).

From an institutional perspective, it can be observed that public agencies and educational legislation impose criteria that restrict the opening of EJA classes, such as the requirement of a minimum number of students. This requirement contradicts National Education Guidelines and Bases Law No. 9,394/1996 (LDBEN), which does not establish a minimum number of learners for its provision. Such requirements operate as mechanisms of exclusion with regard to access to this modality of education, especially for populations whose educational rights have historically been neglected.

It becomes evident that, rather than facilitating the return to schooling, States and Municipalities impose barriers that hinder access to and permanence of young, adult, and older learners within the educational system. This reveals a strategy that, even if implicit, ultimately excludes and contributes to the production of new socio-racial inequalities.

As noted by Da Silva (2021, p. 203), “illiteracy, as well as the lack of access to and permanence at different levels of basic education, have historically constituted, in our country, instruments that limit individuals’ inalienable rights to the full exercise of citizenship.” This reality is experienced on a daily basis by EJA learners, who face numerous obstacles in returning to their studies when, in fact, their demands should be broadly addressed in order to guarantee their social and human rights.

In this direction, Dona Zizi (2024) emphasizes the importance of achieving the implementation of EJA in the territory of Pontinha. Her account highlights not only the relevance of its provision, but also the difficulties faced throughout the process of securing this right, such as the lack of funding that would have enabled her participation in regional forums—spaces that are fundamental for presenting demands and engaging in dialogue with public authorities. In her words:

“I think it was a good thing, right? For the community, especially, right? Because I had already thought that having a secondary school in the quilombo and EJA was really good, you know. And I actually thought it was very good because what used to happen was this: the young people basically only had work in the fields, right? So, those who wanted to study would get home at five or six in the evening and then had to go to Paraopeba to study, right? And when would they get home? They would get home at midnight, one in the morning, only to leave again at five in the morning. So, those who really wanted to study did study. They made that sacrifice. We had some help from local politicians, but most of it was us ourselves! ‘If we had

stayed still, we wouldn't have achieved anything" (Zizi, former president of the *Quilombola Association of Pontinha*, 2024).

Based on this powerful account, marked by pride in the achievement of night schooling and, specifically, EJA within the *quilombola* territory, the fundamental role of social movements as political subjects in the struggle for rights becomes evident. These collectives assume the historical responsibility of ensuring, expanding, and restoring the dignity of the Black population, especially in contexts marked by systematic exclusion and institutional neglect. It is precisely in confronting the absences of the State that popular organization emerges as a strategy of re-existence and identity affirmation. As aptly noted by Arroyo (2003, p. 43):

Social movements have their own ways of knowing reality. Within them, we can grasp distinct ways of understanding the urban question, the agrarian question, employment and unemployment, and even ways of understanding school, education, health, transportation, and security... Ways of knowing social logic. They reveal a particular way in which social subjects come to know themselves, deal with their collective memory, and engage with their rights (Arroyo, 2003, p.43).

This demonstrates that the struggles led by social movements inherently carry a pedagogical dimension capable of articulating, challenging, and organizing the implementation of public policies, especially in the field of education. As emphasized by Silva (2017, p. 210), “the struggle carried out by these social actors for the right to education combined with the right to difference is understood here as a ‘formative virtuality’ that carries within itself an educational dimension.”

In this sense, the *quilombola* community of Pontinha legitimizes itself through the struggle for the right to education, breaking with the colonial logic historically imposed upon it. This rupture occurs not only within the institutional sphere, but also in everyday life, through ways of living, traditions, orality, customs, and ancestral knowledge that remain alive and shared across generations. It is through this process that a *pedagogy of resistance* takes shape as a collectively constructed formative practice, one that reaffirms identity, reactivates memory, and strengthens the struggle for rights from within the territory itself.

3.2 Dialogical relationship between the Association and public authorities in favor of the right to education

From this perspective, the Association performs an articulating role with schools and governmental bodies, acting as a mediator between community demands and institutional instances. This work involves different forms of communication, facing structural and political challenges, while also producing significant outcomes grounded in active listening and collective protagonism.

The Association thus comes to be recognized by the community as an integral part of a broader set of political actors, as highlighted by Joselha:

“We are always making our demands together with the Association; we are always there in the struggle. Bringing issues forward. Also seeking things out. Today it is better that we first seek knowledge of what we are entitled to so that we can go after it. Today it is much easier, because before we were like this: I’ll go, but will I succeed? Today we go with that sense of assurance: I will pursue this because I know I have the right to it” (Joselha, teacher and member of the Quilombola Association of Pontinha, 2024).

Professor Marcos also emphasizes the active participation of community members. By highlighting the importance of EJA for the community, he shares his experience during the period in which he taught students from the *quilombola* community, underscoring the close relationship between participatory education and the construction of knowledge.

“Yes, EJA is very important for Pontinha. I even forgot to mention it, but I had many experiences related to cultural knowledge in EJA. There, they make extensive use of medicinal plant roots. We even carried out a project in which older people brought the plants and explained to us what each one was used for. The EJA students had a great deal of knowledge, and they should pass this knowledge on to students in the other classes, who did not have the same level of understanding. They were true root herbalists; they knew what each root and each leaf was used for. I think there were about three students who knew a great deal about this aspect of nature, about the surroundings of the community, and they shared this knowledge with the others. This contributed immensely for everyone. They explained the uses of the roots, what they were for, how to prepare teas and remedies. This lasted an entire semester, with them speaking and explaining both to us, the teachers, and to the younger students. There are many plants there whose uses we do not even know—how to harvest them, how to prepare them. It was a great opportunity to pass on knowledge. It was truly cultural, because it is part of their culture. And as a teacher, I did not have this knowledge. In this way, EJA is important even for passing culture

forward, making use of the students' own knowledge, which they share with teachers and with younger students" (Marcos, teacher who worked in EJAI).

The testimony makes explicit the relevance of the sociopolitical mobilization of the community and of the *Quilombola* Association in guaranteeing educational rights. Miranda (2012, p. 379) invites us to reflect on education and its practices within *quilombola* territories by arguing that

[...] education in *quilombola* communities cannot be conceived in isolation from the cultural, social, and political dimensions of the community. It must be immersed in historical realities and in the struggles for permanence and resistance of these peoples, taking into account the ongoing process of affirmation of their identities and rights (Miranda, 2012, p.379).

This reflection leads us to understand that educational actions, such as the establishment of night schooling and EJAI, are not merely pedagogical interventions, but rather political and cultural strategies aimed at strengthening the identity and rights of the *quilombola* community. The active participation of the Association, as demonstrated by Erlane, clearly illustrates how local mobilization is crucial for the conquest of rights and for overcoming the historical difficulties faced by these populations.

Thus, by adopting the theoretical-empirical approach of Black Popular Education (BPE), which seeks to value, promote, and make visible the sociopolitical and cultural action led by Afro-descendant peoples, especially with regard to their agency within the field of education (Silva, 2020, p. 201), we understand that this study is guided by the defense of EJAI as a social and human right, grounded in the struggles undertaken by *quilombola* Black collectives.

4 Final considerations

This research sought to understand, through attentive listening to community leaders, a former learner, teachers, and other residents of the *quilombola* community of Pontinha, how EJAI is guaranteed within the territory. The analysis of the testimonies and

shared experiences revealed, in a compelling way, that EJAI should not be understood as an alternative or compensatory educational modality, but rather as an essential mechanism for social transformation, the reconstruction of interrupted life trajectories, and the strengthening of citizenship.

The Association thus materializes as a territory of resistance, in which collective strength and popular mobilization stand out. The actions of collective subjects reveal the community's commitment to guaranteeing the right to education. Their sociopolitical engagement enabled historic achievements, such as the implementation of night secondary education and EJAI at the local school. As a result, *quilombola* students and residents of surrounding rural communities were able to pursue their studies without having to commute to urban areas, thereby expanding, among other aspects, their opportunities for socioprofessional and cultural inclusion.

Despite the advances achieved, the struggle continues. One of the main obstacles identified in this research is the denial of the right to school transportation. Another concerns the registration of learners as residents of urban areas, disregarding their *quilombola* identity and territorial belonging. These practices constitute political maneuvers employed by educational administrators that violate the principle of equity, thus compromising dignified access to and permanence of diverse subjects within EJAI.

In this sense, the formal recognition of the school as a *quilombola* school emerges as an urgent demand. Although this designation appears in some of the documents analyzed, the lack of institutional recognition hinders access to specific public policies and prevents the hiring of professionals from the community itself. This situation undermines Pontinha's autonomy in its educational process and runs counter to what is established in the *Quilombola School Education Guidelines*.

In light of these challenges, the *Quilombola* Association has sought dialogue with the Minas Gerais State Secretariat of Education (SEE/MG) and other public agencies, aiming not only to correct administrative distortions but also to consolidate an educational model that values *quilombola* identity, promotes socio-racial justice, and strengthens the active participation of *quilombola* subjects within the territory.

Thus, the struggle for EJAI, for school transportation, and for the recognition of the school as *quilombola* constitutes a broader agenda of rights advocacy. Finally, the study highlights the importance of the Association in fostering the transformation of educational, social, and cultural realities in *quilombola* territories, in favor of EJAI as a social and human right.

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