



IMAGE: A MAP OF THE STARS OF THE ORION CONSTELLATION

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# Journal Content

In this Issue



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- i. Journal introduction and copyrights
  - ii. Featured blogs and online content
  - iii. Journal content
  - iv. Editorial Board Members
- 

1. Multiple Long-Term Conditions-Multi-Morbidity and Socioeconomic Inequalities in the Adult Population in Brazil: A Gender Perspective. **1-20**
  2. Assessing Faculty Investments in Emerging Education Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in Selected African Universities. **21-37**
  3. Diversity and Identity in Southwestern Poland. Narratives of Silesian Women. **39-52**
  4. Assessment of the Demand for Occupational Therapy Upgrade Programs from Diploma to Degree in Kenya. **53-68**
  5. The Role and Symbolism of Water in Charles Perrault, Gustave Doré and Juana De Ibarbourou: Comparative Literature in Spanish Language Teaching. **69-84**
  6. “Reclaiming Space: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Nature and Memory in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”. **85-103**
  7. Between Yesterday and Today: Education for Young People, Adults and the Elderly, A Story in a Distant Construction Process. **105-118**
- 

- V. Great Britain Journals Press Membership



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# Multiple Long-Term Conditions-Multi-Morbidity- and Socioeconomic Inequalities in the Adult Population in Brazil: A Gender Perspective

*Olivares-Tirado, Pedro*

*Federal University of Pernambuco*

## ABSTRACT

In a context of demographic and epidemiological transitions and significant socioeconomic inequalities, Brazil is experiencing an increasing prevalence of chronic diseases. Based on the Brazilian National Health Survey 2019, the study analysed the impact of education and household income inequalities on multiple long-term chronic conditions (MLTC) in adults aged 18 and older from a gender perspective. In a sample of 86,831 participants, socioeconomic inequalities were assessed using regression-based measures. In the general population the prevalence of MLTC was 29.5%, higher in women and older adults, raising concerns about increasing rates in young adults. Differences between the observed and predicted MLTC prevalence rates were noted, with lower-income and educational attainment groups possibly experiencing under-diagnosis, while higher-income and educated groups may be over-diagnosed. The study found that education and income levels influenced the risk of MLTC, with varying effects based on gender and age. Women with lower education and household incomes had a higher risk, while in men, higher education and household income were associated with increased risk. The research emphasizes the need for preventive policies for young adults and further studies on risk factors, healthcare costs, and health coverage policies to reduce inequalities.

*Keywords:* multimorbidity, multiple long-term chronic conditions, socioeconomic positions, inequality measures, health inequalities, brazil.

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**Keywords:** multimorbidity, multiple long-term chronic conditions, socioeconomic positions, inequality measures, health inequalities, brazil.

**Author:** Center for Applied Social Sciences. Department of Economy. Federal University of Pernambuco, Pernambuco, Brazil.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Global population is growing, particularly in lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), expected to reach 10.3 billion by the mid-2080s [1]. Additionally, people are living longer, with the percentage of individuals aged 60 and older estimated to double from 12% to 22% between 2015 and 2050 [2]. This ageing population will result in more individuals living with chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and multiple long-term conditions [2-4].

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have a significant impact globally, especially in LMICs, resulting in millions of deaths every year, 42% of which occur before the age of 70, and of all NCDs deaths, 77% are in LMICs [5]. These chronic diseases are slow onset, long duration, and irreversible, for which there is no cure, and are managed with medications and other treatments/therapies [6-9]. These diseases are associated with a rapid and unplanned urbanization, ageing population, unhealthy lifestyles and improved diagnostic capabilities by health services [1,10].

The WHO defines multi-morbidity as having two or more chronic health conditions in one individual [11]. Critics argue that this definition may include conditions that may not significantly impact the individual, leading to calls for alternative definitions [12]. The term has been redefined as "multiple long-term conditions" (MLTC) by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR, UK) to address concerns about negative connotations and narrow biomedical care approaches [6,13-15]. Then, MLTC was defined as having two or more long-term conditions, including physical and mental health conditions, or single conditions

with multisystem impacts [13]. The MLTC implies longevity and highlights the interaction between co-existing conditions, which is necessary for clinical management and research of long-term conditions [6]. The study will use "MLTC" to describe the coexistence of two or more chronic conditions in one person, aligning with the shift from "multi-morbidity" to "multiple long-term conditions," while respecting alternative terminology from other sources.

The prevalence of multiple long-term conditions is increasing, being more prevalent in older people, women and socio-economic disadvantaged groups across most countries [4,7,16]. Furthermore, recent studies have demonstrated that in LMICs, the prevalence of MLTC is increasing in younger age groups, reaching that observed in high-income countries (HICs)[17-23]. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis (2023) found that the overall global prevalence of MLTC was 37.2%. South America (45.7%) had the highest prevalence of multi-morbidity, followed by North America (43.1%), Europe (39.2%), and Asia (35.0%) [24].

People living with multiple long-term conditions are more prone to declines in functional and mental health, resulting in disability, decreased quality of life, polypharmacy and increased premature mortality [3,10,25]. Moreover, the MLTC significantly impacts the healthcare system, increasing the demand, utilization of healthcare services and healthcare expenses compared to single diseases [4,7]. These indicators continue to rise as the population ages [24].

The negative effects of globalization, rapid urbanization and economic and social consequences of neoliberal policies -increasing income inequalities and poverty- leading to the socioeconomically disadvantaged groups living life stressors and unhealthy behaviours, resulting in higher rates of chronic diseases and multi-morbidity. This is dramatically true in LMICs, where NCDs are increasing at a faster rate and represent the largest cause of death in these countries [26-28]. Individuals with low education levels and living in deprived areas have higher

rates of MLTC, and income inequalities impact multi-morbidity prevalence based on country development [29].

Economic experts stress the importance of assessing countries based on not just economic growth and productivity but also efforts to decrease poverty and inequality [30]. Health equity is a critical aspect of health systems performance, with measuring and monitoring health inequalities-observable differences in health between different population subgroups-being essential for achieving it [31,32].

Research on multiple long-term conditions has been identified as an urgent global priority. A better understanding of the dynamics of the multi-morbidity prevalence, their determining and risk factors among adults, mainly across vulnerable populations, particularly in LMICs, is a crucial piece of information for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3.4 (SDG 3.4), which calls for reducing premature death due to NCDs by one-third through prevention and treatment by 2030 [10,24].

There is no consensus on the ideal measure for expressing the magnitude of inequalities, so multiple methodological issues must be considered when selecting measures [32]. The choice of inequality measurements can impact policy assessments due to their influence on the magnitude and direction of inequality changes, with different summary measures leading to varying conclusions about inequality [32,33]. The Slope Index of Inequality (SII) and Relative Index of Inequality (RII) are commonly recommended regression-based indices for monitoring health inequalities in ordered health indicators [32,33]. The SII compares health indicator values between advantaged and disadvantaged subgroups, taking into account the whole stratification of the socioeconomic indicators. The RII compares indicator ratios between the most advantaged and disadvantaged subgroups, also considering all subgroups of the socioeconomic indicators [32].

In Brazil, the prevalence of multi-morbidity among adults increased from 18.7% to 29.9% between 2013-2019 [34,35]. Delpino et al. (2021)

reported rates for individuals aged 18-29 and 30-59 were 6.4% and 24.4% in 2013, increasing to 8.5% and 27.7% in 2019, while Silva de Silveira et al. (2024) showed rates of 9.3% among those aged 18-29 and 28.6% among those aged 30-59 in 2019. Disparities in multi-morbidity rates exist by age, gender, and region, with higher rates in older individuals, women, and those with lower education and income [22,34-44].

Understanding the association between multiple long-term conditions or multi-morbidity and socioeconomic positions in sub-populations is crucial to addressing the growing burden of chronic diseases. This research examines education and household income inequalities associated with MLTC in Brazilian adults, focusing on gender and age differences. The objective is to identify socioeconomic patterns associated with multiple long-term conditions and provide empirical evidence to improve public health policies to prevent chronic diseases in at-risk populations.

## II. METHOD

### 2.1 Design, Data and Sample Population

This observational cross-sectional study is based on the Brazilian National Health Survey 2019 (NHS-2019) conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in partnership with the Ministry of Health. The NHS-2019 is a household-based survey representative of the Brazilian noninstitutionalized population at the national, regional, state, and major metropolitan area levels. The selected sample originated from an IBGE master sample, stratified into three cluster stages: census tracts selected with proportional probability, households selected by simple random and individuals aged 15 or over selected within each household. The interviews were carried out between August 2019 and March 2020 by trained teams using smartphone devices programmed with the survey questionnaire and the processes of criticizing the variables. A total of 90,846 households and 275,323 individuals were interviewed. The response rate for households was 93.6% [45,46]. The present study included participants aged 18 years or over who were

considered capable of responding and who answered the questionnaire independently and with complete information for the variables of interest. The sample comprised 86,831 individuals.

### 2.2 Dependent Variable

Multiple long-term conditions were assessed using a list of 14 diseases included in the Q module "Chronic Diseases" of the NHS-2019. The list includes the following conditions: hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidaemia (high cholesterol), heart problems, stroke, asthma or wheezing, arthritis or rheumatism, chronic back problems, work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD), depression, other mental diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cancer and chronic kidney failure. Most diseases were identified by asking, "Has any doctor ever given you the diagnosis of...?". In the case of depression and other mental diseases, the question was: "Has any doctor or mental health professional (psychiatrist or psychologist) ever given you a diagnosis of depression?". To identify chronic back problems, the question was: "Do you have a chronic back problem, such as chronic back or neck pain, low back pain, sciatica, vertebrae or disc problems?" The answer option to these questions was yes or no [47]. The individual self-reported all the diseases. MLTC or multi-morbidity was categorized as a dichotomous variable (1= multiple long-term conditions; 0=none or one chronic disease).

### 2.3 Independent Variables

Measures of socioeconomic position (i.e., education and household income) were the independent variables of interest. These variables correspond to variables derived by IBGE NHS-2019 analysts. The level of education corresponds to the highest level of education achieved standardized for Elementary Education (9-year system). Education was categorized into seven categories: illiterate, unfinished elementary school, finished elementary school, unfinished high school, finished high school, unfinished undergraduate and graduated. Household income corresponds to the sum of the gross monthly

income of the household's residents who work. It excludes the income of people whose status in the household unit was pensioner, domestic employee, or relative of the domestic employee. Income deciles categorized the household income.

#### 2.4 Confounder Variables

The relationship between multiple long-term conditions and level of education or income can be affected by various individual, demographic, economic or social factors, causing biased estimates of the association. To minimize the effect of these factors, it seems necessary to control for some potential confounders. MLTC models will be adjusted for demographic factors (age, geographic regions, residence area) and health factors (private insurance and behaviours risk factors).

Age was categorized into three groups: young adults (18-39 y-olds), middle adults (40- 59 y-olds), and older adults (aged 60 or more). Age was included as a discrete variable in the analyses of each subpopulation –by gender and age group. By grouping the federative units, Brazil is divided into five regions: North, Northeast, Central-West, Southeast and South. The regions were included in the models as categorical variables. The Central-West region was considered a reference group because it has Brazil's best economic, social and quality of life indicators [48]. In addition, the region best represents the national average regarding the population's subscription to health insurance plans (28,9%) [49]. Residence area was included as a dichotomous variable (1=urban; 0=rural).

According to the WHO, the major behavioural risk factors of chronic diseases include tobacco use, the harmful use of alcohol, sedentariness and an unhealthy diet [50]. However, in postmodern Brazil, corporality plays a central role. Individuals are strongly concerned about the presentation and shape of their bodies in an attempt to adapt them to a hegemonic ideal of beauty and youth. Thus, the cult of the body involves not only the practice of physical activity but also diets and plastic surgery [51]. In this cultural context, including a

physical activity variable as a protector factor in the analysis was considered relevant.

According to the WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity, it is recommended that adults should do at least 150– 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, at least 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both [52]. The questions measured physical activity: 1) “In a typical week, on how many days do you do sports, fitness or recreational (leisure) activities? (number of days)” and 2) “How much time do you spend doing sports, fitness or recreational (leisure) activities on a typical day? (hrs and min)”. The time in physical activity was aggregated in total min/week. For the current analyses, this variable was arranged into a dichotomic variable: physically inactive (0=<150 min/week) and physically active (1= ≥150 min/week).

Due to a wide range of age in the sample and considering different preferences by age, sedentary behaviours were measured considering time spent watching television and using a computer or other electronic devices. The questions measuring sedentary behaviours were: 1) “How much time do you usually spend watching television on a typical day?” and 2) “How much time do you usually spend using a computer tablet or cell at home on a typical day?” The response options were: 1) less than one hour, 2) one hour to less than two hours, 3) two hours to less than three hours, 4) three hours to less than six hours, 5) six hours or more and 6) does not watch television or does not usually use computer, tablet or cell phone in free time at home. For the current analyses, this variable was arranged into three ordinal categories by each dimension of sedentary behaviour: little time (does not watch TV/ does not use computer, tablets or cell at home or less than 2 hr/day), moderate time (two hours to less than 6 hours/day) and many time (six hours or more/day). Little time served as the reference group for the analysis.

The behavioural risk factors, tobacco use, and harmful alcohol use were included as

dichotomous variables (1=yes; 0=non). The NHS-2019 questionnaire asks about the previous day's consumption of 12 natural foods and 10 ultra-processed foods. The unhealthy diet was defined as the proportion of daily intake of ultra-processed foods and was included as a continuous variable.

## 2.5 Statistical Analysis

Data analyses included describing the sample and the multiple long-term conditions distribution according to the socioeconomic position measures. Considering the complex sample and aiming to make inferences about the whole population, all analyses used expansion factors and sample weights with the *svyset* and *svy* commands. The variables of the primary sampling unit, individual weight, and stratum were used.

The association between socioeconomic position and multiple long-term conditions was performed using the *svy* command with Poisson regression models with linearized standard error, adjusting for potential confounders. Analyses of each socioeconomic position for gender and age groups were done separately, using the *subpopulation* command (*subpop*) to compute the estimates for these specific subpopulations [53].

Two models were run for each subpopulation: a crude model including only socioeconomic categories and another adjusted model for potential confounders to isolate the association between socioeconomic position and multiple long-term conditions. Because the outcome variable reflects existing cases of MLTC in a given time—2019-, the Incidence rate ratios (IRR) from Poisson regression represent cumulative incidence or prevalence rate ratios (PRR) [54-56]; however, for a better understanding and communication of the association MLTC with socioeconomic positions, we use *margins* command with the *vce* (unconditional) to estimate prevalence rates (PR) for all categories of education and household income deciles within specific subpopulations [57].

Socioeconomic inequalities related to MLTC were assessed using regression-based measures: the Slope Index of Inequality (SII) and the Relative

Index of Inequality (RII). The SII represents the absolute difference in estimated socioeconomic indicator values between those at the highest level of socioeconomic status and those at the lowest level while taking into consideration the entire socioeconomic distribution rather than just comparing the two most extreme groups. In turn, the RII represents the ratio of estimated indicator values of those at the highest level of socioeconomic status and those at the lowest level while taking into consideration the entire socioeconomic distribution [32,58]. To calculate the SII, each category of the socioeconomic position measure (i.e. education, income) is assigned a relative position score based on the midpoint of the range of the cumulative distribution from 0 to 1 (“*ridit*” score) of the population of participants in each category of the socioeconomic position. Individuals were ranked according to ascending socioeconomic position [59].

Because multiple long-term conditions have a high prevalence rate in the population, the outcome variable is binary, and assuming a non-linear relationship with socioeconomic position, the SII was estimated with Poisson regression, entering the “*ridit*” score as an independent variable in the MLTC regression model (Crude model). Then, the predicted values of the indicator are calculated for the two extremes of the socioeconomic position. The difference between the highest socioeconomic position and those at the lowest generates the SII value, and his ratio leads to RII [32]. The crude model was also adjusted based on socio-demographic and health behaviour risk factors (Adjusted model).

The statistical analysis was performed using Stata version 14.0. The statistical significance was tested using Wald's chi-square statistic for binary and categorical variables and t-test for discrete variables, and a level of significance of 5% in the test was accepted.

### III. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Descriptive

In 2019, 86,831 adults between 18 and 104 years old, with an average age of 46.9 (SD: 16.83), were interviewed. In the expanded sample, 29.5% (95%CI: 29.2; 29.7) reported multiple long-term conditions. Most of them were women (53.0%), with an average age of 56.1 (SD: 15.43) and a MLTC prevalence of 35.9% (95%CI: 35.5; 36.3), while in men, the average age was 57.0 years (SD:

14.86), with a MLTC prevalence of 22.1% (95%CI: 21.7; 22.4). The overall prevalence rate of MLTC increases across age groups, from 12.5% (95%CI: 11.9 ;13.2) in young adults, 34.5% (95%CI: 33.5; 35.4) in middle-aged adults, and 56.2% (95%CI: 55.0; 57.3) in older adults. Table 1 describes demographic, socioeconomic, and health behaviour characteristics according to sex and multiple long-term conditions in Brazilian adults included in the analysis.

**Table 1:** Sample characteristics according sex and multiple long-term conditions in adults. NHS-2019

Characteristics	Women		Men	
	MMB (n:16,660)	non-MMB (n:29,328)	MMB (n:9,099)	non-MMB (n:31,744)
<b>Age groups, Avg. (SD), years **</b>				
18-39 year-olds	31 (5.79)	29 (6.14)	32 (5.77)	30 (6.18)
40-59 year-olds	51 (5.69)	48 (5.71)	51 (5.61)	49 (5.71)
60 or more year-olds	70 (7.48)	69 (7.56)	70 (7.20)	69 (7.37)
<b>Education levels (%) **</b>				
Illiterate	10,8%	5,5%	12,1%	7,9%
unfinished ElemSch	38,5%	24,6%	40,0%	31,6%
finished ElemSch	6,8%	7,4%	6,9%	7,9%
unfinished HighSch	4,3%	6,8%	3,9%	7,4%
finished HighSch	21,7%	31,2%	18,9%	27,4%
unfinished GradSch	2,8%	5,6%	3,2%	4,8%
graduated	15,1%	18,9%	15,1%	13,0%
<b>Household income decils (%) (monthly avg. Reais\$)**</b>				
1st decile	9.3% (402)	13.3% (445)	7.7% (394)	11.7% (449)
2nd decile	16.3% (1,035)	14.0% (1,052)	12.7% (1,036)	12.5% (1,056)
3rd decile	8.3% (1,429)	9.6% (1,424)	7.0% (1,432)	9.2% (1,433)
4th decile	13.7% (1,934)	10.9% (1,902)	13.7% (1,943)	11.7% (1,912)
5th decile	8.9% (2,294)	8.9% (2,296)	8.4% (2,290)	9.4% (2,304)
6th decile	8.7% (2,848)	8.3% (2,840)	8.5% (2,850)	8.9% (2,850)
7th decile	8.9% (3,531)	8.7% (3,5009)	9.1% (3,524)	9.2% (3,515)
8th decile	8.5% (4,588)	8.9% (4,579)	9.7% (4,588)	9.3% (4,562)
9th decile	8.7% (6,621)	8.7% (6,675)	10.3% (6,643)	9.0% (6,616)
10th decile	8.6% (16,088)	8.7% (16,458)	13.0% (18,194)	9.3% (16,821)
<b>Region (%)**</b>				
north	14,5%	20,8%	15,9%	21,2%
northeast	34,7%	35,5%	30,8%	34,6%
central west	11,1%	11,9%	10,7%	11,7%
southeast	25,3%	20,4%	26,0%	20,5%
south	14,3%	11,4%	16,7%	12,1%
<b>Urban residence (%) n.s.</b>	82,0%	80,4%	74,3%	72,0%
<b>Health insurance plans (%)**</b>	27,4%	22,4%	26,9%	20,0%
<b>Physical activity (= o &gt;150 min/week) **</b>	22,3%	27,0%	23,2%	27,1%
<b>Sitting time watching television **</b>				
little time (do not - < 2 hours/day)	51,0%	58,2%	53,8%	60,7%
moderate time (2 hours - < 6 hours/day)	40,4%	36,3%	39,4%	35,5%
many time (≥ 6 hours/day)	8,6%	5,6%	6,8%	3,8%
<b>Sitting time using computer at home **</b>				
little time (do not - < 2 hours/day)	76,2%	62,0%	78,9%	67,6%
moderate time (1hour - < 6 hours/day)	18,5%	28,9%	16,5%	24,8%
many time (≥ 6 hours/day)	5,3%	9,1%	4,6%	7,6%
<b>Tobacco use **</b>	10,5%	9,0%	14,8%	16,8%
<b>Harmful alcohol use **</b>	14,8%	20,0%	33,6%	39,5%
<b>Consumption of ultra-processed foods</b>	21,7%	24,8%	22,1%	25,2%

MMB: multimorbidity ; non-MMB: non multimorbidity. ElemSch: Elementary School ; HighSch: High School ; GradSch : Graduate School

\*\* :p-value < 0,001 ; n.s.: non significant

### 3.2 Prevalence Rate of the MLTC Among Socioeconomic Positions

Regarding education levels, in the expanded sample, the overall prevalence rate of multiple long-term conditions followed the next pattern: decreased from illiterate (44.3%) to unfinished high school degree (20.1%), then is steady in finished high school and unfinished graduate levels (around 21%) to increase in graduated (27.9%). Concerning household income deciles, the overall prevalence rate of multiple long-term

conditions increased from 23.4% in the first deciles to 31.3% in the tenth deciles.

Figures 1 and 2 display MLTC rates by gender and age groups, categorized by education levels and household income deciles. Prevalence rates (PRs) indicate observed, crude, and adjusted probabilities of MLTC in each subpopulation group. Average monthly household income is included to underscore economic differences among socioeconomic positions.

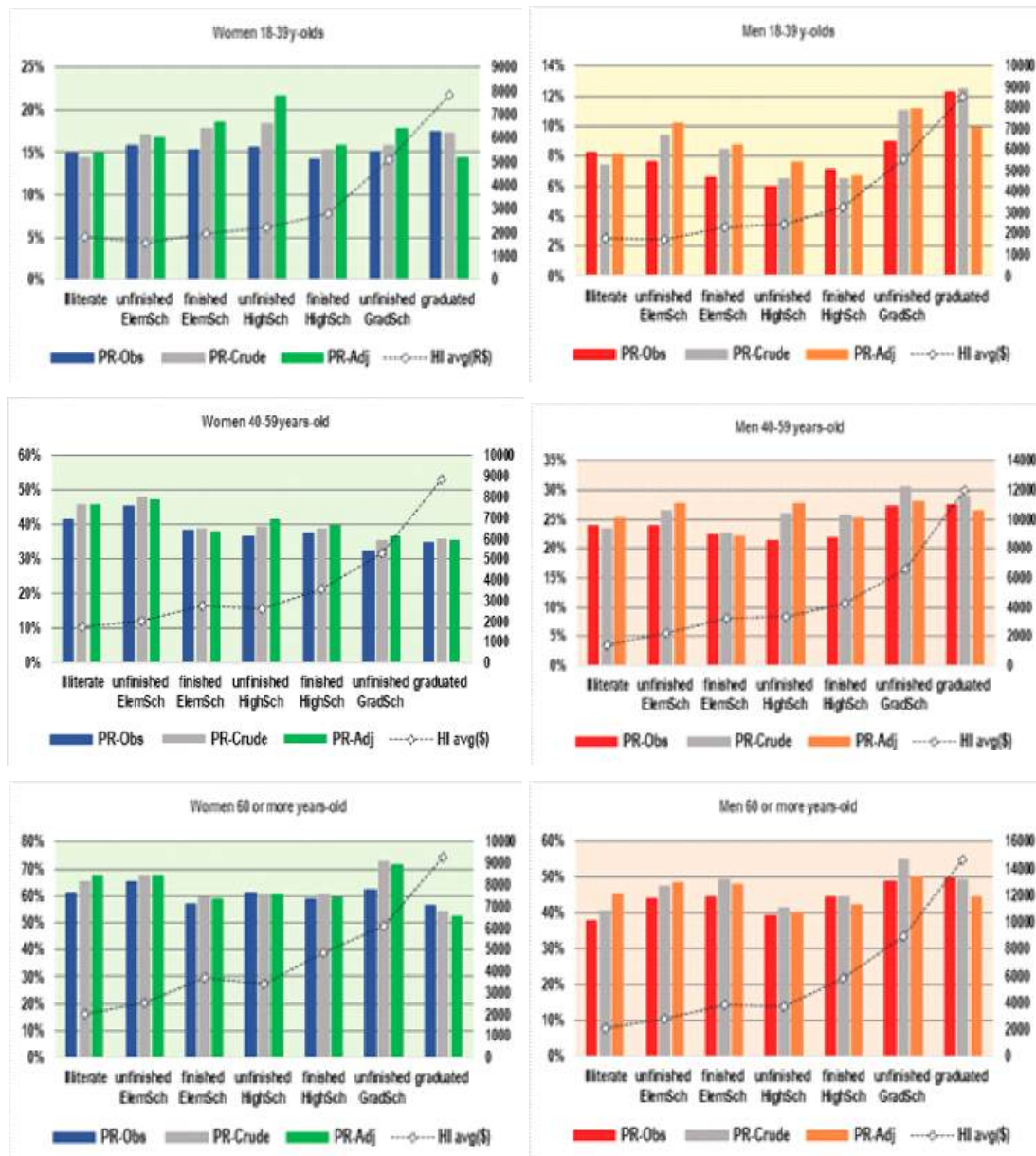


Figure 1: The prevalence rates of multiple long-term conditions by sex and age groups for education levels. NHS-2019

Figure 1 shows marked differences in the prevalence rates of MLTC associated with educational attainment between women and men across age groups. Overall, this difference is more pronounced in young adults and decreases in older adults.

Overall, in both genders and all the age subpopulations, except graduates and some other education categories, the adjusted prevalence rate of multiple long-term chronic conditions - the expected probability - is higher than the observed

prevalence rate from the raw sample. Excluding young adults in both sexes, the observed and adjusted prevalence rates of MLTC in middle-aged and older women tend to decrease at higher education levels. On the contrary, in middle-aged men, both prevalence rates of MLTC tend to increase with better levels of education. In contrast, older men present a slight decrease in the adjusted prevalence rate and an increasing trend in the observed prevalence rate of MLTC across the educational levels.

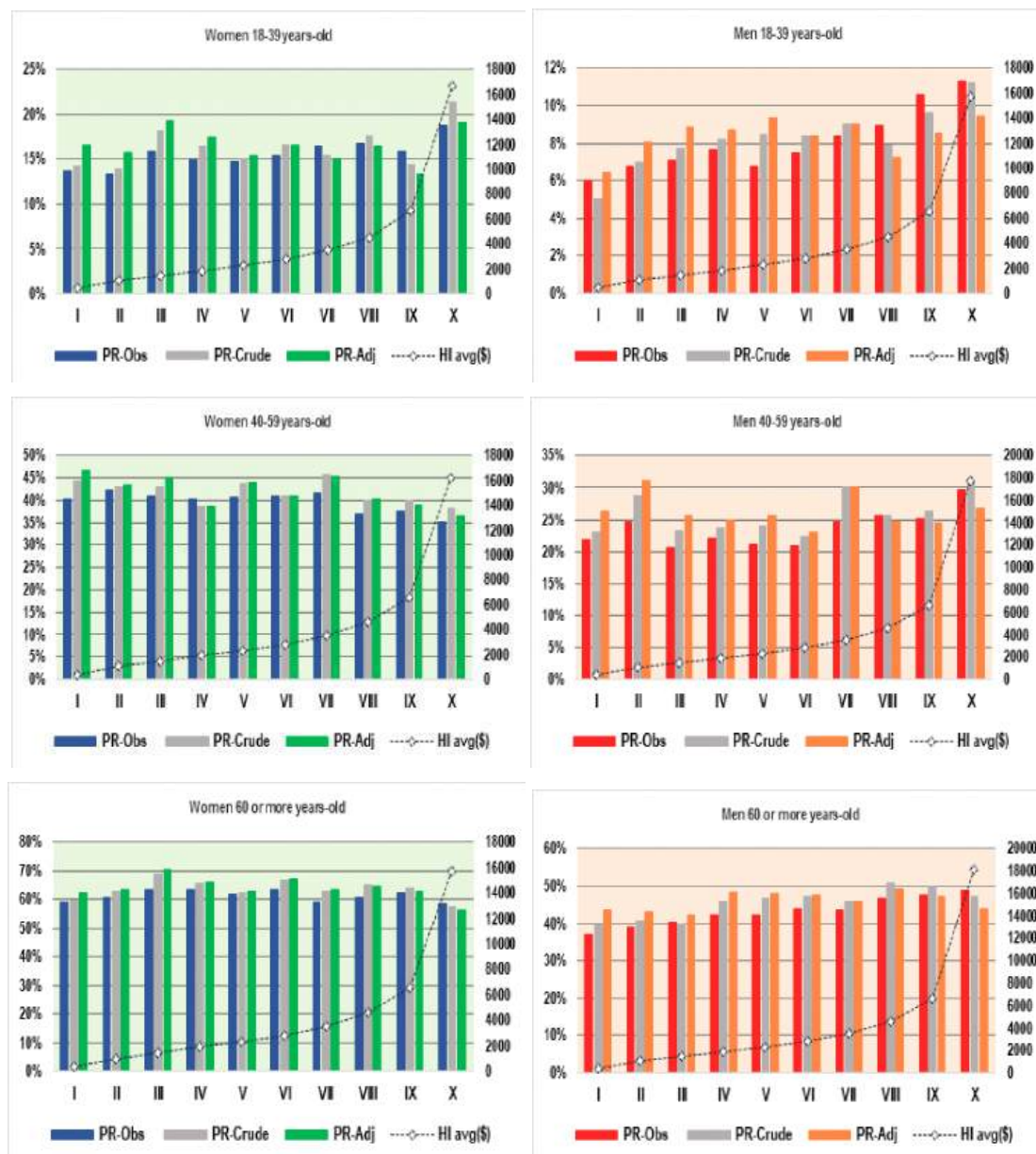


Figure 2: The prevalence rates of multiple long-term conditions by sex and age groups for household income deciles. NHS-2019

Regarding household income deciles, Figure 2 shows marked differences in the prevalence rates of multiple long-term conditions associated with household income deciles between women and men across age groups. This difference is more pronounced in young adults and decreases in older adults.

The observed and adjusted prevalence rates of MLTC in young adults of both sexes tend to increase toward higher income deciles. On the other hand, in middle-aged and older women, these prevalence rates decrease toward the highest income deciles, although this decrease is slight in older women. In contrast, the observed prevalence rate of MLTC tends to increase in middle-aged and older men toward higher income deciles. However, adjusted prevalence rates of MLTC in middle-aged and older men tend to become steady toward higher income deciles.

Except for middle-aged women, the observed prevalence rate is higher than the adjusted prevalence rate in the highest deciles in both sexes, indicating a possible overestimation of the MLTC prevalence rate when the raw data is used. The opposite is noted in the lowest deciles, where the observed prevalence rate is lower than the adjusted prevalence rate, suggesting a potential underestimation of the MLTC prevalence rate in the raw data.

### 3.3 Inequalities Index

The Slope Index of Inequality (SII) and the Relative Index of Inequality (RII) were used to quantify, across the whole population, the absolute and relative inequality gap between the most-advantaged and least-advantaged groups in the analysed socioeconomic positions. Overall, the magnitude and direction of socioeconomic inequalities showed different patterns across gender and age groups. Positive values indicate that MLTC is more prevalent in the most advantaged groups, and negative values indicate that it is more prevalent in disadvantaged groups.

Regarding education levels in the women's population, Table 2 shows that SII in an adjusted model of the young adults is close to "zero" and

RII close to "one", indicating no inequality in MLTC prevalence rate between graduated and illiterate groups. On the other hand, in the adjusted models of middle-aged and older adults, the SII had negative values, meaning that the MLTC prevalence in the graduated group is lower than in the illiterate group across these age groups. As SII and RII are multiplicative measures, their reciprocal values are equivalent in magnitudes [18]. Then, the difference in MLTC prevalence between the illiterate group and the graduated group was 14.7 and 8.9 percentage points in middle-aged adults and older adult women, respectively. Additionally, the RII indicates that MLTC prevalence is 42.5% ( $1/0.702$ ) and 15.3% ( $1/0.867$ ) higher among illiterate than among the graduate groups across middle-aged and older adult women, respectively.

Regarding household income deciles in the adjusted models, Table 2 shows that the MLTC prevalence difference is 4.2 percentage points and 30.0% higher in the tenth decile group than the first decile group in young adult women. On the contrary, in the adjusted models of middle-aged adults, the SII had negative values, but, using the reciprocal value, the difference between the first decile and tenth decile groups was 3.7 percentage points, and by the RII MLTC prevalence is 9.6% ( $1/0.912$ ) higher in the first decile group than the tenth decile group in middle-aged adult women. Finally, in the older adult women, the SII in the adjusted model was close to "zero" and the RII close to "one", indicating no inequality in the MLTC prevalence rate between the first and the tenth decile groups in this age group.

*Table 2: SII and RII of Multiple long-term chronic conditions by Education Level and Income deciles in Women Brazilian Adult.*

	18-39 y-olds		40-59 y-olds		60+ y-olds	
Education Levels	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI
<b>Model 1</b>	<b>-0,006</b>	<b>0,964</b>	<b>-0,147</b>	<b>0,705</b>	<b>-0,105</b>	<b>0,847</b>
	(-0,006 - -0,006)		(-0,147 - -0,147)		(-0,105 - -0,105)	
<b>Model 2</b>	<b>-0,001</b>	<b>0,993</b>	<b>-0,147</b>	<b>0,700</b>	<b>-0,091</b>	<b>0,864</b>
	(-0,009 - 0,006)		(-0,154 - -0,141)		(-0,096 - -0,086)	
Household Income deciles	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI
<b>Model 1</b>	<b>0,033</b>	<b>1,159</b>	<b>-0,043</b>	<b>0,902</b>	<b>-0,030</b>	<b>0,954</b>
	(0,033 - 0,033)		(-0,043 - -0,043)		(-0,030 - -0,030)	
<b>Model 2</b>	<b>0,042</b>	<b>1,299</b>	<b>-0,039</b>	<b>0,907</b>	<b>0,001</b>	<b>1,001</b>
	(0,038 - 0,046)		(-0,046 - -0,033)		(-0,008 - 0,09)	

\* Comparison groups: **Education levels:** graduated vs illiterate ; **Household income:** 10th decile vs 1st decile

\***Model 1:** Crude model including only mmb and "ridit" of education levels and of the income decils, respectively.

\***Model 2:** Model 1 adjusted by demographics, socioeconomic and health behaviours factors.

Regarding education levels in the men's population, Table 3 shows that SII indicates a slightly higher difference in MLTC prevalence in the graduated group than in the illiterate group across all age groups: from 2.6 percentage points in young adults, 2.9 in middle-aged adults and 6.6 percentage points in older adult men in the adjusted models. On the other hand, from adjusted models, the RII indicates that MLTC prevalence is 32,3%, 12.3%, and 16.2% higher among graduates than among the illiterate groups, across young adults, middle-aged adults and older adult men, respectively.

As presented in Table 3, regarding household income deciles in the adjusted models, the SII shows that MLTC prevalence is higher in the tenth decile group than the first decile group across all age groups of men: differences of 4.4, 5.2 and 9.8 percentage points in young adults, middle-aged adults and older adults, respectively. On the other hand, from adjusted models, the RII indicates that MLTC prevalence is 69.0%, 23.1%, and 25.4% higher among the tenth decile than among the first decile groups, across young adults, middle-aged adults and older adults, respectively.

*Table 3: SII and RII of Multiple long-term chronic conditions by Education Level and Income deciles in Men Brazilian Adult*

	18-39 y-olds		40-59 y-olds		60+ y-olds	
Education Levels	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI
Model 1	0,029 (0,029 - 0,029)	1,423	0,031 (0,031 - 0,031)	1,126	0,051 (0,051 - 0,051)	1,118
Model 2	0,026 (0,022 - 0,030)	1,319	0,029 (0,024 - 0,034)	1,123	0,066 (0,060 - 0,072)	1,162
Household Income deciles	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI	SII (95% CI)	RCI
Model 1	0,041 (0,041 - 0,041)	1,654	0,052 (0,052 - 0,052)	1,224	0,088 (0,088 - 0,088)	1,213
Model 2	0,044 (0,041 - 0,046)	1,690	0,053 (0,048 - 0,058)	1,235	0,102 (0,092 - 0,113)	1,266

\* Comparison groups: Education levels: graduated vs illiterate ; Household income: 10th decile vs 1st decile

\*Model 1: Crude model including only mmb and "ridit" of education levels and of the income decils, respectively.

\*Model 2: Model 1 adjusted by demographics, socioeconomic and health behaviours factors.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Using a nationally representative data, this study examined educational and household income inequalities associated with MLTC in Brazilian adults, with a focus on gender and age groups differences. Understanding these associations is crucial to addressing the growing burden of multiple long-term chronic conditions.

The prevalence rate of MLTC in Brazilian adults in the present study was 29.5%. This prevalence increases with age and is higher among women. These results are consistent with recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses in community-based adults, showing varying prevalence of multi-morbidity across different income countries. In LMICs, the multi-morbidity prevalence has fluctuated in the range of 29.7-36.4% [20,24,60], while in HICs, the prevalence fluctuated between 37.9-38.6% [20,24], respectively. South America (45.7%) had the highest prevalence of multi-morbidity, followed by North America (43.1%), Europe (39.2%), and Asia (35%) [24]. Another study reported an overall pooled multi-morbidity prevalence of 43% in Latin America and the

Caribbean [61]. These results also corroborate recent research in Brazil, which found similar multi-morbidity prevalence rate-29.3% and 29.9%- affecting women and older persons [35,44]. It must be noted that the prevalence of MLTC in the adult Brazilian population is increasing over time, as reported by national authors [34,35,39,44]. Rzewuska et al. (2017) from NHS-2013 showed a multi-morbidity prevalence in the adult population of 24.2% [39].

The prevalence of MLTC in Brazilian adults was found to be inversely associated with educational level and directly with household income when not stratified by age and sex. Different patterns emerge when considering age groups and sex. These results are similar to those by Costa et al. (2020), who reported a higher prevalence of multi-morbidity among Brazilian adults aged 20-59, with lower educational levels and belonging to wealthy quintiles [22].

Gender and age significantly affect the association between education and multi-morbidity. In the study, women over 40 with lower education levels showed higher rates, while men over 40 with higher education levels had slightly increased

rates. Even in young adults, women were twice as prevalent as men; however, it is difficult to identify a trend pattern in the prevalence of MLTC across educational levels in both sexes. The educational attainment differences between genders can be explained by a greater interest and concern of women in their health status, thus reducing their exposure to risk factors for chronic diseases. On the other hand, men, for various reasons, adopt behaviours or lifestyles that expose them to more significant risks of getting ill and tend to postpone medical care. The relation between lower education levels and multi-morbidity prevalence is well-established in the literature [12,29,62]. However, in a systematic review by Feng et al. (2021), higher education levels had mixed effects on multi-morbidity likelihood in Southeast Asia due to diverse study contexts and methodologies [63].

The study confirms findings from other Brazilian studies with the same data, showing a high prevalence of multi-morbidity in adults with less than 7 years of schooling [35]. Those with lower education levels had more severe multi-morbidity profiles, with a notable increase in prevalence from 2013 to 2019 for individuals without education or incomplete schooling [34]. Those with incomplete high school or graduate education had lower prevalence ratios compared to graduates, particularly among men [44].

The study found that women over 40 years of age had decreasing MLTC prevalence rates as household income deciles increased, particularly those aged 40 to 59 years. Men ages 40 to 59 showed a similar trend but with a smaller slope, while men ages 60 and older had a slightly increasing rate. Among young adults, women were twice as prevalent as men; however, the prevalence of MLTC showed an increasing trend across income deciles in both genders.

While education consistently influences multi-morbidity, income varies widely in different studies. Recent reviews and a multi-cohort study reveal that socioeconomic deprivation (measured by household income, total household wealth or household area) correlates with increased multi-morbidity rate in HICs. Conversely, several

studies in LMICs reported an increased multi-morbidity rate associated with increasing incomes [29,62,64].

These findings suggest a complex effect – on the magnitude and direction of income on MLTC, mediated by educational and cultural factors and purchasing power among individuals, determining engagement in risky health behaviours and limited access to the healthcare system for a timely diagnosis and treatment, especially for the less advantaged population groups with mental disorders [22,63,65,66]. Studies in Brazil show mixed results on the relationship between income and multi-morbidity prevalence. Costa et al. (2020) found higher rates in wealthier individuals [22], while Bof de Andrade et al. (2022) found lower rates in older, higher-income Brazilians with regional disparities [43]. Silva de Silveira et al. (2024) noted increased prevalence in the unemployed and uninsured [35].

The prevalence of Multiple Long-Term Conditions is increasing among younger adults world wide. The study found a 12.5% prevalence of MLTC in 18-39-year-olds, rising from 9.0% in 18-29-year-olds to 16.2% in 30-39-year-olds, with women showing higher rates than men in both age groups. Previous research in Brazil and globally supports these findings. Pereira CC et al. (2023) and Silva de Silveira et al. (2024) showed rates of 11.1% and 12.7% among young aged 18-39, respectively [35,44]. Carvalho et al. (2017) found rates of 5.6% and 12.3% of the young aged 18-29 and 16.2% in 30-39, respectively [38], while Rzewuska et al. (2017) reported a 5.5% rate in young aged 18-24 [39]. Delpino et al. (2021) noted an increase in multi-morbidity from 6.4% to 8.5% among 18-29-year-olds from 2013 to 2019 [34]. Similar trends were observed in Australia and the U. S., where prevalence rates ranged from 4.4% to 22.2% among young aged 20-39 [19,67,68]. Furthermore, Canadian cohort studies have shown a rise in multi-morbidity rates in younger cohorts [69-71]. These results highlight the need to understand multi-morbidity in young adults as a key to shaping effective health policies and reducing costs [71-73].

Overall, the raw data indicates a lower prevalence of MLTC in both socioeconomic positions than expected rates from adjusted models in those with lower education and income levels. Despite a universal National Health System in Brazil, these findings suggest an under-diagnosis of chronic diseases, potentially due to a lack of awareness, access to health facilities, or issues in healthcare supply in the public health system. On the other hand, both male and female graduates and men in the highest household income deciles in the three different age groups overestimated the observed prevalence of MLTC. These results suggest that chronic diseases in these socioeconomic groups could be over-diagnosed.

The study found significant inequalities in the prevalence of MLTC among different education levels and genders. Among women, illiterate individuals had a higher prevalence rate compared to graduated, especially among middle-aged and older adults. However, there were no disparities among young adult women. Among men, graduates had a higher prevalence rate of MLTC than illiterates across all age groups. However, younger men who graduated had higher relative differences with illiterates than graduates in other age groups. These results suggest that education plays an important role in people's health and well-being. Educated women tend to have better knowledge, practices, and economic resources to obtain health services than uneducated women. On the contrary, educated men may be facing situations of more significant work stress or health-risk lifestyles and do not have financial restrictions to access health services, in contrast to men with low levels of education.

Previous studies show a clear relationship between education levels and multi-morbidity, especially among women, with variations by country [68,71,74]. In Europe and HICs, lower education is consistently associated with higher multi-morbidity rates. Studies in Portugal and Denmark support this trend [75,76], while research in LMICs and South Asia shows mixed results [63]. Recent studies in Brazil reveal gender-specific disparities, with higher-educated men having higher rates and lower-educated

women having higher rates of multi-morbidity [63]. Less-educated individuals in Brazil's Southeast and South regions show higher multi-morbidity prevalence [43]. From 2013 to 2019, there was a general rise in multi-morbidity prevalence across all education levels in Brazil, identifying inequalities in the prevalence of multi-morbidity among less educated [34]. These results correspond with the present research.

This study found slight variations in the prevalence of MLTC by gender and age groups concerning household income inequalities. Younger adult women had a slight absolute difference and a moderate relative difference in detriment of the tenth income decile, while middle-aged had a detriment of the poorest income decile, and older adult women showed no inequality. In all age groups, men presented increasing absolute differences in detriment of the highest income levels. The relative difference was higher in younger adults than in other age groups, to the detriment of the tenth income decile. Differences in the risk of MLTC among genders and age groups may be due to education's role in labour conditions and household income. The risk of MLTC in women is less affected by income differences, while wealthy men are at higher risk may be due to better and affordable access to health services.

Studies worldwide have shown mixed results in the rates of multi-morbidity among economically disadvantaged populations, particularly in LMICs [77-79]. Pathirana and Jackson's (2018) systematic review highlighted conflicting findings, with some studies linking lower income to increased multi-morbidity risk [66,80-82], while others, like a South African study contradicted this finding [83], and a Brazilian study, found no significant association [84]. Income impacted multi-morbidity risk differently by age group and gender, suggesting income may not be a reliable indicator of socioeconomic status, especially in retired individuals [19,29,66]. Despite this, the trend of higher multi-morbidity prevalence in economically disadvantaged individuals remains consistent over time [69-72]. In recent studies in Brazil, Costa AK et al. (2020) found income inequalities linked to multi-morbidity among men

in higher income groups [22]. De Andrade et al. (2021) identified income inequalities affecting lower income levels with regional variations [43].

The present study has several limitations. The study was conducted between 2019 and 2020, and the current association of MLTC with socioeconomic positions could have changed over time. Self-reported chronic diseases may introduce recall bias, especially in older adults and those with lower education. To reduce bias, only individuals aged 18 and over who could respond independently were included. Additionally, the cross-sectional data restricts understanding of causality, and as an observational study, may have a bias from unmeasured confounding, so caution is suggested when concluding socioeconomic positions association with MLTC prevalence.

Despite the above limitations, the study has certain strengths. The study findings can be generalized as the data collected and analyzed are nationally representative. A larger sample size guarantees the accuracy of the results. The study measured MLTC based on 14 chronic conditions similar to other Brazilian research, providing a consistent comparison. IBGE expert analysts derived the socioeconomic position variables. The analysis includes a fully ordered listing of education levels. Controlling by relevant confounding factors offers reliable estimates of measures of inequalities. Separately, subpopulation-by age group and gender- provided a more precise and detailed analysis of the association between SEP and MLTC in Brazilian adult populations.

Future studies in Brazil, should consider longitudinal study design including clinical data, to avoid misreporting of the diagnoses, to capture severity and clinical evolution of diseases over time. Further research is necessary to analyse in more detail and refine the understanding of risk factors, incidence, case mix, and clinical evolution of child and youth MLTC, particularly in disadvantaged populations. Additionally, it is necessary to investigate the impact of specific combinations of chronic diseases determining MLTC on healthcare expenditures to contribute to

evaluating the SUS health coverage policies on reducing inequalities.

In conclusion, this study shows that education and income inequalities influence the risk of multiple long-term conditions in the Brazilian adult population. The magnitude and direction of this association differ across gender and age groups. In women, a high risk of MLTC is associated with lower education and varies according to income. On the contrary, in men, a high risk of MLTC is associated with higher education attainment and is consistently determined by income level. This study highlights the role of education over income in health inequalities. It provides evidence of the risk of multiple long-term conditions in younger adults, underscoring the importance of implementing promotion and preventive public policies for this age group to mitigate social inequalities in the later life cycle.

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# Assessing Faculty Investments in Emerging Education Technologies and Artificial Intelligence in Selected African Universities

*Dr. Tabitha Rangara - Omol, Ms. Mary M. Musyoki & Dr Pamela A. Juma*

*Presbyterian University of Eastern Africa*

## ABSTRACT

Educational technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have revolutionised various industries including education. New education technologies, sometimes, find the education sector ill-prepared, not only in their applications but also in the technical know-how of faculty. This is especially so for higher education institutions (HEIs) in developing countries. The socio-economic and digital divide between developed and low-income countries continues to factor in education disparities between the two worlds. Anchored on the technology acceptance model (TAM), the aim of this study was to assess faculty awareness, personal investments, and perspectives on the potential of AIs as an emerging educational technology in higher education. A descriptive survey was conducted on faculty (n=65) drawn from selected universities in Africa using purposive snowball sampling. Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were integrated into a structured online questionnaire and administered through emails and social media.

*Keywords:* educational technology, generative ais, developing countries, higher education.

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Educational technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have revolutionised various industries including education. New education technologies, sometimes, find the education sector ill-prepared, not only in their applications but also in the technical know-how of faculty. This is especially so for higher education institutions (HEIs) in developing countries. The socio-economic and digital divide between developed and low-income countries continues to factor in education disparities between the two worlds. Anchored on the technology acceptance model (TAM), the aim of this study was to assess faculty awareness, personal investments, and perspectives on the potential of AIs as an emerging educational technology in higher education. A descriptive survey was conducted on faculty (n=65) drawn from selected universities in Africa using purposive snowball sampling. Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were integrated into a structured online questionnaire and administered through emails and social media. Participants represented thirty-four (34) universities in eight (8) African countries. Four (4) themes emerged from the findings; i) A remarkable level of awareness, use, and investment of educational technology mainly from self-learning with a score of 74% (n=65) on a three-point Likert scale, ii) Perceived benefits of ed-tech included AI as useful study, writing and research companion for both faculty and students iii) Faculty's belief on institutional support and investments indicated only 43% (n=65) affirmation and iv) Cost, speed and policies were the main challenges in adopting new ed-tech. These results should inform

decision-making, policy formulation, administrative and budgetary priorities, faculty capacity needs, and adoption of ed-tech including generative AIs.

**Keywords:** educational technology, generative ais, developing countries, higher education.

**Author α:** Dean, School of Health Sciences, Senior Lecturer & Academic Leader, E Learning expert & Occupational Therapy Research, Presbyterian University of Eastern Africa.

**σ:** Occupational Therapy Clinician and Lecturer, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Gondar, Ethiopia.

**ρ:** PhD., Director of Research, Senior Lecturer & Academic Leader, School of Nursing, Presbyterian University of East Africa, Kenya.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation is capital-intensive (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023). The acquisition, installation, adoption, and maintenance of education technologies including AI (Lee & Han, 2021) remain difficult for higher educational institutions (HEIs) in low-income countries that are already resource-constrained. The choice and use of educational technology (ed-tech) for many Universities in Africa is mostly driven by cost which sometimes attracts affordable but redundant models (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023). This, in the long run, proves to be expensive due to maintenance costs of hardware, recurrent costs of upgrade and licensing software, and the need for replacement. Consequently, university administrations in low-income countries are reluctant to invest in educational technology and Artificial intelligence (AI) (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023; Maguatcher & Ru, 2023).

As an emerging ed-tech, artificial intelligence (AI) is promising efficiency and effectiveness not only in education but for all sectors (Altmäe et al., 2023; Crawford, Cowling, Ashton-Hay, et al., 2023). As HEIs adopt AI, they should be informed through constructive discussions and research to inform its careful adoption. AI is already associated with positive societal changes including improved quality of life and strengthened education systems (Nasri et al., 2022). Generative AIs like numerous open education resources (OERs) are widely free but associated costs of technology including the cost of purchasing digital hardware and software, internet bandwidths, and access hinder their adoption and use (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023; Maguatcher & Ru, 2023). Thus, for many reasons; factors surrounding the socio-economic and digital divide between low-income and the first world countries must continue to be articulated on discussion tables (Matthess & Kunkel, 2020). Despite cost issues, low-income countries cannot afford to be left behind. It is important to assess how faculty are adopting emerging ed-tech including AI in teaching, learning, and administrative processes as an indicator for HEIs adoption trends and to develop comprehensive policies (Lubinga et al., 2023; Shwede, 2024).

Despite the techno-stress or phobia, history has shown that previous disruptive technologies like mobile phones, digital search engines, video-conferencing classrooms, and general multimedia generated valuable discussions among academia of the time (Granić, 2023) but ended up being adopted. Even with notable challenges of costs and accessibility, past education technologies have yielded benefits including efficiency and effectiveness for both teacher-centred and learner-centred modes of learning (Alvi, 2023). In addition, digital learning is also a strong component of the successful adoption of education technologies (Alenezi et al., 2023). The most recent technologies that have impacted higher education are the group of generative AIs with disproportionate disruption to assessments (Crawford, Cowling, & Allen, 2023; Naidu & Sevnarayan, 2023). An example is the ChatGPT (chat generative pre-trained transformer),

considered as an emerging educational technology that was launched to an immediate reception and wide range of users in late 2022 (Baber et al., 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023b).

García-Peñalvo (2023), cautions that whether faculty uses this AI technology or not, whether its disruption succeeds or not, it already has an impact and that it will not be the last one. and that many more AI-based technologies will disrupt education in the future. In any case, students are already using it in their learning processes (Altmäe et al., 2023). Universities have had varied reactions to generative AI; some reacted with unsustainable solutions including banning its use (Firat, 2023). 'Bans' have been recognized as a short-lived shock reaction (Hassoulas et al., 2023). Other solutions need to be explored. At the launch of ChatGPT, university policies, especially examination and assessment policies were ill-prepared because they could not have provided policies for something they had not envisaged (Crawford, Cowling, Ashton-Hay, et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the use of generative AIs in education has contributed to digital learning with unmatched speed to content creation; providing speedy solutions to previously complex questions (Eke, 2023; Sallam, 2023).

Even as HEI realises that digital learning is required in the responsible use of generative AIs, it must advance with the assurance that generative AIs do not provide all the answers, especially to skills and psychomotor domains of learning. ChatGPT for example, has in some situations generated incorrect information because of the limited access to new data which it has not been trained to use (Eke, 2023; Rudolph et al., 2023a). Research should focus on both student and faculty awareness, access and adoption of emerging educational technologies including AI. This study targets university faculty including those in administration and management. Findings should inform awareness and adoption strategies, policies, investment priorities, and ownership of the benefits (or lack) of emerging ed-tech including generative AIs.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the awareness, adoption, and investment levels of faculty in the use of emerging educational technologies and generative AIs?
- What are the barriers to the adoption and utilisation of emerging educational technologies and generative AIs among faculty in African Universities?

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The technology acceptance model (TAM) by Fred Davis (Granić, 2023) posits that the adoption of any new technology is based on the user's motivation driven by three factors; usability, usefulness, and general attitude towards technology (Granić, 2023). For lecturers and teachers (faculty), new technologies usually arrive with an element of fear because it finds them ill-prepared for adoption (Khlaif et al., 2023). Faculty who are often dismayed by the entry and speed of ed-tech are constantly in fear of losing their jobs and have expressed such fears through reactions described by Khlaif et al., (2023) as 'techno-stress'. Faculty is often stressed by the frequent changes in education technologies. Sometimes, these changes happen even before the one in use is adopted (Chugh et al., 2023). Such fear is not unfounded because faculty are rarely trained before the arrival of new technologies. Yet, there is the expectation by the administration that faculty will transfer skills from the previous technology applications (Granić, 2023).

## IV. LITERATURE

Technology and higher education in the 21st Century, have developed an interdependent relationship that is unlikely to change (Castillo et al., 2023; Granić, 2023). Equally, AI as an emerging educational technology (ed-tech), has demonstrated its potential to disrupt higher education. It has also illustrated its benefits through improved work outputs, within previously unimagined paradigm shifts (Firat, 2023; Habib et al., 2024). Though the technology-education relationship cannot be broken, education sometimes seems to be the

weaker sibling; always playing catch up with new technologies, even before the recently adopted one is fully implemented (Chugh et al., 2023; Scott & Guan, 2023). This is particularly problematic for universities in Africa (Matthess & Kunkel, 2020). In a systematic review of papers published on ChatGPT and AI education tools through four leading databases, within a very wide search criterion, Baber et al., (2023), found 300 articles and almost 2000 citations of which none of the articles originated from Africa. This exemplifies issues of divide on; adoption, access, affordability, innovation, participation, usage, and research studies (Chugh et al., 2023). Countries in Africa (by extension, universities and faculty) vary on the level, scale and sectorial use of technology (Matthess & Kunkel, 2020). But, 'being left behind' is not an option because it contributes to the widening divides between the first world and themselves (Matthess & Kunkel, 2020). Even though, faculty acknowledge that education technologies must accompany their work (García-Peñalvo, 2023; Nasri et al., 2022), within the already existing divides (technology, information, and skills), they are unable to afford and/or cope with the new and everchanging education technologies (Shwedeh, 2024).

Ed-tech most often seems to arrive in HEIs with an 'uncertainty' for faculty (Lund et al., 2023) borne of pertinent questions; Will faculty find it useful and user-friendly (worth the cost, training, usability, and adoptability)? Will the new technologies take up the roles of the teacher (redundancy and adaptability)? How different is the new technology from the ones already in use (disruption)? Is the new technology affordable to both faculty and students (cost and access)? What problems can the new technology solve (what is broken)? Thus, the general reaction to the new generative AIs is no different from previous education technologies when they first came into the market (García-Peñalvo, 2023). It is not plausible for faculty to invest in technologies that is new or are yet to arrive. Most often new education technologies arrive as a disruptor to the 'normal' teaching and learning processes and then adoption processes including training and acceptance begin (Shwedeh, 2024). Faculty are

expected to find self-directed ways of accommodating technology as the solution to disruptions or risk being left behind. This limits the frequency and depth of the much-needed continuous professional development.

Technology has influenced many administrative processes in education. It has brought solutions that have contributed to speed and efficiency (Chugh et al., 2023). Each successive educational technology attempts to contribute solutions to the challenges that bedevil teaching and learning processes including high attrition, (especially from distance learning formats), differences in learning styles, unmotivated or low achieving learners, an ever-growing socio-economic, information, and digital divide, and faculty development (Naidu & Sevnarayan, 2023). Technology through blended and online formats anticipates improved access and participation for learners who would otherwise not register for higher education including persons with disabilities and people in low socio-economic strata. Therefore, many university administrations already understand the benefits of digital transformation and the need for ed-tech (Alenezi et al., 2023).

Steered by lessons learned following the effects of physical lockdowns of HEIs during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mpofu & Mpofu, 2023), one of the pillars for disaster preparedness in education is investment in ed-tech. This is especially important for technology-driven departments like open, distance education and e-learning (ODEL) which, following the COVID-19 pandemic, has extended its delivery spectra to include the much utilized blended and hybrid formats of learning (Alvi, 2023; Gupta et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2022). Through ed-tech, distance learning formats provide education to diverse student populations in diverse global locations. Technology has bridged distances created by travel, relocation, culture, and transactions. This in turn has increased student numbers (Gupta et al., 2024) and more revenue for institutions (Scott & Guan, 2023). Faculty have also reported increased efficiency in resource utilization including a reduction of time spent in course administration and other duties; recording lectures, automated

attendance reports, simulations, co-creation with global peers and cross-border knowledge sharing (Lubinga et al., 2023; Shwedeh, 2024).

It is expected that the experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown positively changed universities towards digital transformation (Mpofu & Mpofu, 2023). However, it is not easy to evaluate the aftermath of COVID-19 lessons regarding HEI, whether there was a work revolution or not (Mpofu & Mpofu, 2023). Even at the time of lockdowns, there was marked discomfort and resistance by faculty to the adoption of ed-tech (Firat, 2023; Granić, 2023). The lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown should have changed the education landscape forever. Through institutional lockdowns occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, ed-tech in HEIs gained larger budgetary allocations (Shwedeh, 2024). The pandemic compelled many universities to transition into online/remote learning with quick adoption of ed-tech including learning management systems (LMS) and enterprise resource projects (ERP) solutions (Alismaiel et al., 2022; Naidu & Sevnarayan, 2023). While these changes are incorporated, AI has entered the education space with many more disruptions than previously experienced (Castillo et al., 2023; Eke, 2023).

ChatGPT, a generative AI, is an example of emerging and aggressive global ed-tech (Baber et al., 2023; Cotton et al., 2024). Since its launch in 2022 (Eke, 2023; Lund et al., 2023), various scholars have assessed its penetration, adoption, benefits, and challenges (Cotton et al., 2024; Sallam, 2023). Some of its benefits include i) A new paradigm shift in remodelling approaches to processes of teaching and learning, especially assessments, in higher education that will acknowledge the ethical use of AI (Nguyen et al., 2023) ii) A balanced and well-thought-out blended approach of AI and human creativity that can foster students higher order critiquing skills that require students to use questioning, evaluation, and synthesis before incorporating outputs from generative AI into their work (Habib et al., 2024). Faculty is relieved from teaching lower-level concepts to facilitate higher-order

skills training (Firat, 2023). iii) It has introduced efficiency and speed as a teaching and learning companion/aid. Generative AI can create and develop answers for the widest range and combination of questions. This shortens the time for research and evaluation (Sallam, 2023). AI can process and store large amounts of information and brings precision to the search and preparation of learning materials (Stacey, 2022). iv) Adopting AI in education has taught both faculty and administration more about the three facets of teaching and learning; intuition, intelligence, and creativity (Habib et al., 2024). v) Traditional and new assessments have adversely been impacted by generative AI including ChatGPT, Monica, and quizziz among many others. Cheating in assessments has to be redefined within new policies that will propel HEI to skill-based outcomes (Cotton et al., 2024; Stacey, 2022).

There are equally numerous challenges associated with generative AIs. Academic cheating and plagiarism need deeper discussions (Stacey, 2022). Previous examination policies will need to be reviewed (Crawford, Cowling, Ashton-Hay, et al., 2023). It poses an even greater challenge to assessments including online assessments that were just being adopted by universities (Jarrah et al., 2023; Naidu & Sevnarayan, 2023). Outputs from generative AIs like ChatGPT though well-researched, sometimes need verification (Rudolph et al., 2023a). In many cases, generative AIs almost lose their function when students are required to apply knowledge through process reasoning, critical judgment, and decision-making (Rudolph et al., 2023a). The jury is still out on the emotional and physical presence that human faculty brings to learning in contrast to AI. There is consensus that AI has positioned itself in teaching and learning and is unlikely to leave (Jarrah et al., 2023). Therefore, its adoption is inevitable (Granić, 2023). It threatens to automate cognitive teacher functions required for teaching and learning in traditional classrooms (Nasri et al., 2022). Faculty should make the necessary changes to remodel the higher education space. Generative AI has aggressively positioned itself in teaching and learning (Eke, 2023).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are concerned with the impact emerging generative AIs are having in the traditional classroom processes (Shwedeh, 2024). Pertinent questions include; Will AI contribute solutions, or will it add to the challenges (Alvi, 2023)? Should higher education remodel itself, change its approach to teaching, learning, and research, or sit back and wait for AI to consume it (Rudolph et al., 2023b)? Because ed-tech is here and generative AIs are aggressively impacting teaching and learning processes, we should find ways to work with it (Hassoulas et al., 2023; Naidu & Sevnarayan, 2023). It, has, however, raised questions of integrity and ethics in issues of academia and research (Lund et al., 2023). Eke (2023), identifies ethical issues including honesty, trust, and responsibility among many fundamental values of integrity. How can these values be entrusted to students and faculty when both use generative AI to create academic content either for assignments, writing, or research? It seems that HEIs will need to turn a greater focus on value-based education (Nguyen et al., 2023). Banning the use of AI and trying to police its use is already proving futile (Hassoulas et al., 2023). Available policies are mostly outdated or unsupportive to capacity building the knowledge and skills required by faculty for the adoption of new and emerging educational technologies (Crawford, Cowling, Ashton-Hay, et al., 2023). Discussions should open to all possible solutions to uphold academic integrity and ethics (Jarrah et al., 2023). This paper seeks to examine such issues through the lens of Faculty in awareness, investment, and adoption of recent educational technologies including generative AI as a representation of other AIs.

## V. METHODS

A descriptive mixed methods survey design using an online questionnaire for data collection was employed. The questionnaire was designed to include both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Most quantitative questions used 3-point Likert scales (3-Agree, 2-Neutral, 1-Disagree) in testing the awareness, investment, and use of education technologies including generative AIs while closed-ended questions were

used to examine both research questions with more depth. The Central Limit Theorem (CLT), allows for a sample size of thirty (30) or more as sufficient to assume a normal distribution (Ganti, 2022). One hundred (100) participants were selected with a target of thirty (30) responses through purposive and snowballing sampling techniques in diverse universities in Africa mainly through social media including WhatsApp and LinkedIn. Inclusion for participation was teaching faculty including those with additional roles apart from teaching. Data was collected over four (4) weeks with weekly reminders posted on direct messaging in social media. Both descriptive quantitative and qualitative content analysis were used for data analysis and presentation of results. Ethical approval was requested from the host

university of the lead researcher. Participants were requested and required to sign/initialize the consent letter attached to the face page of each questionnaire as a condition for participation.

## VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Participants were drawn from thirty-four (34) Universities in eight (8) African countries; Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia. Participants ranged between the ages of 20 years old to 55 and over years with only 3% (n=65) falling into the category below 25 years. 49% (n=65), were in the category of 20 - 39 years while 51% (n=65) were in the 40 - 55 and over category.

**Percentage distribution of participants by age and gender (n=65)**

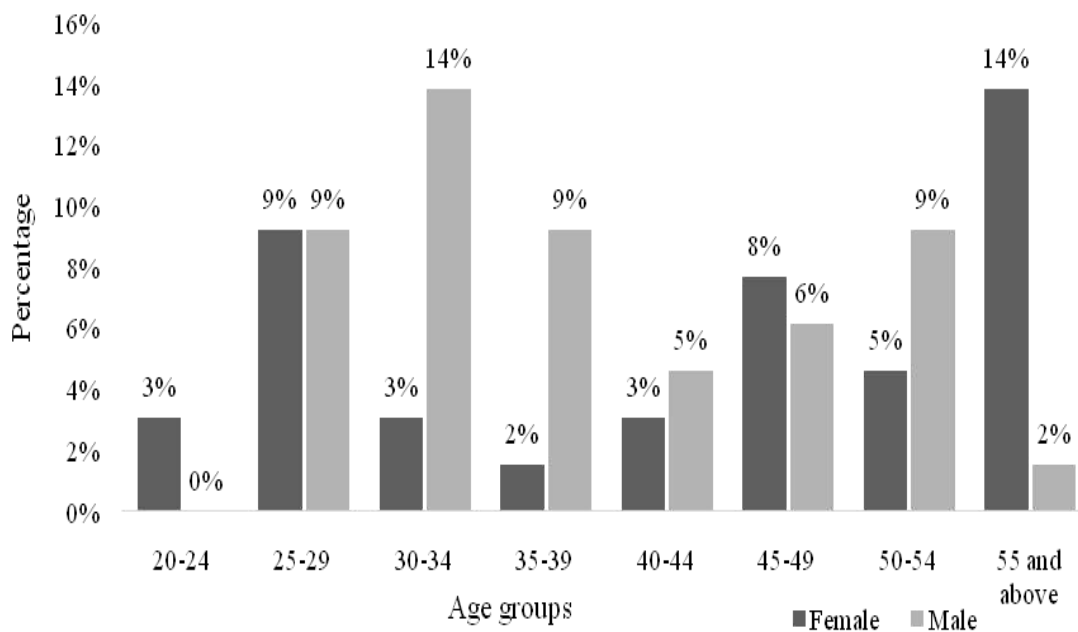


Figure 1

The gender composition of participants comprised 46% (n=65) and 54% (n=65) accounting for females and males respectively (Fig 1). Most university staff in the 30 – 44-year category were male 28% (n=65) compared to females at 8% (n=65) in the same age group. Females were the majority in the 45 - 55 years and over categories

accounting for 27% (n=65) compared to males at 17% (n=65) in the same.

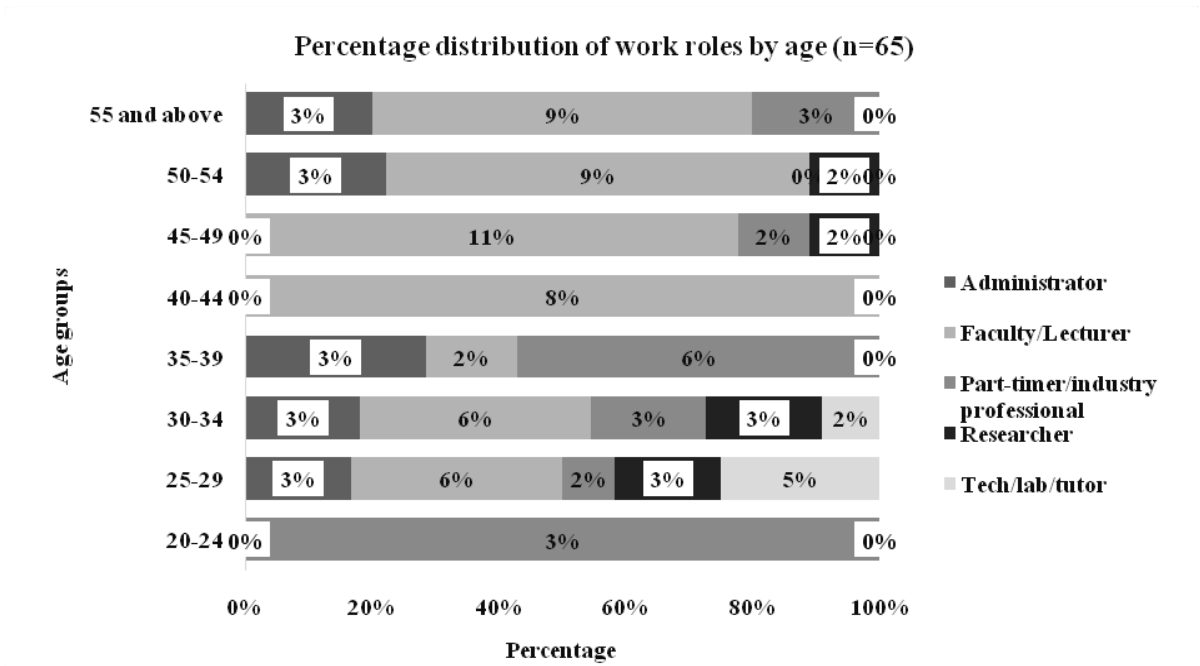


Figure 2

University staff combine teaching with other work roles. The administration needed to be involved in this study as they are the key decision-makers of capital investments in acquiring ed-tech. In addition to other duties, the work roles indicated 51% (n=65) were pure faculty, while 15% (n=65) were also in administration, 27% (n=65) industry professionals but part-time faculty, and 6% (n=65) lab techs and tutors (Fig 2). The majority of faculty, 37%(n=65) were in the 40-55 years and above category compared to 14%(n=65) in the 20-39 years category.

Further findings were grouped under four (4) themes based on the research questions:

### 6.1 Awareness, Investment, and use of Educational Technologies Including Generative AIs

Findings indicated that gender is not a factor in the adoption of ed-tech by faculty. The majority of faculty, though in the 40 years and above categories indicated 98% (n=65) awareness and use of prevailing ed-tech, having used different versions of video-conferencing software, learning management systems, online assessments, virtual reality, and undisclosed ‘others’.

**Percentage distribution of awareness of emerging educational technology & generative AIs as by age groups (n=65)**

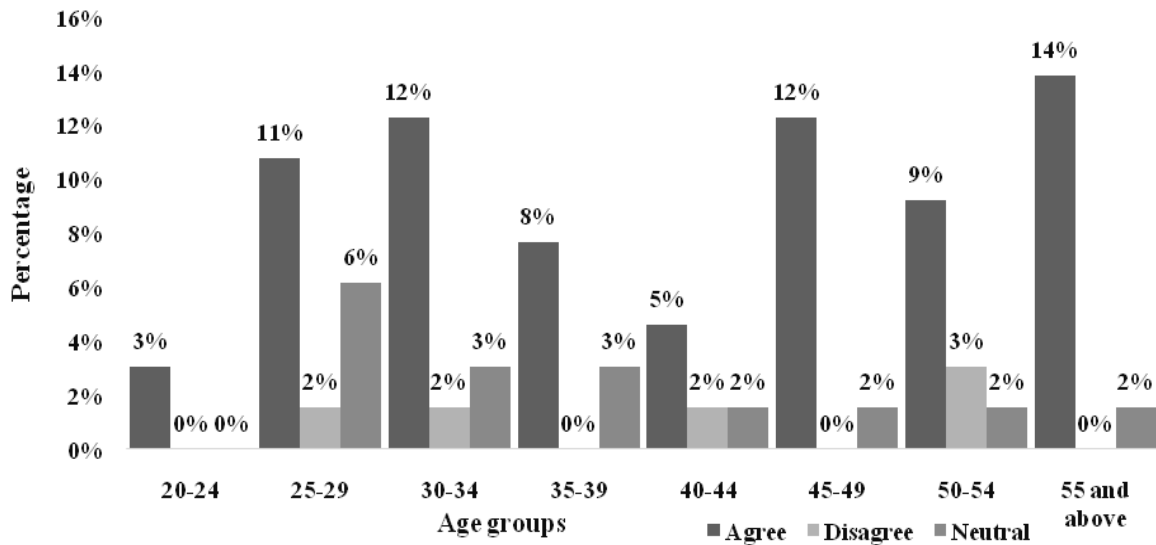


Figure 3

In the combined question of awareness and use of generative AIs as an emerging educational technology, 74%(n=65) indicated ‘agree’ while 9%(n=65) and 17%(n=65) indicated ‘disagree’ and ‘neutral’ respectively (fig 3). In addition, there was minimal difference in percentages between the age groups for those who agreed to awareness and use of emerging educational technologies, with the 20-39 years category accounting for 34% (n=65) and the 40-55 years and above category at 40% (n=65) (fig 3).

### 6.2 Perceived Benefits of using New Educational Technologies and Generative AIs

A combined score of 98% (n=65) in the age categories of 20-39 years and 40-55 years believed that investing in technology was a priority for the institution and individual faculty. This has demonstrated faculty acknowledgment that education technologies are part of academic work (Castillo et al., 2023; Firat, 2023; Granić, 2023) and that the paradigm shift to ed-tech is unlikely to change (Castillo et al., 2023).

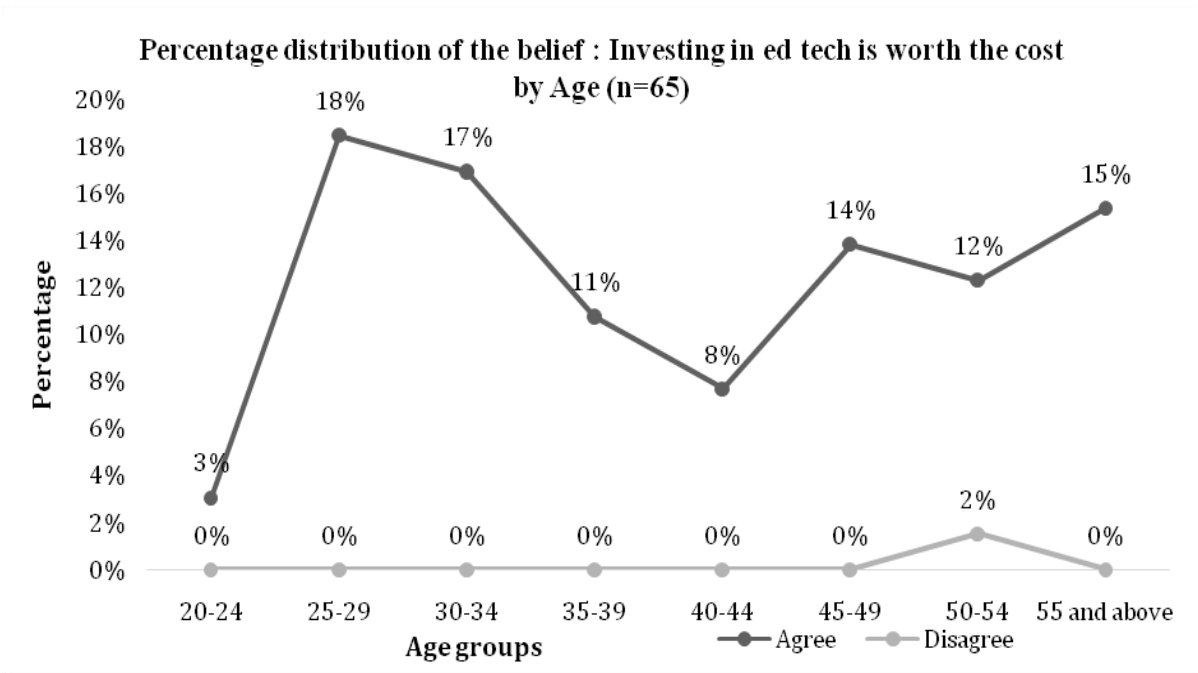


Figure 4

Fig 4 indicates participants' opinions on the question of investing in ed-tech both for themselves and their institutions. There was equivocal agreement that investing in ed-tech is worth the cost with the age categories of 20-39 years and 40-55 years and above both scoring 'agree' at 49% (n=65) and 49% (n=65) respectively in the Likert scale.

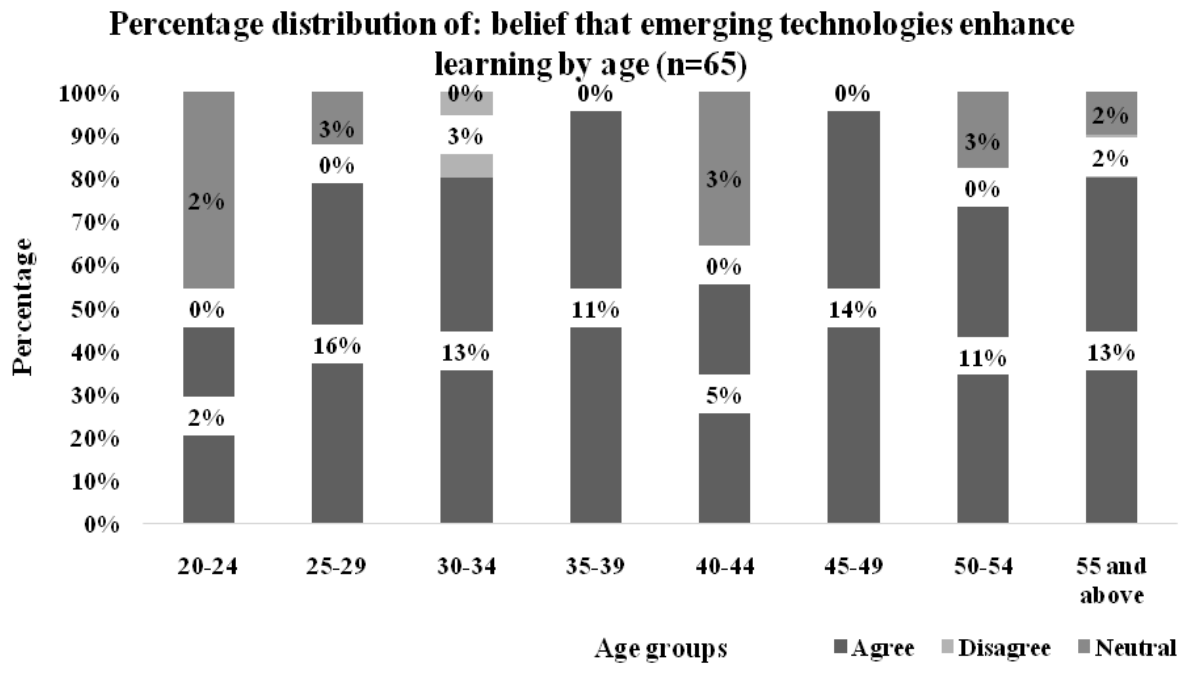
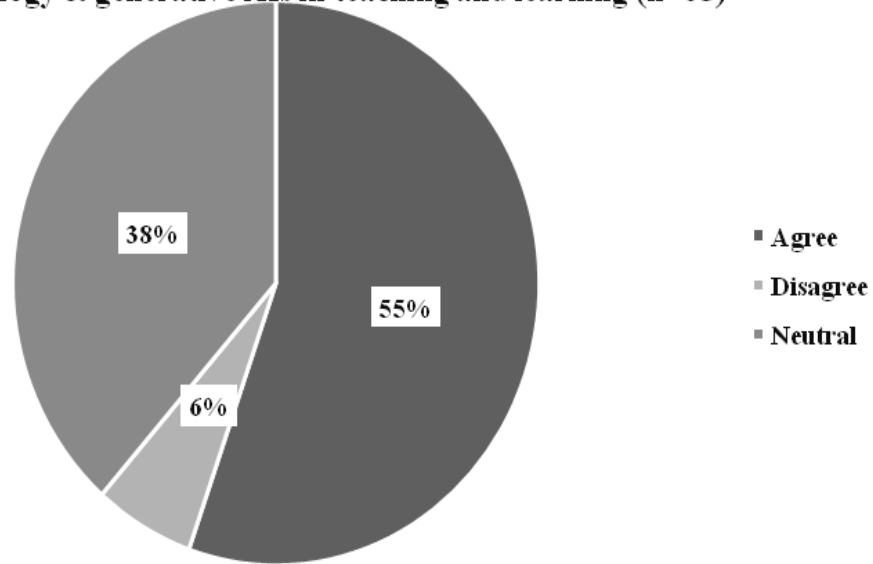


Figure 5

On the role of technologies in teaching and learning, participants were asked about their belief in technologies' capabilities in enhancing learning (Fig 5). All age categories indicated that technology could enhance learning with the age categories of 20-39 years and 40-55 years and

above scoring 42% (n=65) and 43% (n=65) 85% (n=65) compared to 15% (n=65) in the respectively in the agree Likert scale. This totals disagree and neutral scales combined (fig 5).

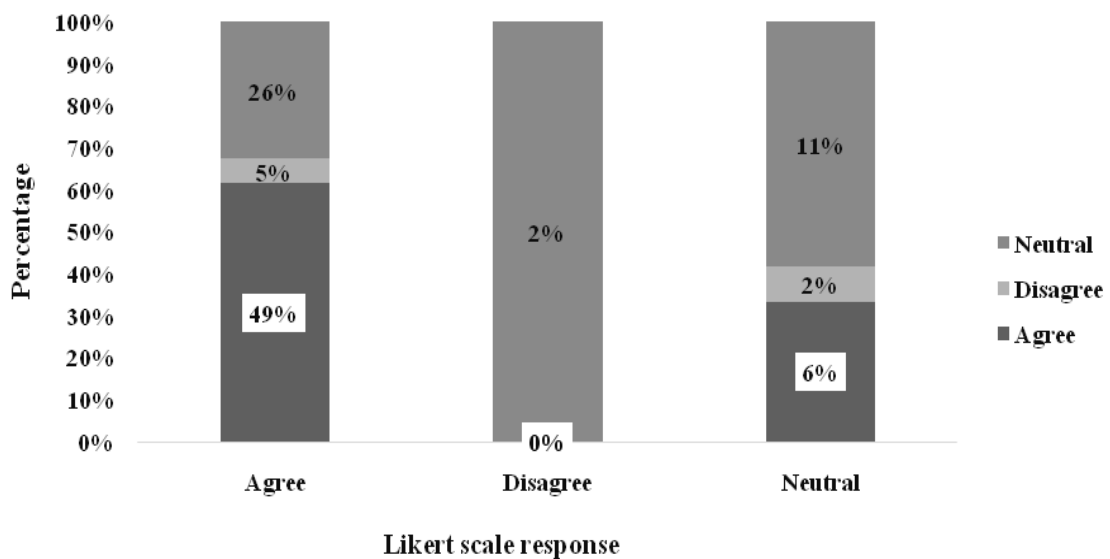
**Percentage distribution of :Most oftenly use educational technology & generative AIs in teaching and learning (n=65)**



*Figure 6*

In the standalone question of ‘often use of new technologies and generative AIs in teaching and learning’, 55% (n=65) of participants indicated ‘agree’ leaving 45% (n=65) in the category of those who were unsure or did not use (fig 6). To further to this, participants were also asked about their beliefs regarding the impact of generative AIs on learning.

**Percentage distribution of convergent responses to oftenly used and AI enhances learning (n=65)**



*Figure 7*

Fig 7 illustrates the convergent responses in the combined statements that i) emerging educational technologies can enhance learning and ii) the often use of new educational technologies

including generative AIs in teaching and learning. Here, 'agree' for both scored 49% (n=65) while 26% (n=65) and 5% (n=65) indicated 'disagree' and 'neutral' respectively.

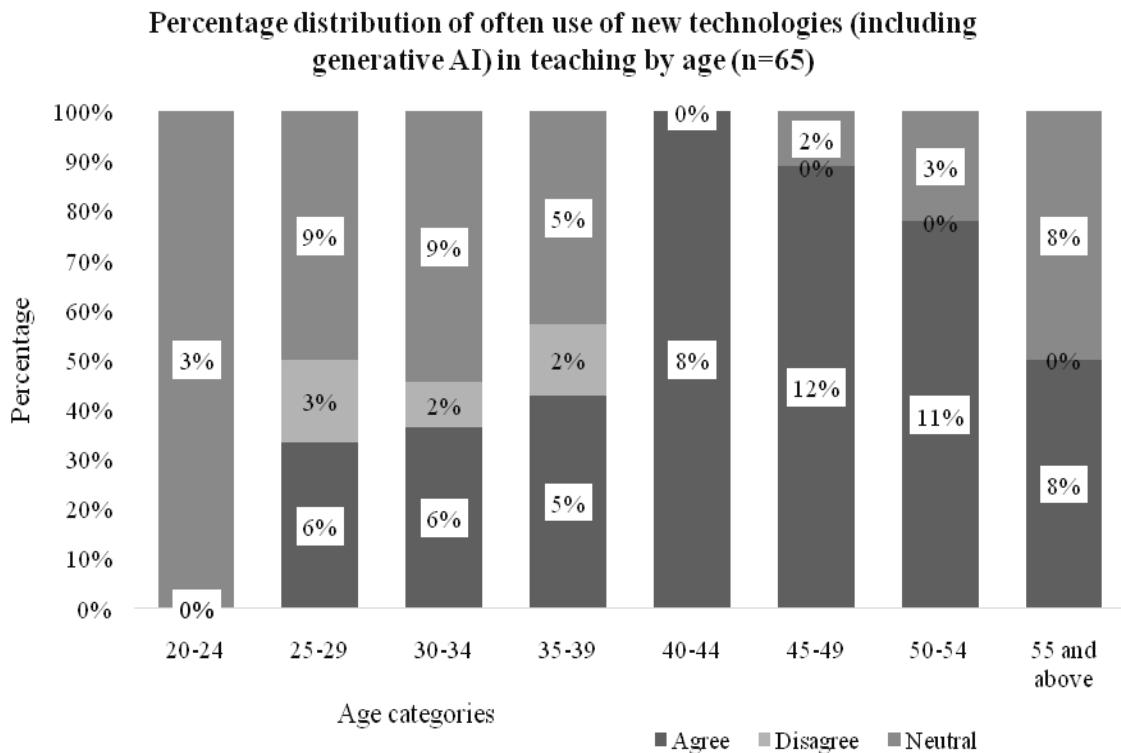


Figure 8

The use of new technologies and generative AIs was plotted by age (Fig 8). There was marked variation between the age groups; the age categories of 20- 39 years and 40- 55 years and above scored 17% (n=65) and 39% (n=65)

respectively on 'agree' in the Likert scale. 26% (n=65) and 7% (n=65) in the 20-39 years category indicated 'neutral' and 'disagree' respectively for the use of emerging technologies in teaching.

Table 1

		Generative AI can Personalize Learning for Students			
Concern on possible ethical issues of using generative AI in education		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Grand Total
	Agree	74%	6%	12%	92%
	Disagree	2%	0%	0%	2%
	Neutral	3%	2%	2%	6%
	Grand Total	78%	8%	14%	100%

Table 1 illustrates the convergent responses in the combined statements that i) Generative AI can personalize learning for students and ii) Concern on possible ethical issues of using generative AI in

education. Here, 'agree' for both statements scored 74% (n=65) while 2% (n=65) and 3% (n=65) indicated 'disagree' and 'neutral' respectively. HEIs practitioners, including faculty

and administration, will need to accommodate AI and future technologies in competency and skills-based assessments rather than basic knowledge and application assessments.

### 6.3 Support and Investments in Emerging Educational Technologies and Generative AIs

The influence of technology solutions in education has brought efficiency to many processes including administration, class management, student records management, and examinations

(Firat, 2023). However, due to dwindling fiscal support from the government, universities also face financial challenges leading to insufficient budgetary allocation to departments and faculty. This has resulted in a reluctance to invest in educational technology and Artificial intelligence (AI) in university administrations in low-income countries (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023; Maguatcher & Ru, 2023; Nasri et al., 2022). Participants discussed institutional support for digital transformation and capital investment in new educational technologies.

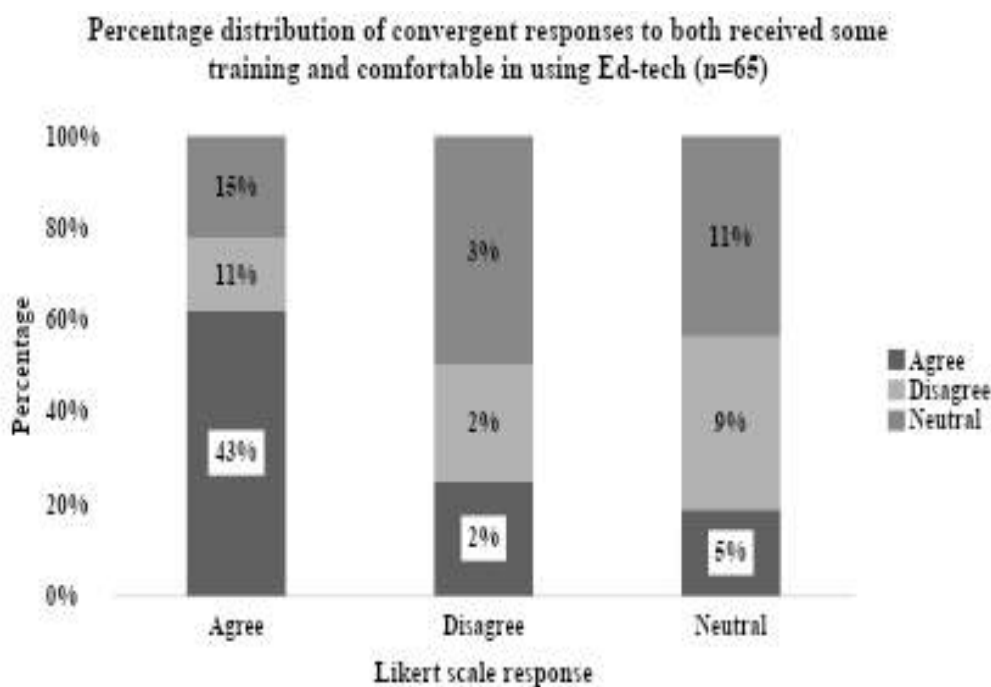


Figure 9

Fig 9 illustrates the convergent responses in the combined statements that i) they had received training and ii) were comfortable with using emerging educational technologies and generative AIs due to institutional-supported training. 'Agree' to both statements scored 43% (n=65) while 12% (n=65) and 15% (n=65) indicated 'disagree' and 'neutral' respectively. Some institutions have invested in digital transformation and continue to support faculty. One participant indicated:

*My institution was continuously investing in and implementing new educational technologies ... these investments need joint*

*efforts from both faculty and administration. (P28)*

Another participant indicated the opposite:

*There were no provisions for technologies, and I didn't know which technology applies in my educational class. (P46)*

One participant expressed dissatisfaction with the university's provision of reliable internet and meeting the costs of training and capacity building:

*We don't have reliable internet access and compatible devices, to effectively utilize technology, Teachers may also require*

*extensive training to effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices. (P2)*

#### 6.4 Challenges in Adopting New Educational Technologies and Generative AIs

University administrations should prioritize technology-driven formats of education through investments in capacity building, policies, accreditation, and establishment. Participants raised various challenges in using educational technologies including individual, institutional, and external challenges. The individual challenges included inadequate understanding and skills in using the new educational technologies. This has been described by Khlaif et al., (2023) as 'techno-stress'. Some faculty members lack confidence, are afraid of the unknown, and are resistant to change. Sometimes this is due to a lack of training in the use of various technologies or simply due to fixed mindsets and negative attitudes. The rapid change in new technology is also a major issue as many faculty members cannot keep up with the new changes (Alenezi et al., 2023; Chugh et al., 2023).

*Technology is ever-changing so I see a case where before one gets used to a certain type of technology, another has come and replaced it. (P7)*

*Cost, ignorance, poor prioritizing, rigid and ignorant administration, resistance to change, fear of the unknown, commission for university education policies, outdated examination policies.(P12)*

### VII. DISCUSSION

This study illustrates that; even though technology adoption has both successes and challenges (Alenezi et al., 2023) faculty are well aware of prevailing paradigms of education technologies. However, the levels of investment and use in the same will always vary (Shwedeh, 2024). The increased awareness and use of ed-tech can also be attributed to the forced physical lockdowns of higher educational institutions (HEIs) during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alismaiel et al., 2022; Shwedeh, 2024) during which ed-tech was the only redemption for

continuity of teaching and learning. In the utilization and self-learning investments in the new AI-associated technologies, at least half of the participants indicated the use of generative AIs including OpenAI, ChatGPT-3 /4, Google's BERT, and Copilot while a substantial number indicated that they had heard about AI in education but were yet to use any including generative (Lund et al., 2023). Faculty also indicated that they had gained awareness of new education technologies mostly through self-learning, forced change by students, reading / journals, conferences and workshops, internet, colleagues, social media, AI platform updates, news and pop-up advertisements on mobile phones, research and collegial learning (Alismaiel et al., 2022). It is also encouraging that the current breed of faculty has less 'technostress' (Khlaif et al., 2023) and more self-drive. This is facilitated by knowledge-seeking and life-long learning propelled by various needs including, career growth, success stories from colleagues, the internet, improved institutional support, recognition for innovation, and incentives from partners/grants.

On the possible benefits of using emerging education technologies and generative AIs in teaching and learning, the majority of participants indicated that the use of education technologies would increase student engagement in learning activities with a commensurate improvement in expected course outcomes. In addition, participants also indicated that the use of AI in education would benefit both faculty and learners with personalized learning experiences and enhance collaboration with peers. This will enhance creativity if generative AI outputs are used as guides and students are encouraged to think of alternatives for problem-solving (Crawford, Cowling, Ashton-Hay, et al., 2023). Subsequently, this will also enhance student engagement and active learning. Generative AIs can be used in collaboration with other education technologies for demonstrations and simulations in developing audiovisual learning materials. In the immediate past, video content for instance was generated using real actors and manual scripts. Generative and other AIs have illustrated

the endless possibilities of artificial actors and scenario-generated scripts (Nasri et al., 2022).

AI in education is an emerging ed-tech (Baber et al., 2023; Cotton et al., 2024). Components of classroom learning that are possibly impacted by new technologies and generative AIs include; set up and administration of assessments (Altmäe et al., 2023). Participants indicated that AI would help education systems like assessments and evaluations to run more efficiently with improved speed of outcomes and feedback even though there was mistrust in AI capacity borne of policy and ethical issues (Eke, 2023; Jarrah et al., 2023). The main concerns included issues of cheating and plagiarism would have to be mitigated in better ways that are yet to be defined (Cotton et al., 2024; Stacey, 2022). Notwithstanding, participants indicated that accepting generative AIs as learning companions would enhance personalized learning, even though faculty would need more skills in moderating their use in learning activities. Overall, AIs have the potential to contribute to impactful growth in digital learning skills (Alenezi et al., 2023; Mpofu & Mpofu, 2023). A definitive positive that is already configured in many LMSs is automated assessment grading systems (Hassoulas et al., 2023). This has introduced efficiency and effectiveness as learners can receive immediate feedback. Other components that participants were positive about included, the use of AIs as adaptive tutors in virtual classrooms. In addition to visual and space simulations, adaptive tutoring can deliver real-time information if AI can gauge the classroom understanding of prevailing concepts and re-adapt the information to fit the current required information.

The institutional challenges included a lack of; financing for the purchase of personal and institutional tech-ware, administrative support for staff training and growth (Gkrimpizi et al., 2023; Maguatcher & Ru, 2023), and supportive policies on the use of new technology (Crawford, Cowling, & Allen, 2023; Eke, 2023). Many HEIs in developing countries lack relevant infrastructure including classrooms fitted with modern technology equipment, new software, smart classrooms, and projectors (Alvi, 2023; Gupta et

al., 2024). Where there is some equipment, there is inadequate expertise or technicians to manage the educational technologies. In addition, poor internet connection hinders access to some of the technology applications. Another challenge is financial resources (Scott & Guan, 2023). Universities have limited funds to budget and prioritize new technologies. Participants also discussed student-related factors; some students lack the required equipment, experience poor access to the Internet, and poor participation mostly due to associated costs. Thus, in many universities that have adopted blended and hybrid modes of learning (Alvi, 2023; Islam et al., 2022), faculty find it hard to deliver effectively due to student-related factors.

External factors include the perceived high cost of capital equipment, new technology software, and licenses, as well as the cost of the internet and related infrastructure (Lee & Han, 2021). Another challenge is the influence of manufacturers and donors ending up with unreliable and non-useful technologies. In addition, most often there is insufficient evidence of cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency of changing from one technology to a new one (Nasri et al., 2022).

## VIII. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was limited in scope. Nonetheless, the sample was representative but non-generalizable due to the sampling technique of snowball. It has, however, illustrated faculty trends in awareness, use, and adoption of emerging ed-tech including AI. Faculty will need to adopt emerging ed-tech as aggressively as their invasion (García-Peñalvo, 2023). This will probably impact teaching and learning methodology in ways that are still open to research. Generative AIs have proven to be worthy learning companions and so faculty may need to incorporate them in relevant pedagogies. Old models of teaching and learning may not work as they used to in the face of emerging ed-tech like generative AIs (García-Peñalvo, 2023). HEIs probably need to integrate other theories and models as they adopt emerging ed-tech. The present generation of learners, borne into a technology world, now aided by AI, trained to access information through social media in a

permissive socio-cultural environment allows learners to interact with information in small chunks, keep only what's useful for purpose, and apply what school or work demands (Alismaiel et al., 2022). Multimedia learning materials hosted by various LMSs can now accommodate new technologies including generative AIs. In addition to instruction and facilitation, faculty will adopt the role of active moderator who should be keen to moderate the use of generative AIs in coursework. Policies may need to give learners the choice to integrate generative AIs as learning companions. Learners can also implement collaborative learning with faculty to develop course content using generative AIs and integrate instructional materials in social media including Instagram and TikTok. Discussion forums may need to integrate collaborative social media including WhatsApp, Telegram, and mobile phone-based applications into learning management systems (LMS) and classrooms. All these are open to more research.

#### Notes

#### Declarations

This study has not currently been submitted to another journal.

#### Availability of Data and Materials

- The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are available in <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1q6DILTW5bGgbpPlm6lXPjg68GqgUmoVC/edit?usp=sharing&oid=113816018990677993987&rtpof=true&sd=true>
- The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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#### List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
BERT	Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers
ChatGPT Chat	Generative Pre-Trained Transformer
CLT	Central Limit Theorem
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
Ed-tech	Educational Technology
HEIs	higher education institutions
LMS	Learning Management System
ODEL	Open Distance Electronic Learning
OERs	Open educational resources
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model

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# Diversity and Identity in Southwestern Poland. Narratives of Silesian Women

*Kornelia Golombek*

## ABSTRACT

This article should be understood as some sort of prelude to an empirical study that has only just begun. It seeks to explore the perceptions of ethnic-nationally orientated identity constructions of Silesian women<sup>1</sup> living in Southwestern Poland.<sup>2</sup> When it comes to academic disciplines, this essay will touch upon both cultural sociology and regional ethnology.

The guiding principle formulated in this essay will initially pursue the current conceptual state within the framework of empirical research, which includes hypothetical assumptions about the aforementioned Silesian women and their identity constructions, while also attempting to gain new insights or refute some of these assumptions. As to systematic research, it becomes clear the topic has been under-researched and the specialised literature is very limited. The situation is similar with the conclusion of this essay, thus only allowing low-threshold conclusions.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This article is a preface to an empirical study that the author has just begun at a Polish university.

<sup>1</sup> The majority of Silesians feel that they belong to neither the German nor the Polish nationality, but as an independent ethnic group. However, the boundaries are not always clearly defined, as some Silesians, for example, also consider themselves to be German or Polish. In the 2011 census, over 800,000 people stated that they were Silesians. They live mainly in the districts of Silesia, Opole and Lower Silesia. Other, numerically rather small minorities include Roma, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Czechs, Belarusians and Tatars. The protection of minorities is enshrined in law in Poland. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (2016): Society in Poland. (Accessed on 19.02.2025 under: Poland Society – Minorities).

<sup>2</sup> Makes direct reference to two other publications by the author: 'In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors' Polish Traditions of Westward Migration Meets Modern Epigenetics of Trauma".

The study seeks to identify gaps in research when it comes to aspects of the sociology of knowledge as well as regional ethnology in the case of Silesian women living in Southwestern Poland and their identity constructions.

This essay comprises three chapters, even though it will not strictly adhere to the classical structure with an opening question and final conclusions. The introduction begins with a brief timeline of Polish history, with particular emphasis on the Southwestern region of Silesia. This is followed in chapter 1 by an introduction to academic terms relating to biography research and psychosocial identity theories, while chapter 1.2 attempts a causal link to interpretations of doing gender. As a bridge to chapter 2, the problem of habitus ruptures will be addressed, which likely have occurred several times due to foreign rule in Poland and whose after-effects (Bourdieu 1970) can still cast a "shadow" on the identity constructions of Silesia's population. Reference is also made to the topic of trauma and epigenetics, which might (although this is just a hypothesis at this time) influence the often ambiguous and diffuse sense of belonging in today's Silesian borderlands. The final passages of chapter 3 conclude this preface to my upcoming empirical study.

## II. THE DILEMMA OF POLISH HISTORY. POLAND'S TENSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE POLITICS OF PAST OCCUPATIONS BY ITS NEIGHBOURS

Even before the 18th century<sup>3</sup>, parts of Poland already were under foreign rule, for instance, the

<sup>3</sup> For over three hundred years (apart from 1772 to 1795 and 1918 to 1939), foreign rule by occupying powers (including France, Hungary, Sweden, Prussia, Austria, Russia, Germany and the Soviet Union) left its 'mark' on the country (cf. Cegielski/Kądziela 1990).

region of Silesia, located in Southwestern Poland. Polish King Casimir the Great renounced his rights to Southwestern Poland, known as Silesia, in the Peace of Prague in 1356. The reins of power in the territories were subsequently taken over by John of Luxembourg, the Czech king who saw (?) himself as a successor to the Roman Empire.

From there, changing occupiers and their rules determined the fate of this formerly Polish territory for many centuries. Later, the Habsburgs, the Prussians and, last but not least, the Germans occupied the region of Silesia and left their respective marks on it, which, in some respects, are still observable even today, for instance, when it comes to the national-ethnic feeling of belonging to a nation, ethnic group or minority.

Today, the historical region of Silesia consists of three Polish voivodeships. Despite the decline of coal mining and traditional heavy industry, the Silesian Voivodeship (województwo śląskie) with its capital Katowice is an economically stable and attractive region that ranks second in Poland (after Mazovia with its capital Warsaw) in terms of population and gross domestic product (GDP). The Lower Silesian Voivodeship (woj. dolnośląskie) with Wrocław as its capital also occupies a prominent place in Polish economic rankings. The smallest Polish voivodeship, Opole (woj. opolskie), located between the two, falls far below the Polish average in economic terms, even though it is able to maintain a strong position in economic rankings due to temporary migration and transfer payments from abroad. Therefore, its disposable income can keep up with the other two Silesian voivodeships (Riedel 2021)( accessed 17.02.2025 at: Analysis: The periphery of the periphery - Silesia in the middle-income trap | bpb.de).

Could ambiguous and diffuse identities have arisen as psychosocial consequences of social habitus breaks in countries that were under prolonged occupation? Presumably, this might be the case in my upcoming study on Silesian women. To date, empirical studies on this topic have rarely included sociology or regional ethnology, or the concept of 'broken habitus'

(Bourdieu; Mannheim) as a result of national traumas associated with periods of prolonged occupation and multiple national tragedies. In the last six hundred years of continuous foreign rule in Silesia, its inhabitants may have experienced constant 'ruptures in the interpretation of their worldviews', during which the material world and the cultural values associated with it underwent numerous changes. What might these changes look like and what do Polish women living in Silesia think about them today? Is there a division of the population into autochthonous and non-autochthonous Silesian women? These questions will be explored in my upcoming study, but not yet in the following essay.

I would like to use the term 'problematic identity constructs' to briefly present biographical and identity theories based on low-threshold interpretations. In addition, I would like to describe the region of Silesia as the 'Western borderland'. It is a somewhat unruly patch of Polish territory, which even today occasionally causes political and historical irritation.

### 2.1 Biography

Life narratives of individuals or groups usually involve a constructive effort on the part of the narrator. However, these are no authentic narratives. Instead, these narratives are reconstructions by the interviewee, which are (once again) recreated by the interviewer and which contain 'blind spots'. On the one hand, the interpreter is too far removed from the narrator, or, on the other hand, he can be too 'close' to him and can thus be 'mute' for the subtle nuances of context-dependent answers of the interviewee (Fuchs 2004, Muster et al. 2023).

Mannheim refers to such 'blind spots' as 'aspectuality'. 'Aspectuality' is linked to a certain landscape based on perception, which can necessarily only be recognised in the landscape itself and from a certain vantage point (cf. Mannheim 1980: 212). Mannheim further explains that every human cognition and idea refers back to the 'situation of being', i.e. to the respective location from which the person

originates ('relativity of being' 1979: 229ff.) (cf. Nentwig-Gesemann 1999: 217).

Methodologically, Mannheim was referring to the question of how people's different ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving the world are dependent on their location.

With his famous sentence 'The map is not the territory' (1994: 58), Alfred Korzybski created a metaphor of mental 'maps' depicting human constructions of reality. This 'map is not the landscape, but if the map is similar to the structure of the landscape, it is useful'. This refers to the fact that humans live in two worlds: in the world of language (cognition) and symbols and in the real world of 'experience' (practice) (Korzybski 1933: 58). In the age of philosophy, in cases where it becomes part of a biography, it seeks to portray the individual as a representative of a certain typical bios. But intention means stylisation, thus leading to the abolition of the boundaries between reporting and poetry. For instance, there is not a single account from classical Greek history where we are not first obliged to ask about the intention of the reporter (Gigon 1946: 1).

An essential point of his philosophical thinking is that philosophical thinking is always at the same time a preoccupation with lifestyle questions. Korzybski understands the philosophical questions that preoccupy him are at the same time questions of lifestyle. Conversely, for him, important lifestyle issues are permeated by philosophical themes (Gunnarsson 2020: 97). Biography (Greek: description of life) is a literary, philosophical and scientific term with a long tradition that is linked to the historical development of the relationship between the individual and society. Biography was already known as a literary form in Greco-Roman antiquity. Today, a distinction is made between biography and related terms such as memoirs or curriculum vitae (cf.) Nevertheless, biographies and biographical work in the sense of empirical research can provisionally be defined as an individual life story that depicts a person over the course of his or her lifetime, the respective historical and social conditions and events, while also exploring the inner psychological

development of the subject as well as in their mutual relationship. In a biography, the dialectic of society and the individual thus finds a concrete historical, social and bodily-living expression. This general definition is expressed differently in various academic disciplines and theoretical traditions (cf. Altheit / Dausien 1990: 6ff).

Similar to the 'umbrella' of humanities, philosophy, sociology, for instance, also dedicates itself to working with individual cases in biographical research, which is limited to single individuals; the results thus cannot be generalised. Since the 1970s, sociological biography researchers in Germany have presented increasingly sophisticated theoretical considerations on the social construct 'biography', which constitutes both social reality and the subjects' worlds of experience. We can also justifiably claim that well-founded sociological biographical analysis on the methodological level always includes social history and the reconstruction of the connection between individual life-historical and collective-historical processes. It becomes clear that the systematic individual life story in the context of the subject's respective family history also involves intergenerational transmission processes – a historical approach that is becoming increasingly established given the social-historical research required for the process of understanding.

Since sociologists usually lack detailed historical knowledge of more distant historical periods, even though this is necessary for the process of understanding, we find ourselves, albeit unintentionally, in the position of the stranger and, as already demanded by Park (1925) and others in the context of the Chicago School, have to consider the given milieu as a foreign lifeworld, just like the ethnologist (cf. Rosenthal 2005: 1-4). They do not focus on the particularity of a case, but rather show the social element in its emergence and its respective changes in the course of action and experience. By means of the narrated life story, it is possible to show the entanglement between the individual and society as well as the current significance of collective and especially familial pasts. It is important to emphasise that both the individual history of a

person and the interpretative retrospective view of the past and the way in which the past is presented in the present are constituted by a dialectic between the individual and the social. The life story, both in its development and in the biographer's present interpretative retrospective, is always both an individual and a social product. Biographical research thus makes it possible to analyse the interrelation between individual experience and collective 'framework conditions'. With the reconstruction of each individual case, we therefore always seek to make statements about its historical-social context (ibid.2005: 21f). In his sociological discourse, Nassehi emphasises the sociological element that constitutes sociological biographical research. This statement could initially include trivial considerations that go hand in hand with the emergence of biographies in social space as biographical trajectories are determined by the structure of society. It is obvious without any sociological contamination that the life of a medieval peasant was characterised by different contingencies than the life of a postmodern dinky. And the fact that the biographical paths of industrial workers and corporate managers, of men and women, of educated citizens and members of the "Lumpenproletariat" (*It refers to the lowest stratum of the proletariat*) of the homosexual avant-garde and heterosexual traditionalists differ from one another is hardly worth mentioning given their diversified lifestyles. This sociologically sharpened view makes it possible to understand that biographies do not only arise from the gusto of individual decisions, i.e. cannot be seen as heroic histories of bourgeois autonomy or as histories of the individual pursuit of happiness. Instead, they oscillate between autonomous lifestyles and heteronomous standardisation (cf. Fischer 1986: 373). Even at first glance, it becomes clear that biographical research – and this actually applies to most of its representatives - is implicitly or explicitly based on an interactionist concept that sees ego identity as an individual balancing act between a personal and a social identity component (cf. Krappmann 1982), which is, however, temporally liquefied (cf. Nassehi 1994: 137). The only invariant structure and identity that is still assumed here is the

persistence of substance that was necessary for Kant in order to be able to grasp time theoretically at all (Nassehi cited in Kant 1983: 226, 2020: 136).

In other words, the identity of the subject is not something that can be built upon; rather, it must first be constructed itself. Subjective identities must now assert themselves in and against time: in time, because the identity of the subject must be secured in the difference of its temporal succession; and against time, because the differences in time necessarily determine the need for, or at least the realisation of, identity. Identities of subjects can at best still be thought of as biographical identities. Thus, the booming interest in biographies is probably due to the fact that the increasingly complex modern age makes subjective identity in time precarious.

Corresponding with the interpretations of human biography are theories of identity that create group-specific intentions for connections between mind and body.

## 2.2 Identity

As a representative of the Frankfurt School, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas sought to take a self-reference from self-acting individuals and thus create a 'space' in which human identity can take its place:

'...Under the gaze of the third person, whether directed outwards or inwards, everything freezes into an object...' (Habermas 347).

The individual itself is accessible in the intersubjective space as an initiator of attributions, because it is at the same time the product of socialised specifications, which it makes use of the identity of the individual and its actions. In this sense, Habermas seems to make the individual in his particularity subject to strict generalisability. The circle between the general and the particular seem to be completed. The individual is generalisable and can in principle be objectified in its structures of action from a 'perspective'. The enigmatic, 'opaque' complexity of the lifeworld as a whole is reflected in the enigmatic nature of the life history of an

individual, who is thus structurally integrated into a general context of conditions and possibilities together with other individuals (Heider quoted by Habermas 349ff, 1999: 125).

In the 'Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', Habermas differentiates between the 'natural identity' of the organism in relation to its environment, the socialised 'role identity' that adheres to conventional expectations and then, as a third stage, the 'ego identity'. This third stage integrates externally prescribed norms and roles by critically examining and appropriating them to create the 'consistency' of an autonomous and individualised person who knows how to preserve his or her uniqueness in the sequence of changing and 'incompatible' role expectations. The 'ego-identity' is the identity of a life story made up of 'identities' that have been overcome and those that need to be rebuilt (Heider 1999:128). The central socio-cultural contexts of experience and action, which can have a major impact on the individual and their future, are primary and secondary socio-cultural socialisation. These include family and school, places of education and qualification as well as places of selection and social allocation. The involvement of children and young people in school as a field of experience and interaction with other children, teenagers as well as teachers also makes school a significant place of identity for them – their own and that of their interaction partners.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory. It assumes that human behaviour and identity are not only determined by external forces and structures, but also by forms of interactional encounters that are formed on the basis of things and their meanings (G. H. Mead,<sup>4</sup> H. Blumer 2013). Every social interaction presupposes and at the same time shapes a reciprocal assignment of identity between the interaction partners. This means that identity is intertwined in two perspectives. One perspective is concerned with the perception and determination of the identity

of the social counterpart. On the one hand, this includes the perception and determination of one's own identity by one's social counterpart, for whom one is, in turn, the social counterpart. Here, the person is the object of the perception and determination of their own identity by others. (cf. Muster et al 2023: 81ff).

Erik Erikson, a professor at Harvard University, has dedicated himself to researching identity development without ever having completed a degree. For his part, Erikson is a Freudian ego psychologist. This means that he assumes that Freud's theories are fundamentally correct, including Freud's more controversial concepts such as the Oedipus complex. However, he also accepts theories about the ego developed by other Freudians such as Heinz Hartmann and, of course, Anna Freud. But Erikson is far more inclined towards society and culture than most Freudians – as you would expect from a researcher with an anthropological focus. He often pushes instincts and the unconscious out of the picture. But perhaps this is the reason why Erikson is extremely popular among Freudians and non-Freudians alike! The epigenetic principle, for which Erikson is famous, shows that he has redefined and expanded Freud's theory of developmental stages. According to him, development takes place according to the epigenetic principle. This principle states that we develop our personality via a fixed set of eight stages. The progression from one stage to another is partly determined by our success or the lack of it in all previous stages. Similar to the unfolding of a rosebud, each petal opens at a certain time, in a certain order, as predetermined by nature through genetics. If we interfere with the natural ordering principles of development by pulling out a petal too early, we destroy the development of the whole flower. Each stage involves certain developmental tasks of a psychosocial nature. Although Erikson follows Freud's theory in labelling these as crises, they are more extensive and less specific than the term suggests. For instance, a child in grammar school must learn a certain eagerness, and this eagerness is learnt through the complex social interactions in school and family. The different tasks are labelled with

<sup>4</sup> Obviously, Mead's identity theory, according to which identity (self) consists of the two aspects 'I' and 'Me' and their interplay (1968), is incorporated into his conception of ego identity without this being explicitly stated by him (Muster et al 2023: 83).

two terms. For instance, the toddler's task is referred to as trust-mistrust. At first it seems obvious that a toddler needs to learn trust and not mistrust. But Erikson made it clear that we need to learn a balance: We certainly need to learn trust most of the time; but we also need to learn distrust so that we don't become gullible fools! There is a time for every developmental task. When a stage has been completed well, we retain a certain virtue or psychological strength that accompanies us through the following stages of our lives.

If, on the other hand, we complete a stage less well, we may develop maladaptations and malignities and jeopardise our further development. A malignancy is the worse of the two, since too few positive and too many negative aspects have been drawn from the respective task; for instance, a person who cannot trust other people (cf. Boeree 2006:7). In addition to the psychological 'view' of what human psycho-social stages of identity could mean, Erving Goffman, as a proponent of sociology along the lines of the Chicago School, has shown that identity theories have (also) enriched modern sociological thinking.

Towards the end of his life, Erving Goffman (1922-1982) declared the 'interaction order' (social identity constructions) to be the central theme of his academic work (Goffman 1994). A closer look at his diverse studies reveals that this characterisation can be specified to the effect that he was primarily concerned with the connection between interaction and identity. Goffman's sociology can thus be characterised with good reason as a sociology of the everyday reality of interaction and identity within and outside social institutions. The book 'Stigma' (1975) is of outstanding importance for the topic of interaction and identity. Therein, he elaborates on his first major work 'Wir alle spielen Theater' (1983), while also taking up central insights from the study 'Asylums' (1972), which deals with survival in 'total institutions' and which is incorporated as a modification and extension in many of his later works. The following passage initially concentrates on this work. Then, in a deliberate reversal of chronology, 'Wir alle spielen

Theater' ("*We all play theatre*") is discussed (cf. Muster et al. 2023: 82).

With Goffman's metaphor of the 'scene and background of the play of life', the 'terrain' is prepared for further arguments in this essay, from which women and their everyday lives stand out and which are attributed in the light of modern doing gender theory.

### 2.3 Gender Doing

'...You too will not have excluded yourselves from this musings, insofar as you are men; the women among you are not expected to do so, they are this puzzle themselves. Male or female is the first distinction you make when you meet another human being, and you are accustomed to making this distinction with unquestioning certainty...' (Freud 1933: 61).

With these words, the brilliant psychoanalyst and physician Sigmund Freud began his series of lectures in the early 1930s, one of which was entitled 'On Femininity'.

For Freud, as a 'child of his times', the attribution to the female sex appears in some of the sentences of his lecture, for instance one lecture from 1933, about the 'woman' as a narcissist or as a being sexually controlled by 'Mother Nature'.

'...We thus ascribe to femininity a higher degree of narcissism, which still influences her choice of object, so that to be loved is a stronger need for the woman than to love...' (Freud 1933: 71).

"...That's all I had to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary, and it does not always sound friendly. But do not forget that we have only described woman in so far as her nature is determined by her sexual function" (Freud 1933: 73).

Several years after Freud's findings on 'Femininity', modern scientists have created a new 'stage' for epistemologies of gender that can be seen not just as a characteristic of an individual, but as a series of social-societal processes.

Simone de Beauvoire, a socialist feminist and philosopher from France, who also was a political activist, made a name for herself in the world of philosophy and elsewhere with her world-renowned book 'The Other Sex' (1949) (first published in Germany in 1951). The consequences resulting from biological sex and cultural or social imprinting of gender differences are at the centre of her work, and the basic understanding of gender studies was derived from this. In the foreword to their book "Gender and Deconstruction. Concepts and annotated basic texts of gender and queer theory", Babka and Posselt refer to current approaches to gender theory, which now play a central role in almost all academic disciplines and research areas. The realisation that gender – together with other social categories such as ethnicity, class or age – is a key factor in how societies organise the coexistence of people, how we experience, describe and evaluate our social world and how individuals perceive themselves in their relationship to others and constitute themselves as subjects has finally become well-established. Despite their diversity, different methods and research interests, the various approaches largely agree that the category of 'gender' is not simply a given, but rather a complex construction that influences our self-image and our ideas of masculinity and femininity as well as our sexuality and our psychological structures of desire. Both the construction and contingency of gender therefore take centre stage. Because if gender and gender relations are not simply a given, but are always also made, then they are changeable in principle and can be formulated and conceptualised in different ways. However, there is disagreement regarding the question of how exactly the constructed nature of gender is to be understood, which areas are covered, its ontological and epistemological status, and which historical, political, social, economic and cultural factors are shaping it (cf. Babka / Posselt 2024: 13f).

In order to actively counter traditional notions of gender, everyday understanding or personal experiences regarding gender ('I know what men/women are like, I am one myself' or 'I know my

husband/wife and therefore know what men/women want') is not enough; instead, the highly complex construct of gender must be understood (Leitner 2005: 18).

'You don't have a gender, you do it!' This is how the approach to the social construction of gender can be summarised in one sentence. The sex-gender debate characterised the feminist discourse of the 1990s, even though it turned out to be a divisive issue inside the women's movement and feminists. The extent to which gender is socially constructed, how gender relations are influenced by this fact and the respective political consequences were and still are interpreted differently. Currently, a consensus seems to have emerged among feminists that gender is not (solely) naturally determined and that there are more than two genders. According to the traditional gender difference model, biological sex is identical to social gender. Biological sex is held responsible for social behaviour and all individuals can be assigned to the biological category of sex as a matter of course. You are either a man or a woman. This unambiguous categorisation is based on a bipolar gender concept. However, as early as the 1960s, a distinction was made between the terms sex and gender in the medical-psychiatric debate (Knapp 2000). In the 1970s, these terms were taken up by feminism in order to better reject biological arguments about the 'nature of women'. Gender nature should not unalterably determine social position and role (ibid. 1f). The key question of constructivist gender sociology is: 'How does the binary, mutually exclusive classification of two genders come about and how is this exclusivity maintained every day?' (Knapp 2000, 74). They create a new version of the sex-gender relation in which biological sex is no longer understood as determining social gender. Instead, their relationship is understood reflexively (ibid.3).

In the following section of the text, the reader can delve into this tense relationship from which insights will be gleaned into what connects the end of the Polish state with the transgenerational trauma of losing one's homeland. This trauma could probably have led to a certain perception among individuals affected by this loss.

Specifically, they might see themselves and their socio-cultural identities as a product of painful periods during which their homeland was under occupation, thus giving rise to a 'foreign', socially-related construction.

In parallel, Bourdieu's Algeria study from the 1950s will be addressed, since it depicts the Kabyle population during similar periods of occupation. This might also be informative when it comes to so-called gender-independent habitus breaks among populations who have been repeatedly subjugated.

### III. 'THE GENETIC MEMORY'. EXAMINATION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF HABITUS BREAKS, WHICH COULD HAVE DIFFERENT NEGATIVE EFFECTS DUE TO TRAUMAS IN THE HISTORY OF PEOPLES

The birth of Poland is dated back to the year 966. In modern times, there are three democratic constitutions that were adopted before 1800: the US constitution of 1787, the French constitution of 1793 and the Polish-Lithuanian constitution of 3 May 1791, in which the Poles established the separation of powers, civil rights as well as the democratic majority principle. The political privileges of the nobility were drastically restricted. Shortly afterwards, however, Poland was 'punished' for the non-absolutist path it had taken. Overall, the country was divided three times. Poland's second bloody trauma that followed was called National Socialism. No other country had to make more human sacrifices in relation to its population: Of almost 35 million Poles, 6 million perished in the Second World War - almost one in five. (Accessed on 17.02.2025 at: A history full of trauma | taz.de.)

At this point, I would also like to mention a sensitive topic, which deals with the implicit psychological dimensions of culture that are probably (also) passed on to next generations via national trauma, including traces of memory and symptoms of traumatic experiences. One conceivable consequence of historical periods

with multiple occupying powers, during which the native population had to change both surnames and nationalities several times, would be the development of an 'unstable' or 'diffuse' national-ethnic perception of identity.

Sigmund Freud eventually coined the term 'archaic inheritance' for this in his 1937 essay 'Moses and the Monotheistic Religion' (Freud, 1940ff., GW XVI: 204f.). This includes 'not only dispositions, but contents (...), traces of memory of the experiences of earlier generations' (Freud, 1940ff., GW XVI: 206), which have an effect on the unconscious of subsequent generations (cf. Weigel, 2006: 139ff.; 2010b). The question of the transgenerational transmission of cultural experiences became even more relevant in the 1970s, when striking trauma symptomatology was observed in the children of Holocaust survivors (Weigel, 1999; 2006: 141). At the beginning of his Algeria study, Bourdieu studied Arab tribes in order to explore the transition of the local political-economic system that was bound to change social structures and their rules forever. Consequently, the archaic, traditional system in which the Kabyle tribes<sup>5</sup> had been socialised and educated for thousands of years, was experiencing cracks and habitual ruptures.

These processes of transformation arose as two very different cultural codes, those of France and Algeria, confronted each other. With the introduction of French colonialism into the Maghreb states, the traditional Arab social structure in Algeria underwent massive economic and political upheavals, whose marks on the country are still visible today. However, these changes cannot always be construed as purely positive and beneficial for the formerly subjugated countries.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Bourdieu's field research

<sup>5</sup> This book was published in German in 1979 under the title 'Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabyllischen Gesellschaft'.

<sup>6</sup> His studies range from ethnological analyses of Kabyle society to detailed lifestyle analyses of late capitalist consumer society. His extensive oeuvre includes works on the reproduction of social inequality through the education system, analyses of the social use of photography, food and leisure, socio-analyses of the use of photography, food and leisure, socio-analyses of intellectuals and the lower classes and research into the reality-generating power of the media.

in Algeria coincided with the complete collapse of the local agricultural subsistence economy. (Steiner 2001: 3). Amid a rapidly advancing process of industrialisation and the emergence of monetary exchange relations, Algeria suddenly became entangled in world market dependencies. In addition, the French government issued a colonial decree converting what had previously been communal property into private property. This in turn created a huge and underemployed rural proletariat, which gradually migrated to the cities as well as to France. The new economic system in Algeria therefore was the legacy of French colonialism. This imposed system initiated a structural change for which those affected had not yet developed adequate behavioural options. A great discrepancy became apparent between the behavioural patterns demanded by the new economic reality and the behavioural patterns of the rural and urban sub-proletariat (ibid.: 11).

In his view, thanks to generative behavioural patterns, individuals are able to develop strategies for appropriate behaviour in a given situation. In the Kabyle villages, for instance, traditional cultural values such as the sense of honour, which the indigenous Kabyles have freely at their disposal in daily life without being aware of it, changed (cf. Steiner 2001: 17). The typical Kabyle house and the placement of the objects inside also changed as the foreign culture of the colonists increasingly permeated the everyday life of the Kabyles. Here, Bourdieu fundamentally develops a binary opposition and emphasises that functionalist explanations are not sufficient in order to understand the structures that this system has produced. All objects of the house are part of this symbolic system (cf. Steiner 17ff). Bourdieu also scrutinises the marriage practices of the Kabyles in order to document their respective transformation, how phenomena and strategies can be interpreted in modern and postmodern contemporary societies and what consequences this may have for transformation societies. (Reflecting on the relationship between theory and practice). Bourdieu's praxeological approach and its theoretical elements emerged

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Areas such as the sociology of religion, law, art and gender are represented in his work (Steiner 2001: 3).

from the theoretical reflection of his empirical studies and, as the 'Draft of a theory of practice on the ethnological basis of Kabyle society' makes clear, have been continuously refined (cf. Steiner 2001: 33ff).

'...The phenomena of social, economic and personal decay must obviously be understood as the result of the interaction of external forces (penetration of Western civilisation) and internal forces (original structures of indigenous civilisation)...' (Bourdieu 1958: 54).

In his essay on 'The Problem of Generations', Karl Mannheim<sup>7</sup> also deals with the fact that people connect their formative or decisive experiences with each other in certain transgenerational frameworks. The parental trauma is not only experienced differently by the descendants, but in some cases also in opposite ways, so that it can be perceived as both a curse and a legacy by a single person (cf. Auerbach 23). One possible explanation for this mental orientation could again be the inherited Polish trauma of the long occupation. Mannheim describes the unintentional reproduction of the transgenerational trauma as an unconscious cultural asset.

Here, reference is made to the level of abstraction that attempts to connect the existent with the non-existent with Mannheim's concept of contagion. For Mannheim, the alternative is

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<sup>7</sup> Mannheim's idea of a 'contagion' is intended to remind us of conjunctive thinking and conjunctive spaces of experience (subjective cognition), which can, for example, protect people from alienation. The contagion could be understood as a kind of 'community of origin' in which conjunctive knowledge and conjunctive spaces of experience (communities that contain stretches of shared experience) are present (cf. Mannheim 1935, 1980). Karl Mannheim's 1928 treatise 'The Problem of Generations' has had a significant impact on the field of research in the social sciences. However, other disciplines such as history and cultural studies also refer to Mannheim's concept of generations. In contrast to biologicistic social theories, Mannheim attempted to theoretically link generational and social change. For Mannheim, the difference between generational storage and generational context lay in the culturally organised stratification of consciousness and experience (...). Generation building is a communalisation process that is predominantly localised in the public sphere and is therefore the object and result of collective understandings (cf. Jurait 2011: 1ff.).

another concept of cognition that reflects the special relationship between subject and object. Instead of abstracting and grasping an object or a person purely rationally and supposedly objectively, this concept seeks to define the special relationship that arises during the process of cognition. Mannheim uses the concept of contagion for this purpose. Mannheim describes this special feeling of unity with the object, which is preceded by any objectification and abstraction into indirect language, as contagion. In this contagion, the self, the soul, is touched by an object. This object is absorbed into the 'self-circle' and forms a unity with the individual, thus leading to a fusion. Only through this existential oneness can there be a tangible subject-object relationship. Mannheim therefore seeks to show that we can only truly recognise and comprehend an object when we enter into an existential, specific relationship with it. Only by taking in the object, by merging it with ourselves, is it possible to truly understand the object, the relationship to the object, as well as ourselves. In this context, any absorption of an object into the circle of the self is seen as contact. It is not always clear when it is possible to speak of contagion in Mannheim's work, and what really constitutes such a relationship. However, Mannheim makes it clear above all that touching or being touched by the other does not occur via already objectified forms of expression (which already represent an abstraction). As Mannheim explains 'contagion',<sup>8</sup> it is a special feeling of unity with the object that includes all objectification and abstraction in indirect language (cf. Oberfeld 2010). On the other hand, however, in understanding, we grasp mental realities that belong to a certain experiential space and that have special, existential, perspectivistic meanings (Mannheim 1980: 271f). The theoretical approach for a possible answer to these questions is based on

<sup>8</sup> Mannheim's idea of contagion represents a possible way out for people in an alienated environment. In his cultural sociological work 'A sociological theory of culture and its recognisability (subjunctive and communicative thinking)', he explains and discusses possible forms of recognition and understanding, pointing out the problems of modern societies. At the same time, however, Mannheim also outlines a solution to everyday alienation by referring to contagion and a return to this form of cognition (Oberfeld 2010: 10).

habitus theory, namely through the consequences of Bourdieu's after-effects (1962).

During Bourdieu's aforementioned fieldwork in Algeria in 1976a and 1976b the philosopher experienced an exceptionally brutal colonial war, which shook him deeply, as the Kabyle societies were torn apart by existing anachronisms and social contradictions, which in turn led to numerous changes and transformations ('transformations of habitus',<sup>9</sup> which refer to one constitutively multidimensional dimension of habitus (cf. *ibid*, p. 285ff.) and which can therefore lead to habitus breaks). What is important here is that '...As a product of history, the habitus produces individual and collective practices, i.e. history, according to the schemata produced by history; it ensures the active presence of previous experiences, which are reflected in every organism in the form of perception, thought and action schemata and which seek to ensure the consistency and constancy of practices over time much more reliably than any formal rules and explicit norms...' (Bourdieu 1987b: 101). For our argument regarding the title of this essay, which addresses the consequences of multiple foreign occupations in Poland, causal connections could be assumed, which, via manifold identity irritations and diffusions, have given rise to some sort of hybrid identities - 'objects' - that still bear the stamp of their occupiers to the present day via the foreign hegemonic culture. Therefore, even today it is not unusual that the population of Silesians still finds itself in a national and ethnic ambivalence, in which a Silesian or Czech ethnicity, the German ethnic minority or the genuinely Polish population come into play.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The habitus (orientation framework as a collective phenomenon, referred to as primordial sociality: see Bohnsack 2013b) can (also) be understood in its concrete socio-historical context, which is determined by participation in social practices and thus represents a genuinely social phenomenon. (cf. Eva-Maria cited in Bourdieu 1987b: 100ff.).

<sup>10</sup> Poles make up 95.5% of the population. The largest minorities are the Silesians (2.1%) and the Kashubians (0.6 %). The German minority makes up only 0.3% of the population. Their numbers have continued to decline since the democratic transition in Poland due to emigration to Germany. State Centre for Political Education (2016): Society

*'... Implicit knowledge is a historically produced solution to a crisis (probation) and can 'at any time again fall into a crisis of validity' or 'have currently lost its validity'...' (Oevermann 2006, p. 105).*

But what about the connection between experienced traumas, transgenerational transmission and thus identity dilemmas, which is (also) being investigated by today's molecular biology?

It is the multifaceted field of epigenetics that has dedicated itself to these questions. Epigenetics is a branch of biology that deals with heritable changes that do not involve a change in the DNA sequence. It is assumed that these changes are transmitted through a combination of chemical modifications of DNA (e.g. addition of methyl molecules; DNA methylation), similar modifications of histones and proteins that surround DNA molecules, and RNA molecules that pass on the genetic code present in DNA sequences (cited in Bohacek / Mansuy, 2015, 2021: 280).

This type of inheritance challenges the conventional concept of heredity, which assumes that only genetic factors are involved. Instead, transmission does not depend on the DNA sequence, which serves as the genetic code, but implies mechanisms such as certain signalling pathways that alter the activity of the genetic code without changing the sequence. This is known as epigenetics. These mechanisms are activated in response to various environmental influences. Their modification can be passed on to the offspring and may lead to certain traits in the offspring, sometimes across generations (Bohacek / Mansuy 2015). This form of transmission is referred to as transgenerational epigenetic inheritance when it affects individuals over several generations (Jawaid / Mansuy 2021: 277). The idea that psychological trauma leads to effects that are potentially inheritable is of great importance to society, considering how many individuals have been traumatised by current and recent conflicts (ibid: 279).

in Poland. Accessed on 19.02.2025 under: Poland Society - Minorities.

Social trauma could be both a clinical and a socio-psychological category. As a clinical category, it defines a group of post-traumatic disorders caused by organised social violence or genocide. In this case, a social group is the target of planned persecution and therefore not only the individual but also their social environment is affected (cf. Hamburger 2022: 13). As a psychoanalyst, Vamik Volkan has worked extensively on the consequences of war, displacement and migration for several decades. He is convinced of the fundamental importance of the transgenerational transmission of imprints from the country of origin and the processing of traumatic stress, which is often deposited in the next generation. Finally, Volkan looks at the psychology of the foreigner, at definitions of one's own in relation to the foreigner, which have their traces in the collective memory (cf. Streeck-Fischer 2016: 112).

Instead of a conclusion, I would like to finish my essay with a final hypothesis as to whether stormy historical passages not only influence the national collective memory. In particular, the modern search for genetic traces of our inheritance could shed more light on such socio-psychological issues as in our case, namely hybrid and ambiguous identity constructs that can be deciphered via habitual ruptures caused by a series of national tragedies.

The concept of memory and remembrance, beyond a fixed attribution to a particular discipline, still holds many undiscovered 'secrets' and includes preserved codes for collectively shared histories and cultures of memory that can either unite or divide most nations across the world. They can be both the source and origin of deeper insights. This will be the subject of my upcoming empirical study, which is currently being prepared at a Polish university, and to which I will dedicate myself with a passion for Poland and scientific curiosity, and as a 'searching' migrant who left her native Poland as a teenager.

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# Assessment of the Demand for Occupational Therapy Upgrade Programs from Diploma to Degree in Kenya

*Dr. Tabitha Rangara - Omol, Ms. Juliet Mugga & Prof. Dovison Kereri*

*Presbyterian University of Eastern Africa*

## ABSTRACT

Occupational therapy (OT) education and training in Kenya has been in existence for over 50 years but stagnated at diploma level qualifications until 2012 when two (2) Kenyan universities established the diploma to degree upgrade programs. This study intended to assess the need, demand, and uptake for OT upgrade programs offered in Kenya. Quantitative exploratory design was utilized. The target population comprised of practicing OTs with diploma qualifications who have not registered for upgrade degree programs (Group 1 – G1); and OTs who have either graduated from or enrolled in an upgrade degree program in Kenyan University (Group 2 – G2). The national research licensing and Institutional Research Boards (IRB) approved the study. Simple random sampling was conducted on a population of 259 members of a Kenya Occupational Therapy Association (KOTA) online forum to select G1. Census sampling was conducted on 108 ongoing and graduated occupational therapists from two universities to select G2. Two separate structured online questionnaires were administered to G1 and G2. Only 108 of approximately 2000 diploma holders trained in Kenya have registered for upgrade degree programs (0.054%).

**Keywords:** occupational therapy, upgrade programs, competencies, diploma, curriculum, higher education.

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## ABSTRACT

*Occupational therapy (OT) education and training in Kenya has been in existence for over 50 years but stagnated at diploma level qualifications until 2012 when two (2) Kenyan universities established the diploma to degree upgrade programs. This study intended to assess the need, demand, and uptake for OT upgrade programs offered in Kenya. Quantitative exploratory design was utilized. The target population comprised of practicing OTs with diploma qualifications who have not registered for upgrade degree programs (Group 1 – G1); and OTs who have either graduated from or enrolled in an upgrade degree program in Kenyan University (Group 2 – G2). The national research licensing and Institutional Research Boards (IRB) approved the study. Simple random sampling was conducted on a population of 259 members of a Kenya Occupational Therapy Association (KOTA) online forum to select G1. Census sampling was conducted on 108 ongoing and graduated occupational therapists from two universities to select G2. Two separate structured online questionnaires were administered to G1 and G2. Only 108 of approximately 2000 diploma holders trained in Kenya have registered for upgrade degree programs (0.054%). The study findings revealed a significant difference between the G1 and G2 groups  $t(23) = -2.769, p = .008$  at  $p < .05$  in the knowledge and competency levels. The greatest demand for upgrade programs was in the 21 to 30 years' age group at 52% (G1,  $n=78$ ). This study provides baseline data to inform further development and strengthening of existing and future OT education curricula in Kenya.*

**Keywords:** occupational therapy, upgrade programs, competencies, diploma, curriculum, higher education.

**Author α:** PhD., MA, BScOT., OTR., Dean School of Health Sciences, Presbyterian University of Eastern Africa.

**σ:** Msc OSH, BScOT., OTR., Senior Occupational Therapist, Kenyatta National Hospital, Senior Lecturer (Adjunct), Presbyterian University of Eastern Africa.

**ρ:** PhD., MHS., BScOT., OTR., Associate Professor, Program Director, DSc. Occupational Therapy, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0420 USA.

## I. BACKGROUND / LITERATURE REVIEW

There are justifications (Merriman, 1998) for diploma graduates to transition to degree programs through upgrade or conversion programs. These include the rapidly changing healthcare landscape which requires healthcare professionals, occupational therapists (OTs) included, to possess on-time knowledge and evidence-based practice skills. OT education also needs to meet the WFOT (World Federation of Occupational Therapy) mandated minimum standards of a bachelor's degree to remain relevant and globally competitive. The development of OT programs in the African countries have depended on support from international partnerships with universities or organisations in the global North. For example, South Africa has long-term partnerships with British occupational therapists and Rwanda with the Belgian partners (Taff et al., 2020). Globally, the professional character of OT is influenced by culture, beliefs, people, and systems (Carey et al., 2019) and Africa is no exception. Like many African countries, OT in Kenya has equally been influenced by such factors. Societal systems and

cultural practices which influence occupations are rarely addressed in the training. Culture is dynamic and the societal fabric is always changing (van Vuuren et al., 2020; Kou, 2021). Yet, the education curricula are still heavily reliant on the Western cultures and theories. For example, client-centred models of practice have different outcomes in Africa compared to the West due to variances in the fabrics of the society, health-care systems, health insurance systems and cultural practices (Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019).

Apart from addressing the education agenda, OT in Africa also needs to develop capacity in research and documentation of its practices. There are empirical gaps in OT research in Africa with regards to education, training, and evidence-based practice (van Vuuren et al., 2020; Kou, 2021). Upskilling OTs in research and evidence-based practices will strengthen alternatives approaches and training content in designing and developing new curricula. In addition, international protocols and global education standards require graduates who can adaptively use 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills in working spaces beyond graduate qualifications (Hong & Ma, 2020). Workers are frequently required to cross-step into multidisciplinary teams. This has blurred boundaries for scope of practice for professions in certain situations (Brown et al., 2015). OT schools need to train holistic skills to students because skills are rarely used in isolation (Thomas et al., 2021). Evidence-based practice skills, for example, is one of the numerous professional skills in addition to soft skills required of new graduates (Alshehri et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2021). Attitude and confidence building skills (Thomas et al., 2021) should be cascaded in all skills training including problem solving, decision making, and clinical reasoning. Because of changing socio-cultural occupations, such skills will increasingly be required in all frontiers of practice beyond the 21<sup>st</sup>C.

OT education in Kenya was established in 1968 with its first school instituted at the Medical Training Centre (MTC) attached to the Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) – known in the 1960's as King George Hospital. The first cohort of occupational therapists graduated in 1970 and

obtained certification in 1972. The curriculum was later reviewed and revised to offer diploma of occupational therapy. The first cohort of diploma holders graduated in 1978 and since then there have been curricula reviews and revisions every four years. MTC has also since expanded into a middle level college renamed to the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTC). Since 2012, KMTC has undergone a substantial expansion, which included the establishment of three additional OT schools in its campuses outside of Nairobi. By 2021, KMTC reported that approximately two thousand (2000) occupational therapists have graduated with diplomas since its 1968 inception (Ministry of Health-MOH, 2021). In the same year, KOTA reported a record of 1650 members on its registers (Ministry of Health-MOH/Kenya Occupational Therapists Association-KOTA, 2021). These documented numbers of OTs may be less than the actual number, considering that the two new university programs have also graduated OTs. In addition, there is undocumented evidence that some of the alumni of OTs from Kenya have furthered their education abroad at varied levels (ranging between higher diploma to doctoral).

Like many other African countries, Kenyan OT education has been influenced by numerous factors. The OT education at KMTC should have expanded more than is presently the case, but its growth has been hampered by many factors, which include: i) The school is a government establishment which is controlled by national policy agenda for growth and expansion. Any proposed expansion must be evaluated through numerous bureaucracies and red tapes, checks, and balances within the prevailing government policies. This has on several occasions discouraged potential partners and stakeholders who most often give-up the endeavour to participate in the growth OT education in Kenya. ii) The school is housed in a middle level educational institution which by law can only award diploma certification. Thus, proposals to establish upgrade, honours or baccalaureate programs within the college have not been possible. iii) Prior to 2022, the OT profession was regulated under the Ministry of Health (MoH)

with no regulatory board to champion its growth hitherto. The regulatory council has since been registered under an independent Act of parliament of 2022 and the national council / board (Occupational Therapy Council of Kenya) is in the process of operationalizing its functions. For these reasons, KMTC continues to graduate only diploma holders (Ndirangu & Rangara-Omol, 2022).

At the beginning of the new millennium, two (2) Kenyan Universities began efforts to bridge the gap in training by establishing diploma- to degree upgrade and full baccalaureate degree programs in OT. The two are the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) and the Presbyterian University of Eastern Africa (PUEA). The two universities graduated their first cohorts in 2013 and 2015, respectively. The degree programs provide opportunities for diploma graduates to register for upgrade degrees through a credit recognition and transfer pathway. This takes a shorter time from registration to graduation; usually a minimum of two years, as it transfers credits from diploma training and provides units or fieldwork hours that are missing in the diploma program. In addition, some of its units which may have already been taught in the diploma program are provided for, in advanced versions. The two Kenya universities have successfully provided upgrade programs for a total of 108 OTs who previously held diplomas to train or obtain full bachelor's degrees (obtained from the universities' raw data in April 2022). These include OT students from other countries apart from Kenya, including Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Prevailing professional trends indicate that there is a global shortfall of workers for almost all healthcare cadres and a skewed distribution for certain health professions (Brown et al., 2015). From the early 1990s to date, Kenyan OT graduates (even with the diploma graduates) continue to access cross-border employment opportunities around the world with many of them in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) (WFOT, 2015). This has been possible due to the global WFOT regulations which continues to be the guiding framework for

OT schools worldwide. The migrations of Kenyan OTs occasioned a brain-drain with gaps that continue to create a demand for OTs in Kenya. In the early 1990s, some countries like the UK were able to transition OT diplomas to degrees through equalisation of diploma credits to degree qualifications (Gape & Hewin, 1995; College of Occupational Therapists Diploma, 2022). This also enabled Kenyan graduates at the time, to enter the international job market. However, this has since changed according to the *Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists (2016)* which now outlines the minimum entry of practice for OTs. Some states in the USA have regularised their minimum entry standards to master's level while others to doctoral level (Wells & Crabtree, 2012; Brown et al., 2015). Canada also raised its minimum entry levels to the same standards (Liu, 2018). The establishment of these regulations has far-reaching effects on internationally trained OTs seeking to work in the USA and other overseas countries. Thus, Kenya needs to develop to such entry levels beginning with undergraduate degree programs. This also justifies the need for more degree and postgraduate training programs. WFOT states that;

“Occupational therapy’s entry-level education must be anticipatory, not just responsive, to growing global health challenges. The profession’s powerful client or patient focused approach at the micro level of direct service requires expansion. Occupational therapists ought to be involved in the creation of population-based programming to address health, social and educational aims” (*Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists 2016* pg. 6).

This not only supports the need to expand OT programs but also emphasises on continuous review of programs in alignment with prevailing global occupational and contemporary issues. Despite the educational entry point (i.e., bachelors, masters, or doctoral), OTs are expected to possess problem-solving skills and use the associated competencies to grow and function beyond OT practice. The development of undergraduate and postgraduate programs for OT

in Kenya has also been hampered by the inadequate numbers / lack of qualified academicians to run the programs. Therefore, to fill in the need for qualified educators, offering upgrade programs for diploma holders is believed to be a start point for preparing professionals to further their education progressively to master's and doctoral levels. This will also enable the elimination of diplomas and push the entry level to bachelor's degree levels in Kenya. In addition, it is believed that an accredited degree qualification is a global certification for OTs who seek cross-border opportunities in any country (*Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists 2016*,).

OTs with diploma qualifications who are interested in registering for upgrade programs are adult learners. This group requires a defined set of motivation and learning styles that will accommodate their already busy lives (McKenna et al., 2020). Thus, the theoretical framework that guides this study is the theory of transformative learning developed by Jack Mezirow in 1978 (Schneppfleitner & Ferreira, 2021). This theory is premised on the concepts of adult learning by Malcolm Knowles in 1970 (Henschke, 2011) also known as andragogy (El-Amin, 2020) and constructivism (Feyzi & Yasrebi, 2020). It recognises that the adult learner not only comes into the learning space with a foundation of experiences but is motivated to acquire new knowledge. The goal of learning is to transform the self with new behaviours and perspectives that positively influence present and future practices. Buoyed by experiences in the education sector's post COVID-19 pandemic experiences, many university programs are increasingly embracing blended / online learning within student-centred course delivery models (Alvi, 2023; van der Stap et al., 2023). This may inform future curricula reviews for upgrade degree programs. The benefits of online professional development programs include (VanderKaay et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2020):

- Provides a good forum for practitioners from diverse global locations to meet, share and collaborate in knowledge and skills gaps.

- Easy access of online modules through mobile and static technologies, which helps to mitigate against the learner's limitations of having to take time off work, and the costs for travel and accommodation associated with relocation.
- Provides opportunities for networking and collaborations on a global level without incurring the prohibitive costs for travel and accommodation.

The purpose of this study was to explore the demand for upgrade OT programs in Kenyan universities and associated educational issues for OT. It provides a baseline for the upscaling of the upgrade degree programs and opportunities not only in Kenya, but globally.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Occupational Therapy (OT) education in Kenya had stagnated at the diploma level for more than 40 years prior to 2012 when the first bachelor's degree programs were established. The stagnation has negatively impacted both the growth and practice of OT in Kenya (Ministry of Health-MOH / Kenya Occupational Therapists Association-KOTA, 2021). While many international universities including Curtin University (Western Australia) and Bournemouth University (United Kingdom) previously equalised the Kenyan diploma and offered degree-conversion programs, the unit cost per student was widely prohibitive (Graber & Bolt, 2011). This encouraged Kenya to establish its own degree programs in two universities beginning in the year 2010 and admitting pioneer students. The ratio of diploma graduates to those registering for degree upgrade programs is widely undocumented. The observed gaps in data availability are due to low research practices and poor documentation.

OT practice in Africa, Kenya included, needs more effort with regards to education, training, research, and evidence-based practice (van Vuuren et al., 2020; Kou, 2021). The gaps make it difficult to determine the exact number of graduate OTs, practising OTs, and the need / modalities to expand OT academic programs. Expansion should be responsive to the demands

of client / stakeholder populations and current practice trends. WFOT and prevailing international practice require the higher-level education or upgrade for entry level OTs. Yet, most Kenya OT schools are still producing OT diploma graduates. These graduates should be aware of the global entry level standards and be motivated to upskill through upgrade degree programs. What would motivate diploma holders to enrol for upgrade programs? As a contributory framework in making Kenyan OT academic programs more responsive, this study intended to assess the need and demand for upgrade OT program from diploma to degree for Kenyan and worldwide OTs. It also explored participant's motivation levels in flexible modes of program delivery including blended and distance learning modes. The findings should inform planning, growth, and expansion of undergraduate and post graduate programs in Kenya.

### 2.1 Main Objective

To assess the need and demand for upgrade occupational therapy (OT) programs (from diploma to degree) in Kenya.

### 2.2 Secondary Objectives

1. To construct a baseline framework that will inform growth and expansion of occupational therapy (OT) upgrade degree programs.
2. To explore the factors that motivate occupational therapy (OT) diploma graduates to register for occupational therapy (OT) upgrade degree programs.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the baseline data of occupational therapists (OTs) who would like to register for upgrade degree programs?
2. What are the factors that motivate occupational therapists (OTs) with diplomas to register for upgrade degree programs in occupational therapy (OT)?

## IV. METHODS

The study utilized an exploratory design with quantitative data collection methods. Participants

were required to respond to questions in two (2) differentiated structured online questionnaires. This approach gave a comprehensive investigation into the need and demand of a top-up degree program in occupational therapy (OT). The target population for the research comprised of two groups:

- i. Practicing occupational therapists with diploma qualifications who have not registered for upgrade degree (G1).
- ii. Occupational therapists who are currently studying in an upgrade degree program and occupational therapists who have graduated with upgrade degrees from Kenyan Universities (G2).

*Sample size:* To determine the sample size for Group 1 (G1), a simple random sampling technique was used on a population of 259 occupational therapists who were members of KOTA members WhatsApp forum. The Yamane's formula ( $S = \frac{P}{1 + P(e)^2}$ ) was applied to calculate the required sample size, where S represents the sample size, P represents the population of the study (in this case, 259), and e represents the margin of error, which was set at 5% (or 0.05) for this study. Using this formula, the sample size was calculated as follows:

$$S = 259 / (1 + 259(0.05)^2)$$

$$S = 259 / 1.65$$

$$S = 156.9$$

Rounding up to the nearest whole number, a sample size of 157 was determined for G1.

In Group 2 (G2), purposive and census sampling approaches were used to select participants from 108 ongoing and graduated occupational therapists from the databases of the two universities. A census sample (Daniel 2012; Cantwell, 2008) targeting a threshold of 30 participants was set based on the Central Limit Theorem (CLT), which suggests that a sample size of 30 or more is sufficient to assume a normal distribution of data (Ganti, 2022). To ensure an adequate response rate, a structured online questionnaire was administered to as many participants as possible who met the inclusion criteria, with the goal of achieving a minimum of

30 participants. Overall, the use of purposive and census sampling with the application of CLT helped to ensure that G2's sample size and distribution were appropriate for the research objectives.

## V. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS, PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

Two (2) structured online questionnaires were designed to test the research questions, one for each group and administered concurrently. Likert scales were scored as Strongly agree (SA) (5), Agree (A) (4), Neutral (N) (3), Disagree (D) (2), Strongly disagree (SD) (1) and Most competent (5), Competent (4), Somewhat competent (3), averagely competent (2), Least competent (1) for different sections. The blanks in both cases were scored zero (0). Adhering to the national ethics guidelines, email addresses were accessed from the KOTA database and university OT departments for G1 and G2 respectively. The links to the questionnaires were shared on emails inviting participation from the sampled population. To ensure that each participant freely consented for participation, the questionnaires included a required consent statement. Any participant who did not consent could not proceed beyond the consent page of the online questionnaire. Data collection was conducted over a period of three weeks with weekly reminders. Data was scrutinized and analysed to identify points of convergence and divergence between and within the groups. Findings were presented through a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. Ethical Considerations: Study approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Boards (IRBs) of both universities under study and the National Commission of Science Technology and

Innovations (NACOSTI). Participants were provided with sufficient study information for them to make informed decisions/consent and voluntary participation. However, as with any online activity, there was a possibility of breach of confidentiality. To mitigate this, personal identifiers were not collected, and responses remained confidential, and password protected.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results revealed that: i) More than 50% of recent diploma graduates (2015 to 2024) are motivated to register for upgrade programs; ii) There are motivating factors and preferred learning models for potential upgrade OTs who have not registered for upgrade programs; and iii) Upgrade programs provide opportunities for occupational therapists to upscale their knowledge and competencies in multidisciplinary teams and emerging practice domains. 157 questionnaires were sent out to G1 and 78 were returned giving a 49.7% response rate. In G2, 108 questionnaires were sent out, 17 emails were undelivered leaving 91, out of which 43 responses were received surpassing the expected 30 responses (Table 1). The total number of questionnaires analysed was  $n = (78+43)$ . Online surveys rarely receive high response rates; 44% to 50% is a practical expectation (Wu et al., 2022). Cronbach's alpha output (validity and reliability) test was run on the actual items of the final questionnaires. Results returned an  $\alpha$  score of 0.91 indicative of a reliable and valid instrument. In addition, demographic representation of participants ( $n=122$ ) indicated that most participants resided in Kenya at 92% ( $n=78$ ) and 88% ( $n=43$ ) for G1 and G2 respectively. However, other 7 other countries; Canada, Japan, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda and United States of America were represented.

Table 1: Response Rate

	Group 1	Group 2	Total n=
Total number of questionnaires sent out on email	157	91	248
Questionnaires received back	78	43	121
Response rate %	49.7%	47.3	48.8%

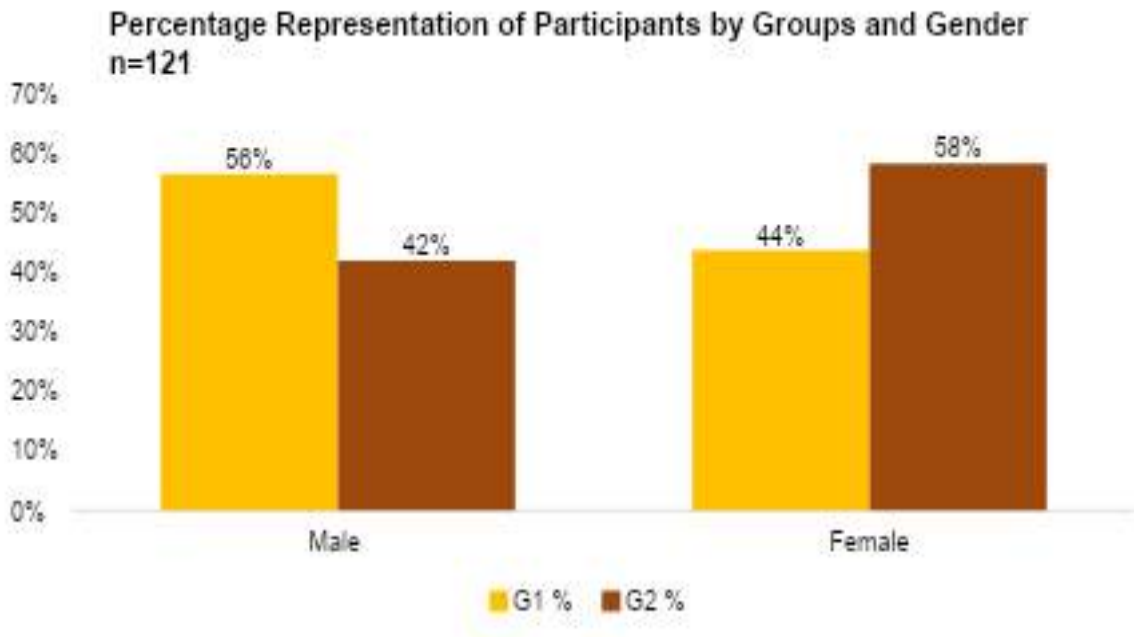


Figure 1

Figure 1 indicates a balanced representation in providing experiences and insights on upgrade degree programs from both groups by gender.

Over 50% of participants were male in G1 (n=78) and inversely in G2 (n=43) over 50% were females. This contributed to balanced contributions towards the study construct.

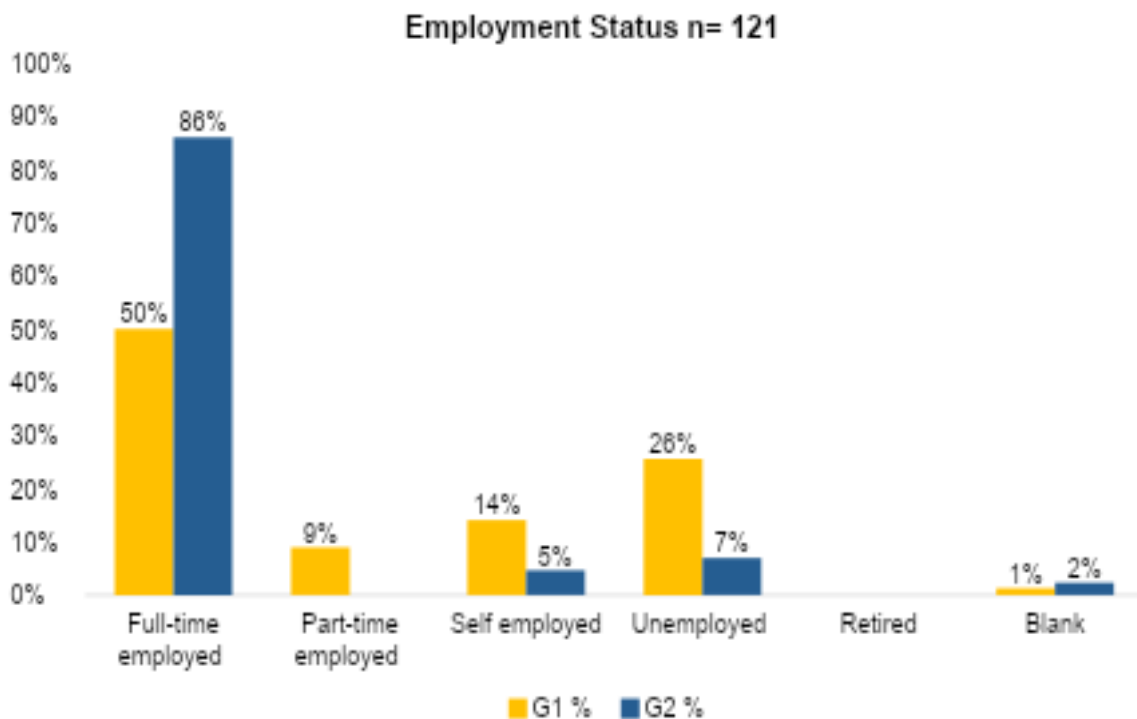


Figure 2

Since professional development and participation in educational programs require resources, the

Employment status as an indicator of a source of income can be a motivating factor. Most of the

participants indicated that they have a stable financial foundation to plan / prioritise for further education presumed on employment status (Figure 2). Comparative and combined groups data represented in Figure 2 indicated that both groups (G1, n=78) and (G2, n=43), showed most of the participants were in full time employment at 50% (n=121) and 86% (n=121) for respectively (Figure 2). This excluded those who were self-employed at 14% (n=121) and 5% (n=121) for

(G1, n=78) and (G2, n=43) respectively. In G1, 26% (G1, n=78) of participants are unemployed but are interested in registering for upgrade programs. This group may require scholarships or sponsorship from partners (Figure 2). In both groups full time employment (FTE) was the majority. Thus, FTE may be a motivator for G1 while the same maybe an indication / motivator for flexible modes of education as they can learn while continuing with work.

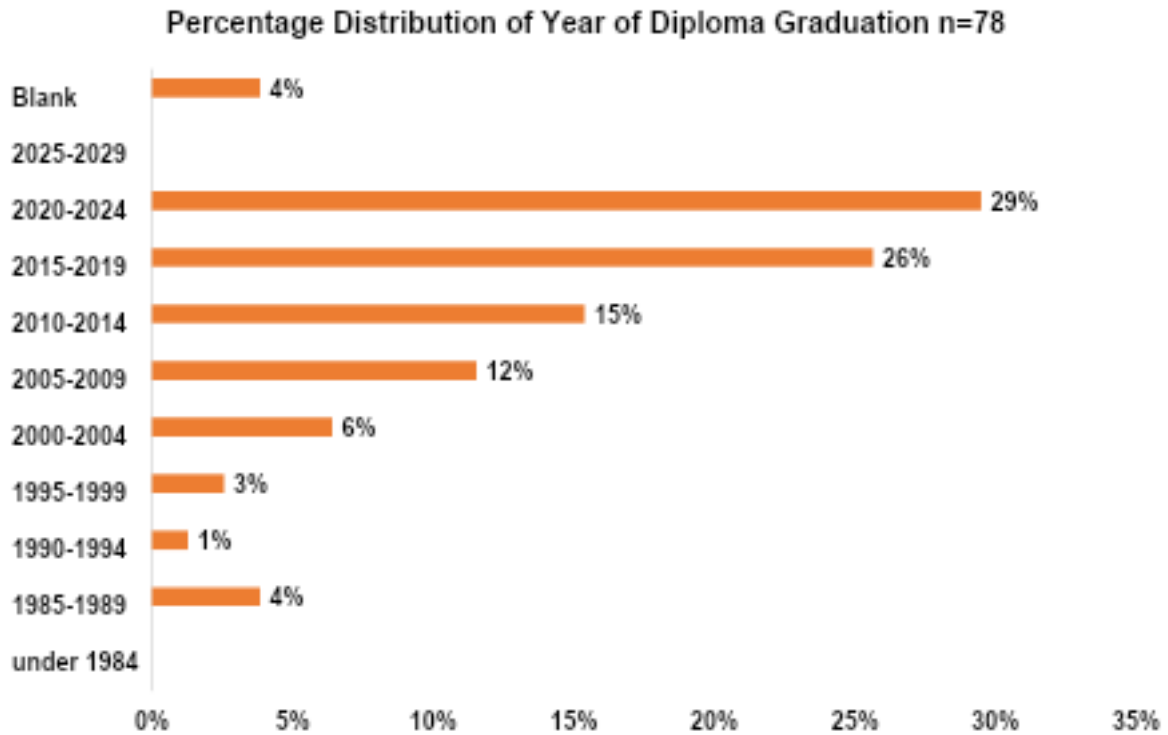


Figure 3

The participants in G1 (n=78) were required to indicate their year of graduation from OT diploma programs. This was for the purpose of assessing the length of time occupational therapists would practice before considering to further their education through upgrade OT programs. Figure 3 illustrates that fresh graduates from diploma programs represent the highest percentage of OTs seeking to register for upgrade programs at a combined 55% between 2020 – 2024 at 29% (n=78) and 2015 – 2019 at 26% (n=78).

Percentage Distribution of Participants by Groups and Age n = 121

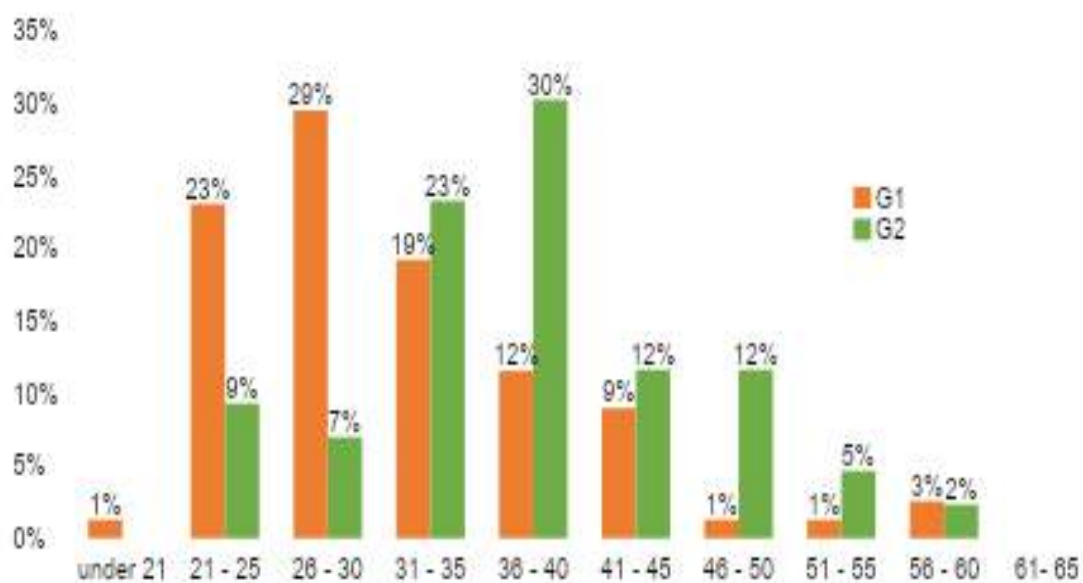


Figure 4

Figure 4 illustrates participants who are interested in upgrade degree programs by groups and age. The highest percentage of students who were interested in registering for upgrade programs (G1, n=77) were in the age group of 26-30 years at 29% while the same for the registered or graduated (G2, n=43) were in age groups of 36-40 years at 30%. In G1 (n=77) had the highest percentage of participants in the age groups 21-25 and 26-30 years totalled 52% (n=77) while G2 had the highest age groups of participants in 31-35 and 36-40 years had a combined total of 43% (n=43). Thus, during developing and reviewing curricula, considerations should be made for the characteristics and needs of the 21 to 30 years' age group. A plausible explanation for the comparatively older participants (G2, n=43) may be that i) the opportunity for upgrade was not available when they were younger and ii) it took time to gather the resources.

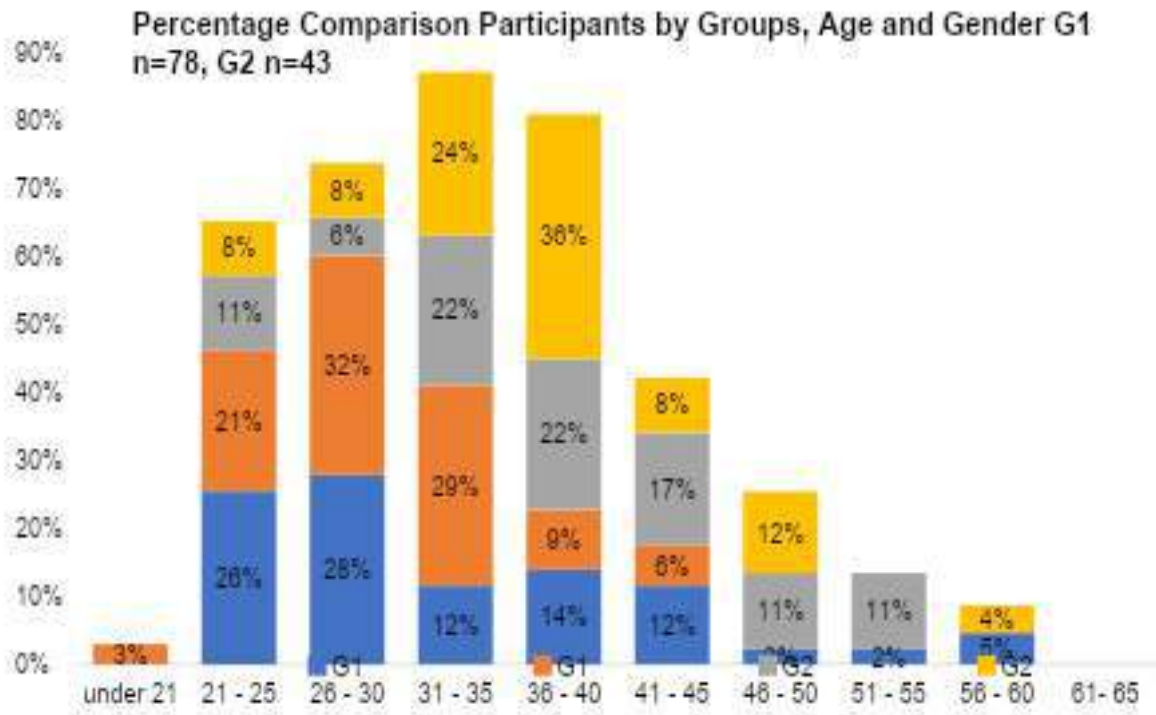


Figure 5

Figure 5 illustrates interests of participants in upgrade degree programs by age, gender and groups. The distribution by gender was as follows; G1, n=78, males (n=43) and females (n=34), G2, n=43 males (n=18) and females (n=25). There were more males in G1 than females and inverse for G2. For G1(n=78), females recorded the highest percentage of therapists who were interested in upgrade programs at 32% (n=34) in the age group of 26-30 years while the lowest at 0% (n=34) in age groups below 21 years and older than 45 years. In the same group (G1, n=43) males, recorded highest and lowest in the combined age groups of 21-25 and 26-30 years at 52% (G1, n= 43) and at 2% (G1, n= 43) for age group of 46-50 years respectively. It thus seems that for both gender (n=120), the highest demand for upgrade programs are therapists aged between 25 to 45 years. For G2 (n=43), females (n=25) who had registered / graduated in upgrade programs recorded 50% (n=25) combined from the age groups of 31-40 years and lowest at 0% (n=25) in the age group of 51-55 years. In the same group (G1, n=43) males (n=18), recorded highest and lowest in the combined age groups of 31-40 years at 44% (G1, n= 18) and 6 % (G1, n= 18) for

age group of 26-30 years respectively. The age group that stands out in both groups in the demand of upgrade programs is between 25 to 40 years for both gender (Figure 5).

### Cross-cutting Motivating Factors to join Upgrade Programs n=78

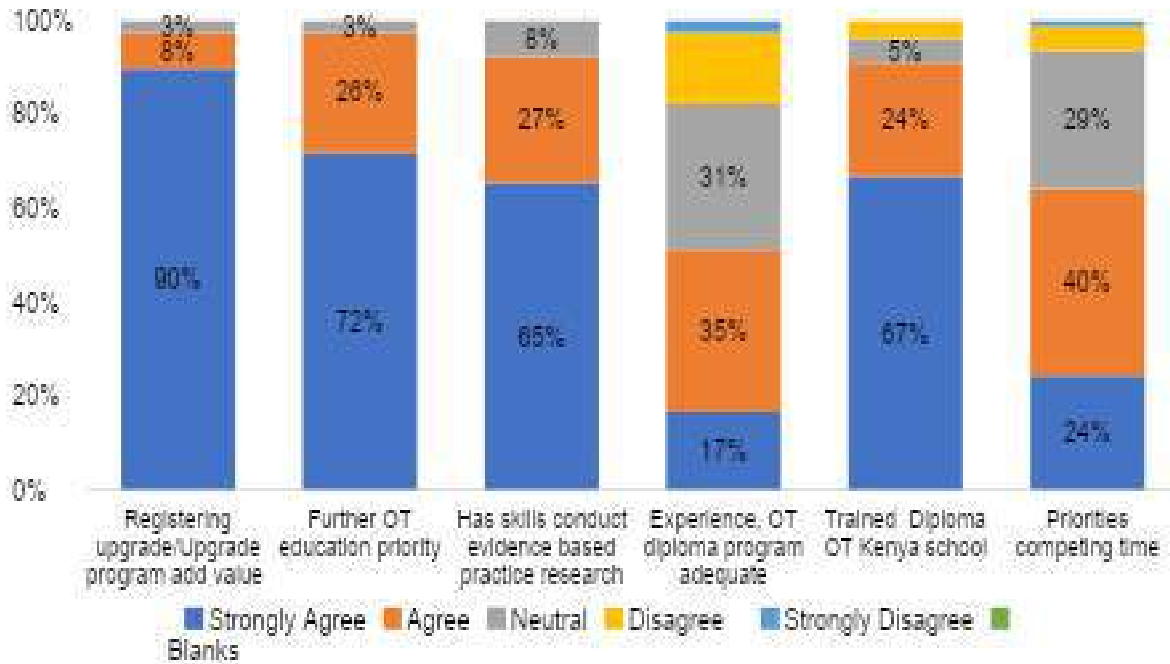


Figure 6

Cross-cutting motivating factors were explored in G1. These factors included possible value addition, the need to further studies, research skill acquisition among six factors (Figure 6). 98% (n=78) of participants indicated that registering for upgrade program would add value to their profession and career goals. 98% (n=78) indicated that furthering their education was a priority while 92% (n=78) believed that registering for the programs would assist them in developing skills for research and evidence-based practice. Additionally, the comfort of having trained in Kenya and that the universities offering these programs are also located in Kenya was a motivating factor for 91% (n=78). 17% (n=78) indicated that Diploma OT was adequate illustrates that there is a large group of OTs who may require upgrade degree programs. The factor which recorded the least was time-management skills which scored 64% (n=78). This being more than 50% is not a big concern. With additional training in time-management skills most students will be attracted to register for upgrade programs.

### Course Delivery Preferences / Motivating Factors for Unregistered OTs group 1 n=78

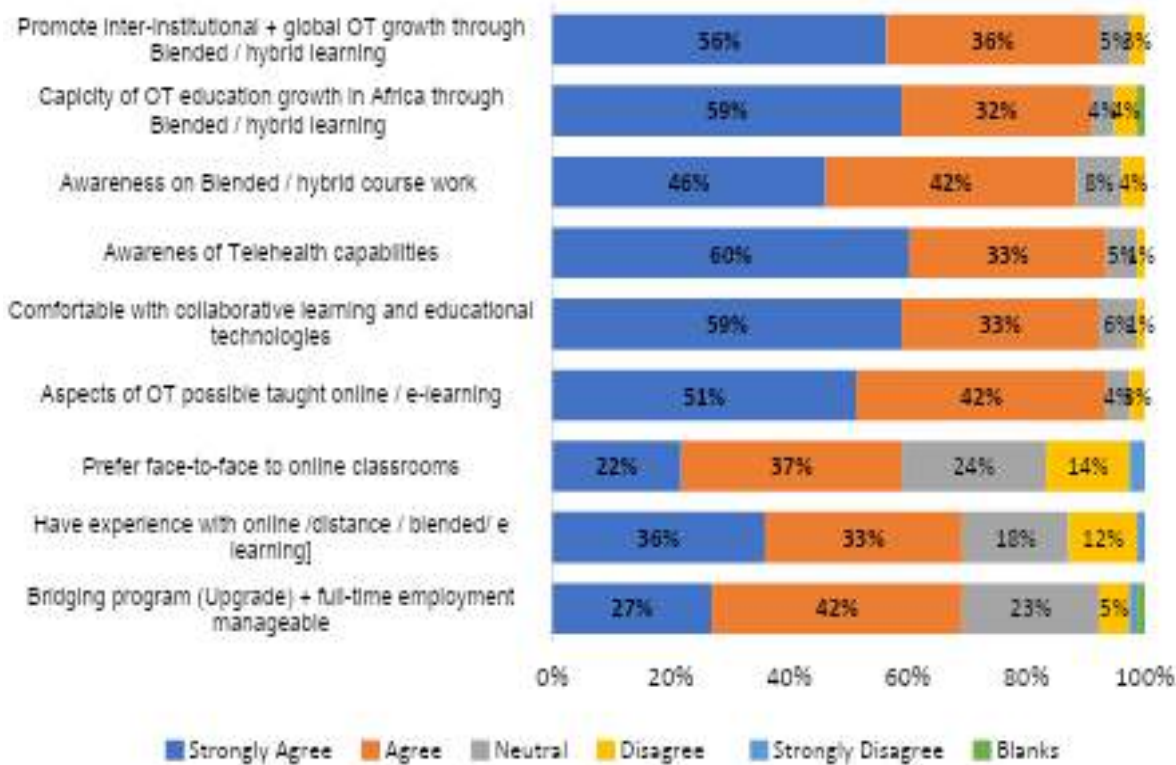


Figure 7

A second cluster of motivating factors under ‘course delivery preferences’ were explored in G1 (n=78). There is an upsurge of online course delivery systems which is believed to have trade-off for student demographics who combine work and studies (VanderKaay et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2020). These include reduced costs on travel and accommodation as well as reduced opportunity costs for both employers and employees. To this end factors that were explored included nine (9) questions on student preferences (Figure 7). A preference of face-to-face over online learning received a mixed reaction with scores of 22%, 37%, 24%, 14% and 3% (n=78) for Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree respectively. A combined 92% (n=78) of participants SA 59% (n=78) and A 33% (n=78) were comfortable with collaborative learning and education technologies. Further, face-2-face preference had the lowest SA score of 22% and combined SA & A at 59% (n=78). This advocates for implementing a mixed

approach of course delivery; either blended, hybrid or distributed learning.

To explore professional factors that would motivate participants (both G1 and G2) to register or participate in upgrade programs, a set of twenty-four (24) skills (Table 2) in OT practices were tested. These skills were drawn from the common practice domains in Kenya OT practice. They include skills in using standardised assessments, working with clients with history of drug and substance abuse, working with insurance, research, and evidence-based practice among the listed (Table 2).

Table 2

Means of OT Practice Domains, Skills, Knowledge, and Competency Levels)		G1	G2			
1.	Skills standardized assessments	4	4			
2.	Skills Pre-schools & Schools	3	3			
3.	Skills Workplace and organisational re-design	4	4			
4.	Skills Mental / psychosocial health	3	4			
5.	Skills Drugs and substance abuse	3	4			
6.	Skills Physical disabling conditions (children & adolescence)]	4	4			
7.	Skills Physical disabling conditions	4	4			
8.	Skills Hospital (in patient)]	4	4			
9.	Skills Hospital (outpatient)]	4	4			
10.	Skills Community based rehabilitation	4	4			
11.	Skills Vocational rehabilitation	3	4			
12.	Skills Telehealth	3	3			
13.	Skills Disaster preparedness	3	3			
14.	Skills Health education / Public health	3	4			
15.	Skills Environmental adaptations (buildings, planning)	3	4			
16.	Skills Refugees and internally displaced persons	3	3			
17.	Skills Working in industry / manufacturing	3	3			
18.	Skills Working in Insurance and indemnity	3	3			
19.	Skills Occupational health and safety	3	4			
20.	Skills Research, education & knowledge sharing	3	4			
21.	Skills Advocacy	3	4			
22.	Skills Marketing and entrepreneurship	3	4			
23.	Skills Inter- and multi-disciplinary teams	4	4			
24.	Skills Lifelong learning	4	4			
KEY	Blank	Least competent	Somewhat competent	Averagely competent	Competent	Most competent
	0	1	2	3	4	5

A set of twenty-four (24) skills (Table 2) in OT practices were tested. Independent *t test* returned; G1, n=78 (SM = 3.375, SD = 0.495) paired with G2, n=43 (SM = 3.750, SD = 0.442) demonstrated a significant difference *t* (23) = -2.769, *p* = .008 at *p* < .05 in competency levels of both groups. G2 indicated a higher sample mean

(SM) indicating that upgrade programs either attract mature students with experiential skills or teaches new skills or reskills them. This indicates that upgrade programs are important providers of training or enrichment of OT practice domains.

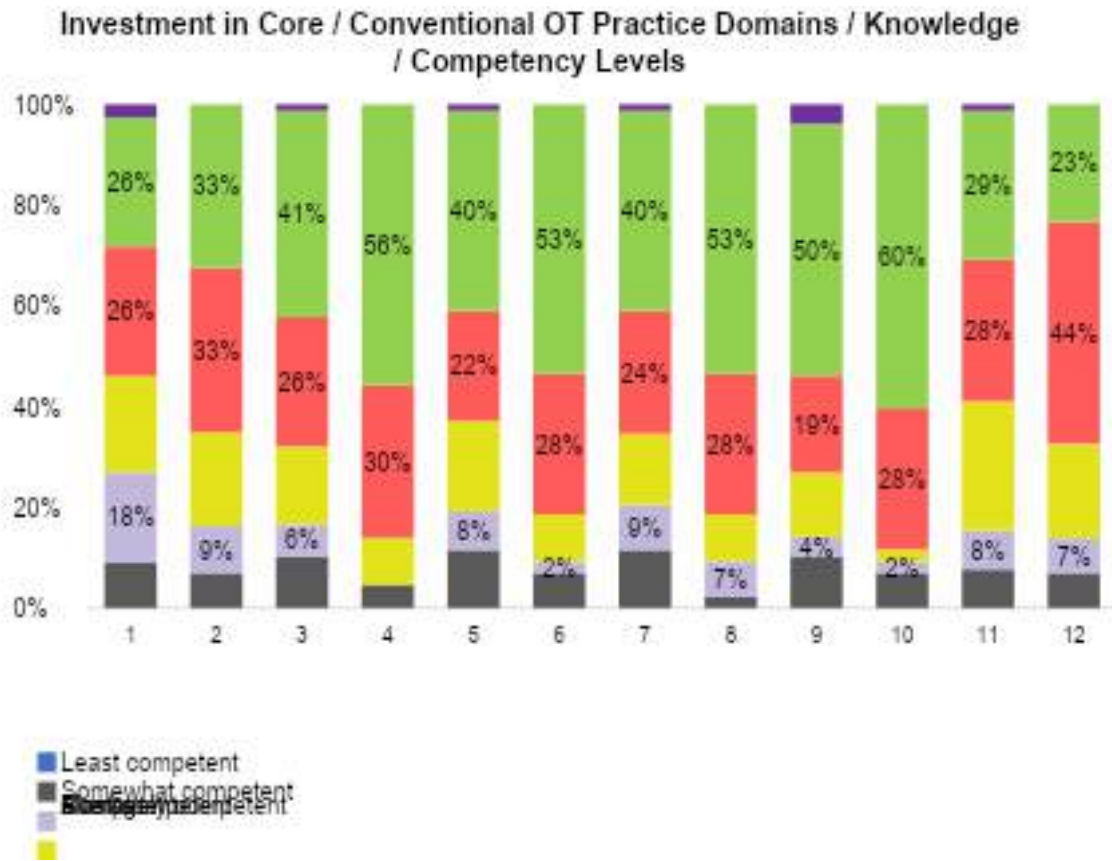


Figure 8: Investment in Core/Conventional OT Practice Domains/Knowledge/Competency Levels

A set of six (6) core occupational therapy domains were further selected out from the 24 skills-set to calculate the means and variances in OT competencies. These included working with i) clients with psychosocial issues and health promotion/prevention of disabling conditions ii) children and adolescents with physical and other disabling conditions iii) adults with physical and other disabling conditions iv) Hospitalised patients v) outpatient clients in hospital settings and vi) standardised assessments for all clients. These skill domains are found in diverse settings including communities, schools, organisations, hospitals, and all environments where people are performing occupations. It is required that OTs acquire these skills in basic training and continue to perfect them through life-long learning opportunities. Most participants indicated high competency levels in the tested areas (Figure 7). The highest competency was in outpatient hospital practice 50% (n=78) and 60% (n=43) and lowest at 18% (n=78) and 9% (n=43) in psychosocial practice for G1 and G2 respectively. Independent *t test* returned; G1, n=78 (SM =

3.380, SD = 0.372) compared to G2, n=43 (M = 4, SD = 0) demonstrated no significant difference  $t(5) = -2.769, p = .340$  at  $p < .05$ . This indicates that both groups may require upgrade programs to reskill and upskill them in these core competency areas.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides baseline data to inform further development and strengthening of existing and future occupational therapy schools. The data should inform curricula developers on the target age group and the curriculum design that would motivate diploma holders to register for upgrade programs. Many of the participants indicated that they were comfortable with educational technologies, an indication to consider developing online or blended programs. This study has illustrated that upgrade programs attract mature students with experiential skills, reskills them teaches new skills. The findings from this study indicate that OT diploma graduates ages between

25 to 40 years are the most attracted age group for the upgrade degree programs. This implies that there is potential decline in interest in the upgrade programs for OTs who have practiced with diploma qualifications for more than 15 years. Of the participants yet to register for upgrade programs, 26% (G1, n=78) of participants were unemployed – a possible indicator for scholarships. As an assessment for the need and demand for upgrade programs in OT, this study illustrated that; registering for upgrade program would add value to professional practice, assist in developing skills for research and evidence-based practice, and support career goals through further education. Therapists need continuous upskilling in core OT practice domains. In the core areas of OT practice, there are indications that both groups need to develop more skills and competences in working with clients in mental and psychosocial domain. They also need to acquire more training in the use of standardised assessments for their clients.

Therefore, it is recommended that upgrade programs should i) focus efforts on providing opportunities for diploma holders to enter upgrade programs as soon as possible after their graduation. Probably interlink diploma with the upgrade schools or find a policy shift that progressively phase out the diploma program. ii) provide practical mechanisms of motivating OTs to register for upgrade degree programs through lifelong learning, blended course delivery systems and training of student-centred learning skills and iii) allocate more effort in training of core OT domains especially in the emerging frontiers of practice.

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*Antonia Javiera Cabrera Muñoz*

## ABSTRACT

In various stories from the oral tradition, we see water taking on different roles. A notable example is the role of water in Charles Perrault's fairy tale "The fairies", published in Tales of mother goose or stories of ancient times (1697). This work was given a Spanish edition, Tales of yesteryear (1986), which contains drawings by Gustave Doré. In the drawing of "The fairies", you can see the image of a young woman holding a huge pitcher under the tap of a natural spring of water that represents feminine pain and purity. In the 20th century, the Uruguayan writer and poet Juana de Ibarbourou used the theme of water extensively in her work, such as in the prose poetry of The fresh pitcher (1920) and in "Triptych", a series of three poems from Dualism (1953). The aim is to carry out a comparative reading of a contrastive and qualitative nature between these three authors based on the idea of a "new comparatism" (Coutinho, 2016). Subsequently, the aim is to reflect on how this emerging new comparatism can be realised in Spanish language teaching in Brazilian schools through a "new humanism" (Coutinho, Palermo & Schmidt, 2021) in rural Latin American communities, such as Sopa, a rural community located in the Jequitinhonha Valley in Minas Gerais, Brazil.

*Keywords:* literature; image; perrault; doré; ibarbourou.

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*In various stories from the oral tradition, we see water taking on different roles. A notable example is the role of water in Charles Perrault's fairy tale "The fairies", published in Tales of mother goose or stories of ancient times (1697). This work was given a Spanish edition, Tales of yesteryear (1986), which contains drawings by Gustave Doré. In the drawing of "The fairies", you can see the image of a young woman holding a huge pitcher under the tap of a natural spring of water that represents feminine pain and purity. In the 20th century, the Uruguayan writer and poet Juana de Ibarbourou used the theme of water extensively in her work, such as in the prose poetry of The fresh pitcher (1920) and in "Triptych", a series of three poems from Dualism (1953). The aim is to carry out a comparative reading of a contrastive and qualitative nature between these three authors based on the idea of a "new comparatism" (Coutinho, 2016). Subsequently, the aim is to reflect on how this emerging new comparatism can be realised in Spanish language teaching in Brazilian schools through a "new humanism" (Coutinho, Palermo & Schmidt, 2021) in rural Latin American communities, such as Sopa, a rural community located in the Jequitinhonha Valley in Minas Gerais, Brazil. This new relationship established with comparative literature and its teaching can give new meaning to the relationships that young Brazilian readers have with foreign literature, as well as to the way teachers relate to this little-known literature in Brazil<sup>1</sup>.*

**Keywords:** literature; image; perrault; doré; ibarbourou.

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE AND SYMBOLISM OF WATER IN LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Between July and October 1889, the Cuban writer José Martí published four issues of a magazine dedicated to Latin American children, entitled *The golden age: a monthly publication of recreation and instruction dedicated to the children of America*<sup>2</sup>. Each issue consisted of 32 illustrated pages and the texts were varied in nature. Stories, essays and poetry taught moral values to the little ones in a continent that was at a delicate geopolitical moment: the expanding North American domination of lands and peoples then colonised by Spain. The four issues of the magazine were collected in book form for the first time in Costa Rica in 1921, with the same title, *The golden age*.

In the dedication to the first issue, one of its aims is "to tell you how the world is made: let's tell you everything that men have done so far"<sup>3</sup> (Martí, 1997, p. 1). To show the world as it is seen, or as it exists, is one of the most praiseworthy notes we can make of the Cuban writer's endeavour. In delightful pages, Martí (1997) delves into details

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Mucuri Valleys, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. PhD in Literature and Post Doctor in Arts. E-mail: antonia.cabrera@ufvjm.edu.br. ORCID: 0000-0003-3573-9473. Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/1408929812033417>.

<sup>2</sup> *La edad de oro: publicación mensual de recreo e instrucción dedicada a los niños de América*.

<sup>3</sup> "decir cómo está hecho el mundo: les vamos a contar todo lo que han hecho los hombres hasta ahora".

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer of the Degree Course in Letters (Portuguese and Spanish) at the Federal University of the Jequitinhonha and

of nature and forms that the most ordinary things in our lives have acquired throughout history. This is the case of the text “History of the spoon and fork”<sup>4</sup>, which was published in the last issue of the magazine.

As he begins his description of how these two everyday objects are produced, Martí (1997) draws attention to the fact that it is imperative to understand what we see and have around us: “the truth is that it is painful to see something and not understand it, and man must not rest until he understands everything he sees”<sup>5</sup> (Martí, 1997, p. 175). In his humanist and idealist vision, Martí (1997) goes on to describe the industrial manufacture of the two objects, the spoon and the fork, without first noting that those who don’t think and don’t work, “living off what others work on, these eat and drink like other men, but in truth, these are not alive”<sup>6</sup> (Martí, 1997, p. 175).

In other words, to live humanely is to be deeply involved with the world around you, that *vast world* that Carlos Drummond de Andrade sang about in “Poem of seven faces”<sup>7</sup> from *Some poetry*<sup>8</sup> (1930), but this involvement is not complete either. Our world is vastly larger: it includes everything we look at and don’t look at, and what we imagine but doubt its real existence. Our gaze does not convey absolutely everything that is in the world, because it only captures an image of the world.

If art is also an expression that speaks deeply to us, allowing us to look at and image of the world, then every piece made by human beings is, also a small, individualised image of the world, and the entire manufacturing process is the result of the power of nature’s materials to adapt to the techniques invented and tested by man throughout history to pass from one state to another. This is the case with production of the

spoon and fork that Martí (1997) describes so beautifully in his text. To these metallic objects, many steps are necessary. The metals were boiled and mixed, cooled and flattened into sheets for cutting and modelling on large tables, then passed through cutting and polishing machines, so that they could finally be bathed in liquid silver and lined up in a wooden cabinet.

At every stage of industrial or craft production, the four elements that make up the universe (water, earth, air and fire) have served man for his feats and imaginations. Martí’s (1997) detailed description of the production and care of raw material is one of those rare moments when we see a writer dedicate himself to the minutiae of life, paradoxically, because what seems like a trifle can become in a great learning experience to little readers, as is the case with the widespread use of water.

Machines ran on steam, which came from heating water. It was water that started and ended production, as the whole process culminated in a bath of liquid silver in a huge boiler. This water was stimulated by a shock of electricity, as described by Martí:

There’s the spoon. Then they file it down and decorate it, jump on it like a fork and take it to the silver bath, because it’s a real bath, where the silver is in the water, undone, with a mixture called potassium cyanide - all the chemical names are like that! And into this bath comes electricity, which is a power that we don’t know what it is, but it gives light and colour, and movement, and strength, and changes and decomposes metals in an instant, and some it separates, and others it joins together, like in this silver bath which, while the electricity enters and mixes it<sup>9</sup>, puts all the

<sup>4</sup> “Historia de la cuchara y el tenedor”.

<sup>5</sup> “la verdad es que da vergüenza ver algo y no entenderlo, y el hombre no ha de descansar hasta que no entienda todo lo que ve”.

<sup>6</sup> “viviendo de lo que los otros trabajan, esos comen y beben como los demás hombres, pero en la verdad de la verdad, esos no están vivos”.

<sup>7</sup> “Poema de sete faces”.

<sup>8</sup> *Alguma poesia*.

<sup>9</sup> “Ya está la cuchara. Luego la liman y la adornan, y la pulen como el tenedor, y la llevan al baño de plata; porque es un baño verdadero, en que la plata está en el agua, deshecha, con una mezcla que llaman cianuro de potasio - ilos nombres químicos son todos así! -: y entra en el baño la electricidad, que es un poder que no se sabe lo que es, pero da luz, y color, y movimiento, y fuerza, y cambia y descompone en un instante los metales, y a unos los separa, y a otros los junta, como en este baño de platear que, en cuanto la electricidad entra y lo revuelve, echa toda la plata del agua sobre las

silver in the water onto the spoons and forks hanging in it. They remove them by dripping. (1997, p. 180).

What is this mystery that bathes cutlery in such a way as to transform it into shiny objects that will embellish our domestic tables? Electricity, we know, is an energy that has the capacity to attract and repel particles, just use it for the purpose you want.

According to Martí (1997), electricity causes the liquid silver to detach from the water and cling to the object immersed in the boiler, in other words, it joins two materials to form a third. If the silver coating illuminates, colours, moves and gives strength to the objects, enlivening them, they acquire a greater power of meaning in the text. Thus, these real objects can be read/seen as artistic objects, since they carry a new nature: a real transformation that activates a beautiful and meaningful image in the reader/appreciator.

This mysterious transformation takes place when we read books that thematise the elements of the universe, such as water, which has been widely used as a medium and inspiration for many stories in the oral tradition since Ancient Greece.

In the Modern Age, Charles Perrault (1628-1703) thematised water in his fairy tale “The fairies”<sup>10</sup>, published in *Tales of mother goose or stories of ancient times* (1697). This work was given a Spanish edition, *Tales of yesteryear*<sup>11</sup> (1986), which contains drawings by Gustave Doré (1832-1883). In the drawing of “The fairies”, you can see the image of a young woman holding a huge pitcher under the tap of a natural spring of water that represents pain and feminine purity. Doré is faithful to the story, focussing his gaze on the fountain and the pitcher under the tap, while the young woman holds on and looks to the side, at the fairy who disguises herself as an old woman in the woods. In the 20th century, the Uruguayan writer and poet Juana de Ibarbourou (1892-1979) also thematised water extensively in her work, as

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cucharas y los tenedores colgados dentro de él. Los sacan chorreando.”

<sup>10</sup> “Las hadas”.

<sup>11</sup> *Cuentos de antaño*.

in the prose of *The fresh pitcher*<sup>12</sup> (1920) and in “Triptych”<sup>13</sup>, a series of three poems from *Dualism*<sup>14</sup> (1953), in which this element takes on different characters.

In view of this marked presence of water in the three authors, namely Perrault, Doré and Ibarbourou, the aim is to carry out a comparative reading of a contrastive and qualitative nature between the three authors based on the idea that there is a “new comparatism” (Coutinho, 2016) in comparative studies that is necessary for understanding literature in Latin American territory. Subsequently, the aim is to reflect on how this new emerging comparatism can take place in Spanish language teaching in Brazilian schools through the idea that there is a “new humanism” (Coutinho, Palermo & Schmidt, 2021) in Portuguese language classes in Elementary School II at a public school in the rural community of Sopa, a district in the historic city of Diamantina in the Jequitinhonha Valley in Minas Gerais, Brazil. In this school, teaching and extension projects took place between 2023 and 2024: PIBID (between May 2023 and March 2024) and PIBEX (during the year 2024), coordinated by the author, in which the focus was on literacy in Spanish for students in the four grades of primary school in Portuguese language classes. This new relationship established between comparative literature and its teaching can give new meaning to the relationship that young readers have with foreign literature, as well as to the way in which Brazilian teachers relate to this little-known literature in Brazil.

## II. THE ROLE AND SYMBOLISM OF WATER IN CHARLES PERRAULT, GUSTAVE DORÉ AND JUANA DE IBARBOUROU

The element of water has been highly thematized in literature. To take just one iconic example from the history of literature, let’s mention the role and symbolism of water in the legends of King Arthur. Belonging to the Welsh oral tradition, the first

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<sup>12</sup> *El cántaro fresco*.

<sup>13</sup> “Tríptico”.

<sup>14</sup> *Dualismo*.

author to format them into an imaginative text was the French cleric Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1135-c. 1190), considered more of an artist than a poet. (Carpeaux, 2011).

The author of the first chivalric romances, Troyes composed five poems in octosyllabic verses, the last of which, *Percival or the tale of the Grail* (1182), which he dedicated to Count Philip of Flanders (1143-1199), was left unfinished. This novel has a plot that is symptomatic of its role and symbolism of water, which appears in the image of an enchanted fountain. After listening to an experienced knight, Calogrenant, at Arthur's court, Iwein sets off towards the fountain that the old knight had described, soon recognising two elements of the story: the water and the magic stone. Determined, he pours the water over the stone and begins to wait for the Black Knight, guardian of the fountain. Then the sky is overtaken by a dense storm and the Black Knight appears to defend the fountain, but Iwein bravely defeats him and marries Queen Laudine. Iwein's entry into Laudine's castle represents the character's entry into a new fantasy universe, that of the fairies, in which Iwein is elevated to the rank of king and lord under the magical power of the fairy Lunete.

Almost 500 years after the publication of this novel, Perrault introduced the element of water in the tale "The fairies". A widowed mother and two daughters who are opposites in character live together in a house, but the youngest daughter, who is beautiful and virtuous, is constantly demanded by her mother. One of her many domestic duties is to fetch a large pot of water from a spring half a kilometre from the house. One day, an old woman (who used to be a fairy) appears in the woods asking her to give her a drink. After showing her generosity by offering her water in the pot, the fairy disguised as an old woman promises her a gift, which soon manifests itself in the young girl: "with every word you say, a flower or a precious stone will spring from your mouth"<sup>15</sup> (Perrault, 1986, p. 135). This gift positively surprised her mother when she

<sup>15</sup> "A cada palabra que digáis, salga de vuestra boca una Flor o una Piedra preciosa".

returned home. It wasn't the same happened to the proud older sister. On her mother's advice, she took a silver jug with her and went to the fountain. This time, the fairy was dressed like a princess. But the girl's pride prevented the fairy from granting her a fortunate gift. Unlike her sister, she was given the gift of expelling "a snake or a frog"<sup>16</sup> from her mouth (Perrault, 1986, p. 137).

Paquita's gift was due to the attitude of the poor girl who, threatened, ran away from home - her refuge was a symbolic forest where she met casually a prince, the king's son. The other "went to die in a corner of the woods"<sup>17</sup> (Perrault, 1986, p. 137).

The role of water in the two stories above is very similar: in one, this element becomes an instrument or a means of realising a magic that is to come good or bad. In another, the Black Knight's fountain becomes the favoured place for magical success, symbolising the characters' entry into a magical universe. In any case, the characters in both stories leave the world of human beings and enter the world of fairies.

In this same symbolic context of water, Ibarbourou published several works in which this element is symptomatically present, just as it is in Martí (1997): it is transformed in fiction to give other elements of nature *another life*. In the text "The water"<sup>18</sup>, from *The fresh pitcher*, water is life, not only because of its material quality of relieving illnesses that us, such as fever, but because it has the gift of being charitable. It is in the world to serve. In the same way as Martí (1997), Ibarbourou humanises water: "I approach it as a being and I am convinced that it is a creature with a soul like ours; and that it speaks, dreams, sings, kisses, consoles, just like us"<sup>19</sup> (1992b, p. 20). This light and symbolic text is a true religious song to water, because it even has a name: "Sor Charity"<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> "Una serpiente o un sapo".

<sup>17</sup> "Se fue a morir en un rincón del bosque".

<sup>18</sup> "El agua".

<sup>19</sup> "Yo acudo a ella como a un ser consciente y estoy convencida de que es una criatura con el alma como la nuestra; y que habla, sueña, canta, besa, consuela, igual que nosotros".

<sup>20</sup> "Sor Caridad".

The water, poured over her head, face and neck, acts as a relief for human pain and sorrow, because “Today I felt her cool fresh fingers breaking the fever at my temples. And your sweetness reached my heart!”<sup>21</sup> (Ibarbourou, 1992b, p. 20). In other words, in Ibarbourou, water becomes a character, unlike the water in the enchanted fountain in the story “The fairies”, in which it serves as an instrument the fairy disguised as an old woman or a princess gives the gift of enchanted speech to the younger and older sisters.

So much so that in Perrault’s work translated into Spanish, we see the illustration for the story “The fairies” (Fig. 1) drawn by Doré in 1862, in the romantic and impressionist style. The reader’s attention is drawn to the distribution of the image in three planes of vision: that of the fountain, that of the younger sister looking at the old woman and the forest. In Doré’s illustration for “Cinderella” (Fig. 2), in the same issue, we can also see three planes of vision: the kitchen, the old woman (fairy godmother) and that of Cinderella. Below are the two illustrations in sequence:



Source: *Cuentos de antaño* (1986).

Figure 1: Illustration by Gustave Doré for the short story “The fairies”<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> “Hoy he sentido sus buenos dedos frescos rompiendo, en mis sienes, la fiebre. ¡Y hasta al corazón me llegó su dulzura!”.



Source: *Cuentos de antaño* (1986).

Figure 2: Illustration by Gustave Doré for the short story “Cinderella”.

In both images, the predominant technique is that of “light and dark”, called *chiaroscuro* in Italian. It’s an innovative technique that Doré used in many illustrations for children’s books. The painter also used another painting technique to compose these illustrations: woodcuts. However, in the *chiaroscuro* technique, the image carries even greater meanings, because black and white show the contrast of light and shadows, and, positioned next to the written text, “increases the contrast and drama of the image”<sup>22</sup> (Bandeira, 2011, p. 47). In both the short story “The fairies” and the short story “Cinderella”, *chiaroscuro* brings a spontaneity and movement to the drawing, without too many demarcations in the shapes. The forest in “The fairies” is impressionistic in that it stands out from the rest of the image: it is clear, indicating that the old woman’s presence will bring her younger sister a good gift.

In the view of the fountain, the young woman is holding a pitcher, but she doesn’t pay enough attention to the water, a mere instrument, but

directs her vision to the plane of the old woman, who suddenly arrives to meet her. The colouring of the fountain is predominantly dark, since going to the fountain is painful and mysterious. When she returns home, she will soon have to go back to the fountain again to maintain food and domestic order. For her, going to the distant fountain is a punishment, an arduous task that her older sister won’t appreciate at any time, being proud of it.

The drawing is printed using woodcut, a freehand creation on a wooden base, which allows the painter to maintain spontaneity and movement of the image. Doré’s representations of fairy tales manage to capture the magic and mystery of nature in the publications of Perrault’s fables, giving plasticity and life to the texts.

Back in Ibarbourou, we have a “Triptych”, three poems that, as in Doré’s drawings, bring water to life, no longer as an instrument, but as the protagonist. What’s more, in each of the poems we have three different types of water: “The mercy of water”, “Water in love” and “The avenging

<sup>22</sup> “Aumenta o contraste e a dramaticidade da imagem”.

water”<sup>23</sup>. These poems are in fact fables, as there are animated beings. In the first, we have a conversation between a child and a thread of water; in the second, a river overflowing with water tries to persuade a willow tree of its passionate love; in the third, we have a first-person account of a water that turns into a vengeful hailstorm. In all three fables, water has the same meaning: it always offers the reader good sensations and images, but with teachings.

In Perrault (1986), Doré (1986) and Ibarbourou (1992a and 1992b), the element of water has a differentiated and complementary role and imagery symbolism that are both differentiated and complementary, in our opinion, since they present a remarkable architecture of images:: while Perrault and Doré emphasise the scenery and the fantasy resulting from the search for water in the enchanted fountain, Ibarbourou is concerned with the plot and the servile nature of water in a text in poetic prose and in three poems that can be read as fables, making water a different character in each text.

In the story “The fairies”, we can draw some analogies with the mythical story of Hilar, the young Greek who came to live in the waters of the lagoon of the Naiad nymphs. The fate of the two female characters, the older sister and the younger one, are fantasised, just like Hilar. In order to weave these analogies between the two stories, we’ll return to the concept of the word myth, which in the *Caldas Aulete digital dictionary* has the following meaning: “fanciful narrative, symbolic narrative, usually with supernatural elements, transmitted by the oral tradition of a people”<sup>24</sup> (Aulete, nd). Both stories, although different in nature (one belonging to Greek mythology and the other to fairy tales), are fantastical, since they are created with supernatural elements. In the story of Hilar, oral tradition brings the image of a handsome young man being convinced by the Naiad nymphs, while in the fairy tale, a young and beautiful woman is

fancifully transformed by the fairy in order to dignify her: in order to escape from a difficult home life and achieve happiness, she is forcibly removed from her habitat, just as happened to Hilar. So far, we’ve seen the presence of the element of water and the young, beautiful human being in both stories, but the analogies don’t end there: the presence of the jug in both stories brings the mythical meaning of destiny, in other words, fatality is present so that each story takes its course. In them, neither of the two characters imagines their fate or the days to come, but they are well aware that they have a mission to fulfil: to fetch water to provide food for their places of their places of origin: the ship Argo where the Argonauts are, and the house where their widowed mother and her older sister live. As in ancient times life was more difficult than it is now, in the 21st century, the presence of the supernatural element (nymph and fairy) exactly positioned in a fountain or bucolic place containing water, inspired the oral tradition by providing the characters with a magical solution.

Flowers and precious stones come out of the younger sister’s mouth, because she has been generous with the fairy disguised as an old woman when the old woman asks her for some water from the jug, unlike her older sister, who was proud of the fairy disguised as a princess when she asked her the same request. In other words, the fairy’s gift can be good or bad, and that magical decision will forever define the fate of the characters. Therefore, everything that is ugly, rude and scary cannot correspond to the nobility and cordiality expected of a young, beautiful woman at the court of Louis XIV the Great. In this context, the prince decides to marry the younger sister who had been thrown out of the house and found lost in the woods.

In the story “The sleeping beauty of the forest”<sup>25</sup> evil is shown in the figure of the mother-in-law, who is actually an ogre; in “The fairies” there is no mother-in-law, but a widowed mother. In other words, in both plots, the peace of the family home is governed by a deep threat: the ogre wants to eat the symptomatic children *Aurora* and *Day* in

<sup>23</sup> “La piedad del agua”, “El agua enamorada” y “El agua vengadora”.

<sup>24</sup> “Narrativa fantasmagórica, simbólica, geralmente com elementos sobrenaturais, transmitida pela tradição oral de um povo”.

<sup>25</sup> “La bella durmiente del bosque”.

“The sleeping beauty of the forest”, while the widowed mother wants to boss her youngest daughter around, as if they were living in a vicious circle of bad behaviour that is repeated *ad infinitum*. In the stories, there is a continuous erasure of future life, as in Manuel Bandeira’s verse that declares: “The whole life that could have been and that wasn’t”<sup>26</sup> (2013, p. 35), from the poem “Pneumothorax”, from *Debauchery*<sup>27</sup> (1930), because there is a continuous return of the heroines to an empty life, without a real, living demonstration of their personality. Marriage, being an initiation for young women and men, is constantly banned by the widowed mother and the mother-in-law turned into an ogre. While the manifestation of frogs, snakes and lizards is a continual temptation to the lives of both, they will be banished forever from a normal family life. That’s why, with magic at work through the fairies, the heroines miraculously manage to maintain their destiny of being wives and mothers: one being rescued by the prince in the middle of the woods; another being saved by the prince from being thrown into the cauldron of hideous beasts. On the contrary, the one who goes into the cauldron is the mother-in-law, who then dies.

In *The psychoanalysis of fairy tales*<sup>28</sup> (2002), Bruno Bettelheim states that what is most fundamental about fairy tale plots is that they have to end well. Being a genre that serves as a support for human evolution, especially female evolution, the abandoned character has to do well in the end, as is the case with the heroines in question, because by in a dead and meaningless life, the possibility of magic in the tale comes to change the course of things, that’s why magic has the characteristic of being sober, moderate, because magic is not the protagonist, but rather the result of it on her youngest daughter.

In Perrault’s writing, magic is sober, yet ironically beautiful. It only happens because the aim is to achieve a new family life, not a simple fantasy aimed at children, and the aggressor or adversary, as much as he wants to prevent this new life, is

<sup>26</sup> “A vida inteira que podia ter sido e que não foi”.

<sup>27</sup> *Libertinagem*.

<sup>28</sup> *A psicologia dos contos de fadas*.

not the bearer of magic, but only the bearer of bad behaviour that will be easily neutralised by magic. That’s why magic only appears to circumvent the constant presence of evil and to help the heroine as she goes in search of her new family. Family, then, is the main theme of both fairy tales, “The sleeping beauty of the forest” and “The fairies”. In these tales, the mother-in-law and the widowed mother cause insecurity to the heroines, because they themselves find themselves abandoned in their solitary lives. Furthermore, the constant presence of the dense, dark and mysterious forest is not credible either: such is the forest present in the *Aeneid* (I before Christ) and *Metamorphoses* (VIII after Christ), because in these works the entrance to the Kingdom of Hades (or the land of the dead) is surrounded by a magical forest. By placing his princesses in this magical forest, Perrault puts the plot of the tale on a borderline, in other words, he takes the genre itself to a borderline space of fictional writing: either the genre is rewritten, or oral stories of enchantment continue to be told, without there actually being a greater and deeper teaching of human behaviour. This is what Perrault bequeaths to posterity.

The two princesses are synonymous with extreme human fidelity and generosity, because they show these qualities in their behaviour and expressions. Sleeping Beauty’s extreme fidelity is shown in the scene where the prince arrives at her bedside:

He approached trembling with wonder and knelt down beside her. Then, as the enchantment had come to an end, the Princess woke up; and, looking at him with eyes softer than a first glance can allow, she said: - Is that you, my Prince? I’ve kept you waiting too long.<sup>29</sup> (Perrault, 1986, p. 105)

The future princess of “The fairies”, on the other hand, shows her extreme generosity by giving in, without conditions to the request of the fairy disguised as an old woman:

<sup>29</sup> “Se acercó temblando y maravillado y se arrodilló a su lado. Entonces, como había llegado el fin del encantamiento, la Princesa se despertó; y, mirándolo con ojos más tiernos de lo que una primera mirada puede permitir, dijo: - ¿Sois vos, Príncipe mío? Os habéis hecho esperar mucho tiempo.”.

(...) One day, while he was at the fountain, a poor woman came up to him and begged him to give her a drink.

- Why not, good woman,' said the beautiful young woman.

Then, rinsing out her pitcher, she drew water from the clearest place in the fountain and offered it to her, while supporting the pitcher so that she could drink more to her liking. After drinking, the good woman said:

- You are so beautiful, so good and so courteous, that I can only grant you a gift - for she was a Fairy who had taken the form of a poor peasant girl, to see how far that young woman's courtesy would go.<sup>30</sup> (Perrault, 1986, p. 135)

These behaviours are the ones that, at the end of the tales, Perrault draws attention to in the final *moralejas* (morals), which is why the readership is, in both cases, the same, the young woman. Thus, the *moraleja* (moral) of "The sleeping beauty of the forest":

Waiting a prudential amount of time to have a rich, handsome, gallant and affectionate husband is natural; but waiting for him for a hundred years, and sleeping for a hundred years without getting tired, there is no ordinary female who sleeps so long and so peacefully.<sup>31</sup> (Perrault, 1986, p. 111)

And the moral of "The fairies": "Pistols and diamonds can do a lot for the Will, but words full of kindness are even more powerful and of greater

<sup>30</sup> "(...) Un día, estando en la fuente, se le acercó una pobre mujer que le rogó le diera de beber. – Cómo no, buena mujer – dijo la hermosa joven. Y, enjuagando en seguida el cántaro, sacó agua del lugar más claro de la fuente y se la ofreció, sin dejar de sostener el cántaro para que pudiera beber más a gusto. La buena mujer, después de beber, dijo: – Sois tan hermosa, tan buena y tan cortés, que no puedo dejar de concederos un don – pues era un Hada que había tomado la forma de una pobre campesina, para ver hasta dónde llegaría la cortesía de aquella joven."

<sup>31</sup> "El esperar un tiempo prudencial para tener Esposo rico, guapo, galante y cariñoso, es cosa natural; pero esperarlo cien años, y estarse los cien años durmiendo sin cansarse; ya no hay hembra corriente que duerma tanto y tan tranquilamente."

value and usefulness."<sup>32</sup> (Perrault, 1986, p. 138). The moral of the story is clearly aimed at the young woman, waiting for her future husband, transfigured into the character of the prince in both stories, perceiving value in the behaviour and expressions of their (promised or chosen) princess. In addition, there are other common elements of literary fiction in the tales, such as the beginning of the story with *Erase una vez* (Once upon a time), the logical paradoxes in the figure of an antagonist and a protagonist who are clearly differentiated in their morals and behaviour, and the presence of magical weapons put to use by supernatural beings with no thirst for revenge in order to bring about a happy ending. These textual coincidences are not fatalities, since Perrault, as we have said, is an artist of words, as was Chrétien de Troyes in his day. These full authors of fiction rewrote stories from time immemorial in a French language contemporary to their readers. It is them, then, that the text goes, and not to remain as mere stories from distant times. They are stories to be read and commented on in circles of readers from any time and place. In other words, they are readings to be updated according to their use.

Goethe said that the greatest force in us is the human personality. It's no coincidence not by chance, the symbolism present in Ibarbourou's fictional texts is also an exercise in courage, unlike Perrault's fairy tales, in which there is a test of the female personality and not the presence of a ready-made, decisive personality. For example, in the "Triptych" series, water chooses to be playful, enamoured and vengeful. In all these decisions, water is potentially creative, since she is courageous and willing to assume these moral qualities in public. This makes her more beautiful, because she exercises the virtue she has chosen in each poem. In the first, "The mercy of water", the water strand's response is surprising at the end: "You think I'm lost, but haven't you seen/ How the pink laurel tree/ That you planted by the side of the road dies of thirst?/ I want to give its roots

<sup>32</sup> "Pistolas y Diamantes, pueden mucho sobre la Voluntad, mas las palabras llenas de bondad son aún más pujantes y de mayor valor y utilidad".

a drink./Before being beautiful, I must be pious.”<sup>33</sup> (Ibarbourou, 1992a, p. 63).

In the poem “Water in love”, water also puts itself at the service of the willow tree, the object of its passion: “You are so clear, willow tree, and so beautiful!/ Whisper your feather to me. See: I live/ Dependent on your anguish or your joy”<sup>34</sup>. (Ibarbourou, 1992a, p. 64). And in the poem “The avenging water”, the water turns into hail, “into destructive pebbles”<sup>35</sup> (Ibarbourou, 1992a, p. 65), to take revenge on the owner of a wheat field who didn’t want to be generous to a beggar: “I’ll go down and chop up the treasure/ From the hard shoulder denied pity./ ...../ And the hail wiped out the field of gold.”<sup>36</sup> (Ibarbourou, 1992a, p. 65). The dots in the poem are a spatial reference to the destruction of the “field of ripe wheat”<sup>37</sup> (Ibarbourou, 1992a, p. 64) by the hailstorm. In all three poems, the virtue underpinning the human behaviour of the water element is generosity, as seen in the gesture of the protagonist in the short story “The fairies”. And also as seen in the text “The water” from *The fresh pitcher*, in which the individualised I of the text recognises water almost as a nun, “always attentive to providing us with consolation and help”<sup>38</sup> (Ibarbourou, 1992b, p. 20).

The three fictional texts present the element of water as the bearer of meaning, although in Perrault (1986), water served as an instrument of the magical plot. Water is transformed by both Perrault and Ibarbourou in the same way that the enchanted fountain of *Iwein or the lion rider* of Chrétien de Troyes and the fountain of the Naiads in the story of Hylas acquire symbolic meaning in their plots. In the poetry and poetic prose of Ibarbourou’s poetry and poetic prose (1992a and

1992b), water transforms the reality around it, drawing the reader’s attention and literally abusing their gaze for what really matters in this life and which is the greatest strength that all of us living human beings have, according to Goethe, which is our own personality. But just having a personality doesn’t change our inner and outer world, because it needs to be continually renewed, as primitive men did by renewing cycles created in the era of mythical times (Eliade, 1972). Just as human beings learnt to repaint earthly life until they were able to produce their own kitchen utensils by hand, so man has learnt, by listening to stories, to renew the learning of human virtues, among them, and the strongest of all, in our opinion, courage.

It is the power of courage that moves the younger sister in the story “The fairies” to be generous to the fairy disguised as an old woman and to be generous to herself when she flees a home emptied of human virtues. An interdisciplinary reading between literature and the image seen in the story and in Gustave Doré’s woodcut can help us measure how much an element so present in our lives, such as clear, muddy or miraculous water, personified in Ibarbourou’s fables in verse, makes us understand the role and symbolism of these elements in literature and the arts, in order to increase the original significance of the works. Reading plays a fundamental role in the beauty of the eye in the formation of the imagination of the reader and art lover. On this Martí’s descriptive text is spot on:

And life isn’t difficult to understand either. When you know everything that the earth gives, and you know what men have done in the world, you feel the desire to do even more than they have done: and that is life.<sup>39</sup> (1997, p. 175)

The life symbolized in literature and the arts is an eternal possibility of understanding it with nuances than those who came before us. But we are not better than our ancestors, because we will

<sup>33</sup> “- Tú me crees descarriada; mas ¿no viste/ Cómo muere de sed el laurel rosa/ Que han plantado a la vera del sendero?/ Dar de beber a sus raíces quiero./ Antes que bella, debo ser piadosa.”.

<sup>34</sup> “¡Eres tan claro, sauce, y tan hermoso!/ Susúrrame tu pena. Ve: yo vivo/ Pendiente de tu angustia o de tu gozo”.

<sup>35</sup> “En destructoras piedrezuelas”.

<sup>36</sup> “Bajaré a hacer añicos el tesoro/ Del hombro duro a la piedad negado./ ...../ Y flageló el granizo el campo de oro.”.

<sup>37</sup> “Campo de maduro trigo”.

<sup>38</sup> “Atenta siempre a proporcionarnos consuelo y ayuda”.

<sup>39</sup> “Y la vida no es difícil de entender tampoco. Cuando uno sabe para lo que sirve todo lo que da la tierra, y sabe lo que han hecho los hombres en el mundo, siente unos deseos de hacer más que ellos todavía: y eso es la vida.”.

always learn from them with each reading and appreciation. That's why, in the middle of the 21st century, being in contact with the artistic works of different times and places is not only a vital human need, but a beautiful and opportune moment to renew our personality *ad infinitum*.

We'll see below how the reading and appreciation of these three authors can take place in Spanish language classes in a Brazilian school, and how the theoretical and methodological basis of comparative literature can contribute to the introduction of these works in the teaching of Spanish in Brazil.

### III. COMPARATIVE READING TODAY: THE NEW COMPARATISM AND THE NEW HUMANISM IN THE CLASSROOM

Eduardo F. Coutinho, in his article "The new comparatism and the Latin American context"<sup>40</sup> (2016), seeks to develop the idea of a "new comparatism" that goes far beyond binary comparative studies, in which a precise, autonomous object is analysed with its own methodology, in other words, almost a comparatism with a semiotic orientation - that of pure intertextual analysis: searching for textual differences, cultural and literary interrelationships, re-readings of genres and plots, etc. In our comparison of the three authors - Perrault, Doré and Ibarbourou - we have investigated the structuring processes of their works and saw that, basically, the three correspond to very personal worldview projects: in Perrault (1986), we have a project to transform a young, beautiful - and therefore virtuous - woman into a wife; in Doré (1986), we have an impressionistic view of the fountain, between light and dark, giving an air of mystery and magic to Perrault's (1986) tale; in Ibarbourou (1992a and 1992b), as in Martí (1997), we have the Latin American novelty of water placed as the protagonist, as the full agent of the action. In both Latin American authors, water takes an active role in the plots. It acts rather than suffers. If we were to ask ourselves if there is any borrowing between Perrault and Ibarbourou, we would answer no, just as if there is a filiation

between Perrault and Ibarbourou: we would answer that there isn't either. Just as there is no borrowing or affiliation between Perrault and Martí. On the contrary, there is a free recreation of the water element in Martí and Ibarbourou, and this can be read as a characteristic of the "new comparatism" that develops Coutinho:

The work will investigate, from a comparative perspective, the transformations that have taken place from the end of the 19th century to the present day with regard to the dialogue between Latin American thought and contributions from the Euro-North American world and will discuss the possibility of constituting what has been called a "Latin American geoculture", i.e. the necessary intersection between reflection, culture and the continent's soil.<sup>41</sup> (2016, p. 182)

Both Martí and Ibarbourou start from the soil of the continent to approach the water element in their works. Martí's aim is to teach children about the reality of life, of the universe, as Carlos Drummond de Andrade sang in his "Poem of seven faces" (1930), one of the poet's most popular compositions by the poet from Minas Gerais, in which, despite the presence of the melancholic tone to express the lyrical self's feelings of inadequacy and loneliness of the lyrical self, he assumes a posture of wanting to be *gauche* in life, in other words, it would be a metaphor for wanting to be different, unlike the majority. In the poem, we have the personification of the houses: as if they were people, they observe the movement of the streets: "The houses spy on the men/ who run after the women./ The afternoon might be blue,/ if there weren't so many desires."<sup>42</sup> (Andrade, 2013, p. 11). This peaceful observation

<sup>41</sup> "No trabalho, serão investigadas, por uma perspectiva comparatista, as transformações que se têm operado de finais do século XIX até o presente no que diz respeito ao diálogo entre o pensamento latino-americano e as contribuições oriundas do universo euro-norte-americano e será discutida a possibilidade de constituição do que vem sendo chamado de 'geocultura latino-americana', ou seja, a interseção necessária entre a reflexão, a cultura e o solo do continente." (2016, p. 182).

<sup>42</sup> "As casas espiam os homens/ que correm atrás de mulheres./ A tarde talvez fosse azul,/ não houvesse tantos desejos."

<sup>40</sup> "O novo comparatismo e o contexto latino-americano".

of the lyrical self being in an urban life - Brazilian, therefore Latin American, different from the North American and European, continues in the third stanza, which says: "The tram goes by full of legs:/ legs white black yellow./ Why so many legs, my God, asks my heart./ But my eyes/ don't ask anything."<sup>43</sup> (Andrade, 2013, p. 11). There is awe of the lyrical self, but it is also peaceful, like the gaze in the previous stanza. Alongside this feeling of astonishment, we can mention the feeling of loneliness, which increases: when he looks at the tram, and when he says "Why so many legs?", the lyrical self is using a metonymy (an expressive resource that takes the part for the whole), in other words, what is underlined is the idea that there are many people in the street, a crowd around him, and this is Brazilian culture - and consequently Latin American culture, *mestiza*, fluid, present. The existence of so many people around him seems to cause a feeling of distress in the lyrical self, who asks God, his only interlocutor: what for? In the next stanza, we have an introspective look at himself. Describing himself as "serious, simple and strong"<sup>44</sup>, he seems to correspond to the image of resilience expected of an adult Latin American man. "The man behind the moustache/ is serious, simple and strong./ He hardly talks./ He has few, rare friends/ the man behind the glasses and the moustache."<sup>45</sup> (Andrade, 2013, p. 11). However, in the next stanza, the lyrical self shows what exists in him beyond this external image, and which corresponds more to a closed individual, *incomunicado* and quite solitary, even when he's in the middle of a crowd: "My God, why did you abandon me/ if you knew I wasn't God/ if you knew I was weak."<sup>46</sup> (Andrade, 2013, p. 11). The feeling of abandonment by God, in this stanza of the poem, is revealing of our European and even oriental roots, by paraphrasing the words of Jesus Christ when he was being crucified. There is a

feeling of helplessness and orphanhood. Without direction, without support either on earth or in heaven, the lyrical self recognizes that it is alone in the world. However, this weak, vulnerable and fallible man grows in the last two stanzas and ends with what we all need to recognize in life: that our earthly life is deeply connected to our cosmos and to the best *modus operandi* for being and growing up in a lonely, resilient and strong land - the soil of the Latin American continent. A stanza "World world vast world,/ if my name was Raimundo/ it would be a rhyme, would not be a solution./ World world vast world,/ vaster is my heart."<sup>47</sup> (Andrade, 2013, p. 11), is a recognition of the immensity of the world, and it is clear that the lyrical self feels small, insignificant in the face of everything else. In this stanza, we can find a reflection on poetry itself, as in Ibarbourou (1992a and 1992b). Both poets, in the 20th century, one in Brazil and the other in Uruguay, sang about their native land, each in their own way. Carlos Drummond de Andrade, writing that "if my name was Raimundo/ it would be a rhyme, not a solution." (Andrade, 2013, p. 11), it can be inferred from these verses that the subject is poetically declaring that writing poetry doesn't solve his problems with life. Even so, these verses may be a way of accessing his deepest lyrical self, his true *ethos*, as he then writes: "World world vast world,/ vaster is my heart." (Andrade, 2013, p. 11). Thus, his heart is what defines his being in the world, recognizing that his best state in this *vast world* is what we read in his final confession to God himself: "I shouldn't tell you/ but this moon/ but this cognac/ make us as moved as the devil."<sup>48</sup> (Andrade, 2013, p. 12). It is the greatest confession of love written by a Brazilian poet for Brazil, not for the national land, but continental, for belonging to a culture other than the North American or European. It is a recognition that the *vast world* can and should fill the local imagination, especially literary and artistic. So, if the "new comparatism" is also the contestation of the foreign (in this case, French, through

<sup>43</sup> "O bonde passa cheio de pernas:/ pernas brancas pretas amarelas./ Para que tanta perna, meu Deus, pergunta meu coração./ Porém meus olhos/ não perguntam nada."

<sup>44</sup> "sério, simples e forte".

<sup>45</sup> "O homem atrás do bigode/ é sério, simples e forte./ Quase não conversa./ Tem poucos, raros amigos/ o homem atrás dos óculos e do bigode".

<sup>46</sup> "Meu Deus, por que me abandonaste/ se sabias que eu não era Deus/ se sabias que eu era fraco."

<sup>47</sup> "Mundo mundo vasto mundo,/ se eu me chamasse Raimundo/ seria uma rima, não seria uma solução./ Mundo mundo vasto mundo,/ mais vasto é meu coração."

<sup>48</sup> "Eu não devia te dizer/ mas essa lua/ mas esse conhaque/ botam a gente comovido como o diabo."

Perrault-Doré), it is because it must first be a “locus of enunciation, of the contextualization of the place of speech”<sup>49</sup> (Bhabha, 1994 apud Coutinho, 2016, p. 184), in order to then be an “intersection between thought, culture and soil”<sup>50</sup> (Palermo, 2005, p. 44 apud Coutinho, 2016, p. 185), in which both the artist and the cultural thinker take a critical stance: from this point of view, Ibarbourou’s literary production is nonetheless post-colonial, as she revisits several works aimed for children and young people, stories from both East and West (*Natacha’s dreams*<sup>51</sup> (1945) and *Puck* (1953), are examples), but she also creates so many other stories from his childhood memories in *Chico Carlo* (1945) set in his hometown of Melo, in the department of Cerro Largo in Uruguay.

Thus, in postcolonial discourse, we have the constant production of different places of enunciation, as Coutinho explains, postcolonial discourse:

It is, in other words, resistance to Westernization and globalization, and the productive creation of ways of thinking that constantly mark the difference with the process of westernization, or, better still, the constant production of different places of enunciation<sup>52</sup> (Mignolo, 1995, p. 32 apud Coutinho, 2016, p. 186)

In view of this brief conceptualization and in order to propose comparative reading in the Spanish language classroom through the teaching of foreign literature with a post-colonial discourse bias, we should first ask ourselves in what situation higher education professors live who train Spanish teachers for Basic Education. At federal universities, especially those located in remote and challenging places, as they are far from large urban centers, at the same time as we

have stimulating situations when it comes to thinking about teacher training, we also have situations where everything is lacking, especially in relation to the literary collection available for working with original literary texts in the classroom.

As a lecturer in Hispanic literature, the author has made an individual effort both to compile a literary collection accessible to the students of the Degree Course in Letters (Portuguese and Spanish) at the Interdisciplinary Faculty of Humanities of the Federal University of the Jequitinhonha and Mucuri Valleys - UFVJM, located in the city of Diamantina, Minas Gerais, and to propose teaching, research and extension projects around literary reading by these students, future teachers. Just to mention the most recent ones, from May 2023 to March 2024, the interdisciplinary Portuguese and Spanish subproject was carried out in our region in three core schools of the CAPES Institutional Program for Teaching Initiation Scholarships - PIBID/UFVJM, which covered two schools in the city of Diamantina and a public school in the district of Sopa, a rural community in Diamantina. A number of primary and secondary school students had access, for the first time, to literary literacy in Spanish in their Portuguese classes: Professor Isabel Motta State School, Joaquim Felício dos Santos State School and Sopa Municipal School. In the latter school, which was under our responsibility and that of teacher Maria Vanderlene Costa Gonçalves, who is responsible for the four years of Primary School II (from 6th to 9th grade), a reading schedule was drawn up that covered various literary genres in Spanish, such as the poetry of Spanish writers Federico García Lorca and Juan Ramón Jiménez, an adapted version of *Don Quixote* made by the government of Mexico for public schools in his country, and even a theater by Ibarbourou that rewrites the fairy tale “Cinderella”, first published in *Natacha’s dreams*.

This literary experience in a rural school helped us to draw some conclusions: it is possible to bring literary reading to students in public schools in a region that lacks books and Spanish teachers, because - and this was a request from the students

<sup>49</sup> “Locus da enunciação, da contextualização do lugar da fala”.

<sup>50</sup> “Intersecção entre pensamento, cultura e solo”.

<sup>51</sup> *Los sueños de Natacha*.

<sup>52</sup> “É, em outras palavras, a resistência à ocidentalização e à globalização, e a criação produtiva de formas de pensamento que marquem constantemente a diferença com o processo de ocidentalização, ou, melhor ainda, a constante produção de lugares diferentes de enunciação”.

themselves - they all wanted to read the texts directly in the foreign language. There was reciprocity at all stages of the workshops, and the group of students even staged some passages from Don Quixote, and at the end, when the dramatic adaptation of scenes from Ibarbourou's "The sweet miracle"<sup>53</sup> based on "Cinderella" (Cabrera Muñoz, 2024).

The ease with which the Spanish language can be acquired through literature has left the students with a "taste of wanting more", so much so that last year, 2024, the extension project "Literary workshops in Spanish in public and private schools in Diamantina", coordinated by the author, was approved under the Institutional Extension Scholarship Program - PIBEX/UFVJM, in which the experience of the literary workshops held at the Sopa Municipal School to other schools in the city, such as the Professor Gabriel Mandacaru State School, where we had a recent graduate from the Degree Course in Letters teaching Spanish to secondary school students, the teacher Larissa Aparecida Oliveira Santos. In 2025, the same extension project was approved in another PIBEX/UFVJM Call for Proposals, but with a different name: "Literary workshops in Spanish in public schools in the Jequitinhonha Valley", so the project is reaching other municipal and state schools in our vast region of coverage, as we have former students working in these schools teaching Portuguese (Early Years, Elementary I and II and High School). In the district of Mendanha, the workshops began in April 2025, with the help of teacher Liliam Fernandes, who is also a former student of the UFVJM Letters Degree Course. Between May 2023 and April 2025, up to a total of more than 200 students took part in our literary workshops in UFVJM's PIBID and extension projects. Some of the cities in which the project is already taking place in 2025 are: Gouveia, Maria Nunes, Mendanha, São João da Chapada, Senador Modestino Gonçalves and Sopa, and may reach other towns in the Valley in the second semester like Milho Verde.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> "El dulce milagro".

<sup>54</sup> Students who took part in the 2024 project: Carina de Fátima Almeida e Tatiane de Oliveira. In the 2025 project: Aline de Jesus Guimarães Cândido, Daiane Aparecida Paulino e Miriam Aparecida da Costa Oliveira. I would like to

The aim of these projects is to give continuity to what was already being done in PIBID, but with an important addition: the promotion of Spanish language learning so that there is a literary reading culture in Spanish so that these students have full access to Hispanic cultures. We think that, in a region where Spanish classes are non-existent, a stimulating and very rich scenario opens up to us, especially when we deal with Hispanic literatures from an intercultural dialog within a post-colonial discourse, as proposed in this article through the theme of water in Perrault, Doré and Ibarbourou. In a vast region of Brazil where the presence of water as a natural source in waterfalls predominates, provide the reading of these authors, while escaping from the traditional fairy tale, also opens doors to through a tale such as "The fairies", to enter the suggestive and fanciful world of poetic images that an element such as water can inspire when reading Ibarbourou's children's literature. Primary school pupils have access to Spanish through a theme that makes different authors engage in a fruitful dialogue in the classroom, since it comes from comparative literature, a discipline par excellence that promotes the encounter of cultures and is therefore a place of encounter that produces, in turn, and to quote the suggestive name coined by Laura Taddei Brandini (2021) when revisiting Tânia Franco Carvalhal's theorisation, a "methodology of encounters"<sup>55</sup> (p. 210). If comparative literature is, in the end, a methodology, let it be the encounter of cultures and broader visions of what not only literature is, but its reading, with a view to training the literary reader. That's why revisited textual genres, such as the fairy tale, will always be present in the school environment, because, in a literature teaching plan, it can and should be renewed in authors unknown to the Brazilian reading public, as in the hands of Ibarbourou, one of the great names of Latin American female lyric alongside the Chilean Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) and the Swiss-Argentine Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938).

thank my friend Carlos Felice, from São Caetano do Sul, state of São Paulo, who did all the final artwork for this project: banners, slides, etc. And the Municipality of Diamantina, for continuing the project in 2025.

<sup>55</sup> "Metodologia dos encontros".

So, we asked ourselves: how can this suggestive comparative reading take place in the teaching of Spanish language and its literatures in Brazil? In a round table entitled “Comparative today: state of the art”<sup>56</sup>, the professors taking part in the round table, Zulma Palermo, from the Universidad Nacional de Salta (Argentina), Eduardo de Faria Coutinho (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro/Universidade Federal Fluminense) and Rita Teresinha Schmidt (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), mediated by Andrei Cunha (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), held during the XVII International Congress of the Brazilian Association of Comparative Literature, on October 4, 2021, reached a consensus that without a “new humanism” comparative literature cannot exist today. Professor Zulma spoke of the idea of *communalidad*, i.e. that reading literature always involves an act that is more political than cognitive, because it promotes the meeting of people who continually problematise life, whether by writing or reading. These communalities are always creative, since it is in this real reunion of human beings that there is a reciprocal sharing of concerns and desires. When people meet, they aren’t just looking for things and motivations outside their own lives, but thoughts and knowledge that reflect their subjectivities. That’s why these places of encounter are always places of crossings and transits, and not previously demarcated boundaries, as any so-called nationalising literature would have it. Comparative literature, being a “methodology of encounters”, only sets the scene and invites dialogue.

We will always strive for an intercultural encounter in foreign language teaching, because it is in the reader’s (and teacher’s) decisions that we find the fabric of the student’s deep memory. In contemporary education, there is no longer any reason to complain: we either make decisions that will have a lasting impact on the approach to literary reading in the classroom, or we will forever be at the mercy of what others will tell us and select for us. The idea of communality is this: either we think that these are highly creative places, or we let others think and create for us

<sup>56</sup> “Literatura comparada hoje: estado da arte”.

wherever language teaching takes place in our country.

#### IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of the article was to highlight the mysterious transformation that takes place when a universal element like water is thematized in literature from time immemorial and how today this literature can be read in local communities where foreign language teaching takes place. This teaching establishes a new relationship not only with this little-known literature known in Brazil, such as Ibarbourou’s, but with an innovative imaginary that starts from Latin American soil without any kind of borrowing or foreign affiliation. The role of water in Ibarbourou potentially differs from that of the fairy tale, because, as we’ve said, water is life and appears humanised in his literature. There is a real religious and profane song present and that can make the Brazilian student, in the Portuguese language classroom in Basic Education language classroom, where Spanish is taught, understand that a natural resource so close to them can acquire not only life in front of them, but true protagonism, and its main teaching is not just to “educate” the literary reader to achieve this or that virtue, as in fairy tales, but to leverage them towards a truly *local* reading, which begins in the very imagery and symbolic architecture that Ibarbourou prepares in his fictional writing. Thus, the water in Ibarbourou shows not only a freedom to be different from the water in Perrault-Doré, but also a new, non-magical and non-traditional place of enunciation perfectly localise and culturally rich for these young readers who are learning a new foreign language never before heard in the in the Jequitinhonha Valley, so that the empty life of the heroine of the short story “The fairies” is not repeated in the water-characters of Ibarbourou: they all have full lives and are self-assured, because they know where they come from and what they are capable of doing in their own habitat. Everything is seductive and seduces creatively. This shows that writing and reading literature, on Latin American soil, is also to provide a human life with personality, as Martí has been teaching us with his delicious writings in *The golden age* (1889).

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# “Reclaiming Space: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of Nature and Memory in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”

*Abdelghani El Mity*

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted concept of space in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* through a postcolonial ecocritical lens, focusing on how natural and domestic spaces serve as sites of memory, trauma, and healing for African American characters in the aftermath of slavery. The study examines three key spaces—the Ohio River, Baby Suggs’ Clearing, and the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road—as symbolic realms where the characters navigate their fractured identities and confront the lingering ghosts of their past. The Ohio River emerges as a liminal space of rebirth and emancipation, while the Clearing represents a communal sanctuary for spiritual and emotional healing. The haunted house, on the other hand, embodies the inescapable past, where the trauma of slavery continues to haunt the present. Through these spaces, Morrison not only critiques the environmental and psychological scars of colonialism but also highlights the resilience and agency of her characters as they seek to reclaim their histories and identities. This article argues that Morrison’s portrayal of space in *Beloved* underscores the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds, offering a profound commentary on the enduring impact of slavery and the possibility of redemption through nature and community.

*Keywords:* toni morrison, beloved, postcolonial ecocriticism, space, memory, trauma, healing, ohio river, baby suggs’ clearing, haunted house, african american literature, slavery, environmental agency.

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## I. INTRODUCTION: *BELLOVED*: A SPACE WHERE THE VOICELESS FIND THEIR VOICE

*Beloved*, published in 1987, stands as one of Toni Morrison’s most acclaimed works. Within a year of its release, the novel earned the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and secured its place as a finalist for the National Book Award in 1987. The New York Times conducted a survey among writers and literary critics, ranking *Beloved* as the finest piece of American fiction spanning the years 1981 to 2006. This powerful narrative, set in the aftermath of the American Civil War, talks about a troubled family of former slaves living in Cincinnati, haunted by a malevolent spirit, and it “revolves around the wish to forget and a necessity to remember” (Naomi Mandel 585).

The protagonist, Sethe (Margaret Garner), was born into slavery and escaped from Kentucky to Ohio in 1856. Despite nearly two decades of freedom, she remains captive to haunting memories of Sweet Home, the once-beautiful yet horrific farm where she endured the atrocities of slavery. The ghost of Sethe’s deceased, nameless baby, engraved with the single word *Beloved* on its tombstone, continues to torment her household. Although Sethe strives to suppress the past, its echoes persistently reverberate in her memories and affect those around her. The arrival of a mysterious teenage girl, identifying herself as *Beloved*, triggers the eruption of Sethe’s agonizing secret into the present.

Toni Morrison weaves a narrative that blends the visionary elements of legend with the undeniable truths of history. *Beloved* stands as an enduring masterpiece in American literature, highlighting

Morrison's profound storytelling and capturing the profound impact of slavery's legacy on women and their families. Morrison confirms: "I write for black women. We are not addressing the men, as some white female writers do. We are not attacking each other, as both black and white men do. Black women writers look at things in an unforgiving/loving way. They are writing to repossess, re-name, re-own." (N. McKay). Yet, Morrison refuses to identify her works as feminist, and when asked why? She answered:

In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination, I can't take positions that are closed. Everything I've ever done, in the writing world, has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors, sometimes, not even closing the book – leaving the endings open for reinterpretation, revisitation, a little ambiguity. (Jaffrey Zia)

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* stands as a literary masterpiece that transcends the boundaries of time and narrative, delving into the profound complexities of human experience. Within the intricate tapestry of this work, Morrison crafts a powerful exploration of identity, trauma, and the enduring legacy of slavery, for Morrison: "Modern life begins with slavery" (P. Gilroy). One of the striking dimensions of *Beloved* is its role as a sacred space, a literary sanctuary where the marginalized and voiceless slaves find resonance and, more importantly, discover the agency to articulate their silenced histories. This evocative narrative becomes a poignant testament to the transformative power of storytelling, where the unheard voices emerge from the shadows and claim their rightful place in the discourse of shared humanity. In the heart of Morrison's creation, *Beloved* becomes a sanctuary, a realm where the voiceless not only find their voices but also contribute to a collective and resonant chorus that echoes across the corridors of literature and history.

In Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the Ohio River, the sacred clearing of Baby Suggs, and the hauntingly evocative 124 house emerge as profound spaces that transcend mere physical settings. These spaces serve as poignant vessels for the

expression of silenced voices and the narration of the African American experience during the post-slavery era. The Ohio River, a symbolic boundary between slavery and freedom, becomes a liminal space where characters confront the traumas of their past and forge a path toward self-discovery. Baby Suggs' clearing, a sacred sanctuary within the natural landscape, serves as a communal space for healing and spiritual revival, allowing the voiceless to reclaim their agency and articulate their stories. The haunted 124 house, shrouded in the lingering specter of the past, becomes a compelling backdrop where the ghosts of slavery and the unresolved traumas of its survivors find expression. Within these carefully crafted spaces, Morrison magnificently provides a platform for the voiceless to speak, ensuring that the African American characters of *Beloved* are not only heard but also empowered to narrate their intricate and often silenced histories. So how does Morrison portray water as a space of rebirth and emancipation for Sethe and her family? How nature is depicted as a space for healing through Baby Suggs clearing? And how is the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road transformed into a space of inescapable past in Morrison's *Beloved* ?

## II. WATER AS A SPACE OF REBIRTH AND EMANCIPATION: THE OHIO RIVER

Life has its origins in water, and rivers play a crucial role in nurturing both human existence and culture. Humans not only rely on rivers for sustenance but also derive strength from them. Across various ancient cultures, a recurring theme is the veneration of a "mother river." The deep connection between rivers and black communities can be traced back to historical rivers such as the Nile, and Congo, with a tradition of profound respect towards these water bodies. Rivers symbolize both tranquility and turbulence, mirroring the ebb and flow of historical events. In the case of African Americans in the 19th century, the Ohio River held immense significance, representing life and redemption in their narrative.

The Ohio River has historically represented freedom...The northern part of the state had

underground railway stations and a history of black people escaping into Canada, but the southern part of the state is as much Kentucky as there is, complete with cross burnings. Ohio is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base. (C. Tate 119)

Tate presents a nuanced view of Ohio's historical significance in the context of American slavery and the quest for freedom. Tate highlights the Ohio River as a symbol of freedom, marking a physical and symbolic boundary between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North. This river, therefore, represents a critical juncture in the journey of enslaved African Americans seeking freedom, particularly through the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses used to escape to free states and Canada. The quote contrasts the northern and southern parts of Ohio to underscore the state's complex identity. In the north, Ohio is depicted as a beacon of hope for black people fleeing slavery, with its underground railway stations and a history of aiding their escape into Canada. This part of Ohio embodies the ideals of liberty and justice that are foundational to the American ethos.

Conversely, the southern part of Ohio is described as being "as much Kentucky as there is," alluding to its cultural and ideological alignment with the slave-holding South, complete with manifestations of racial hatred such as cross burnings. This starkly contrasts with the image of Ohio as a land of freedom and highlights the persistence of deeply entrenched racism and division, even in states that were nominally free. Tate concludes by reflecting on Ohio as a "curious juxtaposition" of America's highest ideals and its most base realities. This juxtaposition serves as a microcosm of the broader American experience, where the lofty ideals of freedom, equality, and justice coexist with the harsh realities of racism, division, and oppression. Ohio, in this sense, encapsulates the ongoing struggle to reconcile these conflicting aspects of the American identity and the continuous effort to live up to the nation's founding principles.

In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a post-slavery America, weaving a complex narrative of haunting histories and unrelenting struggles for identity and freedom. Among the various motifs that Morrison masterfully employs, water, and particularly the Ohio River, emerges as a symbolic space of profound significance. Within this aquatic realm, Morrison deftly explores the transformative power of water as a metaphor for rebirth and emancipation. The Ohio River, coursing through the narrative, takes on a dual nature, serving not only as a geographical boundary but also as a symbolic threshold between the shackles of slavery and the promise of liberation. This exploration of water as a catalyst for change becomes a central theme, as the river becomes a conduit through which characters like Sethe and her family navigate the complexities of their pasts, finding solace and emancipation in the ebb and flow of its currents. In this analysis, we delve into the symbolic depths of water as a space of rebirth and emancipation in Morrison's *Beloved*, uncovering the layers of meaning woven into the novel's narrative.

The Ohio River represents a boundary between slavery and freedom, and crossing it is a transformative experience for Sethe. The river is where Sethe's baby is born, symbolizing a new beginning:

On a riverbank in the cool of a summer evening two women struggled under a shower of silvery blue. They never expected to see each other again in this world and at the moment couldn't care less. But there on a summer night surrounded by bluefern they did something together appropriately and well. A pateroller passing would have sniggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws—a slave and a barefoot white woman with unpinned hair—wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. But no pateroller came and no preacher. The water sucked and swallowed itself beneath them. There was nothing to disturb them at their work. So they did it appropriately and well. (Morrison, *Beloved* 84- 85)

The act of crossing the water is a pivotal moment for Sethe, as it represents her transition from the bondage of slavery to the promise of freedom. The water here is not just a physical barrier but a symbolic one, marking the boundary between two worlds and two states of being. The phrase “sucked and swallowed itself” suggests a kind of self-contained cycle, reminiscent of the natural processes of renewal and rebirth. Water, in many traditions, is associated with cleansing and new beginnings, and here it seems to be renewing itself, just as Sethe is seeking to renew her own life. The water’s self-consuming action could also be seen as a metaphor for the way Sethe must consume her own past, confront it, and emerge anew on the other side.

The fact that “there was nothing to disturb them at their work” indicates a moment of peace and focus, a rare respite from the chaos and danger that have characterized Sethe’s life up to this point. This tranquility allows Sethe to perform the task at hand “appropriately and well,” which in this context means giving birth to her child and thus literally bringing new life into the world at the very moment she is seeking to rebirth her own life in freedom. Therefore, the theme of water as a space of rebirth in *Beloved* is reinforced by showing how the Ohio River serves as a natural force that aids in the characters’ transformation. It is a place where the old can be left behind and the new can be embraced, where the characters can perform the work of self-renewal without the interference of the oppressive structures from which they are fleeing.

The Ohio River is also a source of sustenance and life, providing Sethe with the water she desperately needs after her arduous journey to freedom:

She begged him for water and he gave her some of the Ohio in a jar. Sethe drank it all and begged more. The clanging was back in her head but she refused to believe that she had come all that way, endured all she had, to die on the wrong side of the river. (90)

This passage can be considered a powerful intersection of environmental, historical, and

cultural narratives. The act of begging for water and receiving it from the Ohio River encapsulates the life-giving and sustaining properties of natural resources, which are often central to ecocritical readings. Water, in this context, is not merely a physical necessity for survival but also a symbol of the natural world’s role in human liberation and transformation. The Ohio River, in particular, is emblematic of the boundary between the ecological spaces of slavery and freedom. It is a natural feature that has been imbued with profound social and historical significance due to its geographical location as a divider between slave and free states.

Sethe’s consumption of the river water in a jar signifies her taking in the essence of freedom, as the river itself represents a threshold she must cross to achieve emancipation. The water from the Ohio River is thus not just hydrating her body but also symbolically nourishing her spirit and will to live as a free person. This act of drinking is a form of communion with the landscape that has witnessed the trauma of slavery and now participates in the rebirth of those who cross it. The “clanging” in Sethe’s head can be interpreted as the psychological remnants of her traumatic past, which continue to haunt her even as she seeks to move beyond them. The refusal to die on the wrong side of the river is a testament to her determination to redefine her identity in relation to the land. It is a rejection of the colonial imposition that has dictated her life up to this point and an assertion of her agency in choosing where her life will be lived and how her story will be told.

In this light, Morrison’s work at hand reflects the complex interplay between the environment and the postcolonial experience. It underscores the role of the natural world in the historical experiences of colonized peoples, serving both as a witness to their suffering and as a participant in their quest for autonomy and self-definition. The ecocritical lens allows us to see how Morrison weaves environmental elements into her narrative to enrich the experience of her characters, and behind them the experience of African Americans who suffered the atrocities of slavery. Morrison emphasizes the interconnectedness of the

characters with their environment. The natural world is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the process of healing and rebirth, Morrison narrates: “Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash” (261). The wave of sound that is “wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees” illustrates the power of nature to affect change and to resonate with the characters’ emotional states. This wave of sound that “broke over Sethe” and caused her to “tremble like the baptized in its wash” aligns with the ecocritical notion that human emotions and experiences are deeply entwined with the non-human world. The baptismal imagery further reinforces the theme of rebirth. Baptism is a ritual of purification and a symbolic act of being born anew, which in the novel is paralleled by the characters’ desire to cleanse themselves of the traumas of slavery and to emerge with a renewed sense of self. The natural setting of the Clearing, combined with the spiritual connotations of water, creates a space where personal and collective histories can be confronted.

Another aspect of water as a space of resurrection and rebirth in *Beloved* is the renaissance of Beloved from water like a child born from a watery sac, Morrison writes:

A fully dressed woman walked out of the water. She barely gained the dry bank of the stream before she sat down and leaned against a mulberry tree. All day and all night she sat there, her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat. Everything hurt but her lungs most of all. Sopping wet and breathing shallow she spent those hours trying to negotiate the weight of her eyelids. The day breeze blew her dress dry; the night wind wrinkled it. Nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by. If they had, chances are they would have hesitated before approaching her. Not because she was wet, or dozing or had what sounded like asthma, but because amid all that she was smiling. (50)

This passage from chapter five in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* presents a vivid image of a woman emerging from water, a symbol that is rich in meaning. From a postcolonial perspective, water in *Beloved* can be seen as a metaphor for the Middle Passage, the transatlantic slave trade route that forcibly brought Africans to the Americas. The woman’s emergence from the water can be interpreted as a symbolic rebirth, an act of emerging from a history of oppression and the trauma of slavery into a new existence. This act of rebirth is not without its difficulties, as indicated by the woman’s pain and the effort she expends just to keep her eyes open. The struggle to emerge and the subsequent rebirth can be seen as a metaphor for the broader African American experience of striving for a new identity and place in a post-slavery, postcolonial world.

From a green cultural studies perspective, water is often associated with life, cleansing, and renewal. Beloved’s sitting by the mulberry tree, a symbol of growth and nurturing, further emphasizes the theme of rebirth. The natural elements—water, the tree, the day breeze, and the night wind—interact with the woman, affecting her physical state and contributing to her transformation. The ecocritical reading highlights the interconnectedness of the human and non-human worlds and suggests that the environment itself participates in the Beloved’s rebirth and healing process. Moreover, the fact that the woman is smiling amid her pain and struggle suggests a complex emotional state, one that acknowledges the hardship of her past while also embracing the potential for hope and renewal. This smile could be interpreted as an act of resistance against the dehumanizing experiences of her past, asserting her humanity and resilience in the face of suffering.

What is more, in an otherworldly portrayal of the fluid boundary between the earthly realm and the afterlife, Sethe and her daughter remain spiritually connected, with the departed spirit lingering “in the water under the bridge” (214). Interpreters discern in this chapter a scene evoking a collective unconscious, a hazy

recollection embedded in the black diaspora's shared memory—the dispersal of Africans via ships to slave ports in the New World. Despite Beloved's lack of direct knowledge about the harrowing journey, her unity with the deceased compels her to undergo the confined and oppressive conditions of black bodies in the hold of the slaves' ship.

The reference to the departed spirit “in the water under the bridge” suggests a connection between the character Beloved and the element of water as a site of memory and return. Water, in this context, is not just a physical space but also a metaphysical one where the spirits of those who have passed away linger, unable to fully detach from the world they have left behind. This lingering presence in the water signifies the unresolved traumas and the continuous impact of the past on the present. Additionally, the bridge becomes a liminal space where Beloved attempts to join Sethe in the water. This liminality reflects the boundary between life and death, the past and the present. The failure to connect underscores the challenges of reconciling with a traumatic history and the difficulty of finding closure.

Furthermore, the theme of water in *Beloved* can be considered as a symbol of sustenance and struggle. The theme of water underscores the characters' fraught relationship with the natural world, one that is deeply intertwined with the experience of enslavement and the colonial exploitation of both land and people:

He, Sixo and both of the Pauls sat under Brother pouring water from a gourd over their heads, and through eyes streaming with well water, they watched the confusion of tassels in the field below. It had been hard, hard, hard sitting there erect as dogs, watching corn stalks dance at noon. The water running over their heads made it worse. (27)

The act of pouring water from a gourd over the heads of Sweet Home plantation's slaves while sitting under the tree named Brother suggests a connection to the natural world and a momentary respite from their laborious existence. The water, a source of life and renewal, contrasts with the

oppressive heat of the day, symbolizing the harsh conditions under which the enslaved individuals are forced to work.

The water's flow over the slaves' heads, while potentially refreshing, is described as exacerbating the difficulty of their situation, indicating that even elements of nature that should provide relief are transformed into sources of discomfort by the conditions of their enslavement. This reflects the postcolonial ecocritical idea that the environment, while inherently neutral or even nurturing, can be experienced negatively by those who are oppressed or marginalized. Moreover, the characters' connection to the land and the natural elements like water and corn is complex. While they rely on the land for sustenance and have an intimate knowledge of it, their relationship is mediated by the violence and control of slavery. The corn stalks they watch, for instance, are part of the plantation economy that exploits both the land and the people. The water, in this case, becomes a reminder of their lack of autonomy, as even their interactions with the environment are dictated by the needs and desires of their oppressors.

*Beloved* is written in remembrance of the lives of sixty million Africans, including those lost during the Middle Passage, as well as others who survived only to endure the cruelties of slavery. Morrison gives voice to these silenced spirits to narrate their stories and resurrect them from historical amnesia. Water is a symbol of rebirth and also a synonym of the dehumanizing effects of slavery, the maternal bond, and the struggle for identity:

She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. “She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe.” (62)

Nan's words to Sethe convey the brutal reality that both Sethe's mother and Nan were subjected to repeated sexual assaults by the crew during the Middle Passage, the sea voyage that brought them from Africa to America as slaves. The phrase "together from the sea" suggests a shared origin and a bond formed through the collective trauma of the transatlantic slave trade.

The act of Sethe's mother "throwing away" the children born from these assaults signifies a form of resistance. By refusing to accept or name these children, she rejects the violation and the offspring that resulted from it, which she could not view as her own under such circumstances. This act of discarding is a tragic assertion of agency in a situation where enslaved women had very little control over their bodies and lives. In stark contrast, Sethe is the child her mother kept, the one she "gave the name of the black man" and embraced with love. This distinction highlights the importance of parentage, naming, and acceptance in the formation of identity. Sethe's mother's decision to name her after her father and to physically embrace her signifies an acknowledgment of Sethe as her legitimate child, one born out of a consensual relationship, presumably with a black man who was not part of the crew.

Nan's repetition of "Never. Never." emphasizes the finality and the depth of Sethe's mother's rejection of the other children. It also underscores the emotional weight of the decision to keep Sethe, which is further amplified by Nan's insistence, "Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe," as if to ensure that Sethe understands the significance of her own existence and the choices her mother made. This passage is a powerful example of Morrison's ability to convey the complexities of slavery's legacy, the nuances of motherhood under such oppressive conditions, and the enduring quest for personal identity amidst a history of violence and loss. The Middle Passage, water, and the sea are other witnesses on the history of the oppressed and their White oppressors.

In Morrison's *Beloved*, the river and the Sea Islands could have functioned as refuge for

runaway slaves, offering a potentially safer and less detectable route to freedom, away from the dangers and obstacles that Paul D and other slaves encountered on their journey to freedom, "If they had known about it, they would have avoided not only Alfred And the beautiful feldspar, but Savannah too and headed for the Sea Islands on the river that slid down from the Blue Ridge Mountains. But they didn't know" (111).

To conclude, In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, water serves as a powerful and multifaceted symbol, representing both life and death, freedom and confinement. While the novel primarily focuses on the experiences of African American slaves and the haunting legacy of slavery, the theme of water offers a lens through which to examine their relationship with the environment. African American slaves are depicted as environmentally attached through their connection to water sources. The characters in *Beloved* often find solace, healing, and a sense of community near bodies of water. For example, Sethe, the protagonist, escapes to the riverbank with her newborn daughter Denver, seeking refuge and a connection to the natural world. The river becomes a space of cleansing and rejuvenation, representing both the trauma of slavery and the possibility of spiritual renewal. The water here is a life-giving force, present at the moment of Denver's birth, and it is undisturbed by the societal structures that oppress Sethe. Additionally, water in the novel is associated with memories and ancestral ties. The character of Sethe is haunted by the memory of her traumatic escape across the Ohio River, where she attempts to find freedom for herself and her children. This traumatic water crossing becomes a central motif, and the river itself becomes a repository of collective memories for the community.

Furthermore, the character Beloved, who represents the spirit of Sethe's deceased daughter, is associated with water and often described as "watery." Beloved's presence blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead, symbolizing the enduring impact of slavery on both the individual and the community. She is seen engaging with the water in a creek, gazing at her reflection and

touching the water's surface, which ripples and folds, suggesting a sense of unity with the natural world.

### III. NATURE AS A SPACE FOR HEALING: BABY SUGGS AND THE CLEARING

In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the complex interplay between nature and the characters' healing processes takes center stage, offering a profound exploration of the transformative power embedded within the natural world. This part of the study delves into the pivotal role of nature as a space for healing, focusing specifically on two emblematic elements: Baby Suggs and the Clearing. Through this element, Morrison weaves a narrative that transcends the real and delves into the idyllic imagined spaces, portraying nature as not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the characters' journey towards liberation and self-discovery. The exploration of this natural space unfolds a nuanced understanding of how the environment, in its various forms, becomes an essential element for healing and reclaiming agency, particularly for the enslaved individuals grappling with the haunting legacy of their past. So, how does Morrison depict natural spaces, such as the Clearing, as a place for healing the wounds inflicted by the traumatic experience of slavery on the characters in *Beloved*? Additionally, how does this space portray African Americans in the novel as environmentally connected individuals and green agents?

To start with, the Clearing is a secluded area in the forest where Baby Suggs, a spiritual leader and former slave, holds gatherings for the black community. It is a place of emotional and spiritual healing, where the characters can connect with nature and each other away from the oppressive structures of slavery and racism. The clearing is also a space which connects African slaves to their African roots and African heritage, as Rachel Elizabeth Harding confirms:

[African] religions all reflect a powerful, shielding spirit whose roots and branches represent the links between the spiritual and material worlds, as well as the connections between living human beings and their

ancestors. The Africans who came across the Atlantic as slaves carried with them this tradition of recognizing a sacred tree as the dwelling of a protective divinity and as a symbol of their own relationship to spirit and to lineage. (268)

Harding highlights the profound spiritual and cultural significance of trees within African religions, emphasizing their role as symbols of connectivity and protection. This symbolism is deeply rooted in the belief that trees serve as a bridge between the spiritual and material realms, as well as between the living and their ancestors. The sacred tree, in this context, is not merely a physical entity but a manifestation of a protective divinity that safeguards and guides the community. This belief system, carried by Africans across the Atlantic during the transatlantic slave trade, underscores the resilience of African spiritual traditions and their ability to provide solace and a sense of belonging in the face of the dehumanizing experience of slavery. The sacred tree thus becomes a potent symbol of the enslaved Africans' enduring connection to their spiritual heritage and lineage, offering a source of strength and identity amidst the brutal dislocations of the slave experience. Harding underscores the importance of understanding the spiritual and cultural practices of African peoples as dynamic and living traditions that have played a crucial role in shaping the identities and resilience of African diasporic communities.

From an ecocritical standpoint, the Clearing represents a space of environmental purity and sanctuary, contrasting with the human-dominated and often exploitative environments that the characters have endured. Also, the Clearing can be seen as a reclaimed space where the characters assert their autonomy and identity. It is a refuge from the dehumanizing experiences of slavery, where they can engage with the natural world on their own terms. This act of reclamation is a form of resistance against the colonial mindset that views land as a resource to be owned and controlled. In the Clearing, the characters find a sense of belonging and community that is not dictated by the colonial power structures.

The Clearing also symbolizes a return to a more harmonious relationship with the land, which is a key aspect of many indigenous and pre-colonial cultures disrupted by colonialism. Baby Suggs' role as a preacher in the Clearing underscores the importance of oral traditions and communal gatherings in fostering a collective identity that is deeply connected to the land. Furthermore, the Clearing can be interpreted as a space of ecological healing, where the natural world provides solace and restoration to those who have been psychologically and physically scarred by the brutality of slavery. The forest itself becomes a character, offering a sense of peace and continuity that contrasts with the characters' turbulent pasts.

For Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, the Clearing is a natural space where she can heal from the wounds of loss, she felt towards Baby Suggs. The Clearing is a powerful communal and natural space which provides solace and the possibility of recovery. Sethe's yearning for the Clearing and the memory of Baby Suggs' vibrant spirit illustrates the enduring impact of her legacy and the community's need for a space where they can come together to heal and honor their past:

Nine years without the fingers or the voice of Baby Suggs was too much. And words whispered in the keeping room were too little. The butter-smear'd face of a man God made none sweeter than demanded more: an arch built or a robe sewn. Some fixing ceremony. Sethe decided to go to the Clearing, back where Baby Suggs had danced in sunlight. (Morrison, *Beloved* 86)

This quote encapsulates the profound sense of loss and the need for healing that permeates the novel. The absence of Baby Suggs, a matriarchal figure and spiritual healer, is deeply felt by Sethe, the protagonist. Baby Suggs' fingers and voice symbolize her nurturing touch and wisdom, which provided comfort and guidance to the community. The "nine years" without her presence underscores a prolonged period of grief and disconnection from the solace that Baby Suggs once offered. The "words whispered in the keeping room" suggest the inadequacy of quiet,

private mourning and the need for a more significant, communal form of healing. The reference to the "butter-smear'd face of a man" evokes the memory of a loved one, possibly a reference to Halle, Sethe's husband, who is remembered with fondness and whose absence also demands recognition and a form of closure.

Sethe's decision to return to the Clearing, where Baby Suggs once "danced in sunlight," indicates a desire to reconnect with the healing power of this natural space. The Clearing, as a place of communal gathering and spiritual release, represents a space where the community could openly express their emotions and find collective healing. The mention of "danced in sunlight" conveys a sense of freedom and joy that was once experienced there, contrasting with the darkness of their past traumas. The "fixing ceremony" Sethe seeks is a ritual of repair, a way to mend the emotional and spiritual wounds left by the absence of Baby Suggs and the horrors of slavery. This passage highlights the importance of ritual, community, and connection to nature in the process of healing. It also reflects the characters' ongoing struggle to reconcile their painful histories with their present lives and their search for a way to move forward.

Moreover, the Clearing is a sacred space of communal healing and emotional release for the formerly enslaved. Baby Suggs, the spiritual leader of the community, uses the Clearing to facilitate a ritual that allows each group within the community—children, men, and women—to express a range of emotions that were often suppressed under the dehumanizing conditions of slavery:

When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land inland in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees.

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. Then she shouted, "Let the children come!" and they ran from the trees toward her.

"Let your mothers hear you laugh," she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.

Then "Let the grown men come," she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.

"Let your wives and your children see you dance," she told them, and groundlife shuddered under their feet.

Finally she called the women to her. "Cry," she told them. "For the living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose. (87-88)

The Clearing itself is described as a "wide-open place cut deep in the woods," suggesting a hidden sanctuary that is both part of the natural world and separate from the everyday spaces controlled by white society. The fact that it is known only to deer and the unnamed individuals who cleared it implies a connection to a time before the current community, perhaps even to a time before slavery, and to the natural world that exists beyond human affairs. Baby Suggs' role in this space is central. She is described as "holy," indicating her spiritual authority and the reverence the community holds for her. Her actions are deliberate and ritualistic, from the silent prayer to the placement of her stick, signaling her readiness to begin the ceremony.

The call-and-response structure of the ritual is significant. Baby Suggs summons each group to perform an act that affirms their humanity. She invites the children to laugh, as an expression of joy and innocence that slavery attempted to quash. The laughter of children symbolizes hope and the future. The men are called to dance, as an act of physical freedom and self-expression. Dancing allows them to reclaim their bodies, which were treated as property under slavery, and

to demonstrate strength and resilience in front of their families. Finally, the women are told to cry for the living and the dead. This is a profound moment of collective mourning and catharsis, acknowledging the immense loss and suffering they have endured, as well as a space to grieve openly without fear of retribution or judgment. The Clearing, then, is a place where the community can perform these acts of emotional liberation, away from the white gaze. It is a space where they can be fully human, where they can express the full range of human emotions—joy, pride, sorrow—that were often denied to them. The passage also highlights the interconnectedness of the community. The adults cannot help but smile at the children's laughter, and the ground itself "shuddered under their feet."

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* there is a complex interplay of hope, disillusionment, and the search for solace in the aftermath of trauma. Baby Suggs, a source of strength for the formerly enslaved community, experiences a crisis of faith following the arrival of her daughter-in-law, Sethe. The "Clearing," which once represented a place of healing and spiritual rejuvenation, becomes a symbol of lost grace and the limits of faith in the face of overwhelming suffering:

Baby Suggs, holy, believed she had lied. There was no grace—imaginary or real—and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that. Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived. Yet it was to the Clearing that Sethe determined to go—to pay tribute to Halle. Before the light changed, while it was still the green blessed place she remembered: misty with plant steam and the decay of berries. (89)

The phrase "Baby Suggs, holy," underscores her revered status within the community, but the revelation that she "believed she had lied" suggests a profound sense of betrayal within herself. The lie pertains to the promise of grace, which she no longer believes exists. The Clearing, where she led her community in rituals of dance

and emotional release, was supposed to be a space where the scars of slavery could be momentarily forgotten and where grace could be found. However, the harsh realities that followed Sethe's arrival—most notably, the trauma of Sethe's past and the ghostly presence that haunts 124 Bluestone Road—shatter Baby Suggs' belief in the possibility of such grace.

The “sunlit dance in a Clearing” symbolizes the moments of joy and communal connection that Baby Suggs facilitated, but she now sees these efforts as futile in the face of the relentless pain that her community endures. The “collapse” of her faith, love, imagination, and heart speaks to the emotional and spiritual exhaustion that comes from bearing witness to so much suffering. Despite Baby Suggs' loss of faith, Sethe is drawn to the Clearing to pay tribute to her husband, Halle. The Clearing still holds significance for Sethe as a “green blessed place,” a memory untainted by the traumas that have unfolded since. The “misty with plant steam and the decay of berries” evokes a sense of both life and decay, reflecting the natural cycle of growth and death, and perhaps metaphorically, the cycle of pain and healing.

Sethe's determination to visit the Clearing before the “light changed” indicates a desire to reconnect with a time of perceived purity and hope, to honor Halle, and perhaps to find a measure of the grace that Baby Suggs has declared nonexistent. This act of tribute is Sethe's way of seeking closure and attempting to reconcile the beauty of her memories of the Clearing with the harsh realities of her present struggles and the traumas of her past.

Furthermore, the novel at hand captures the essence of the Clearing as a space of communal catharsis and the pivotal role Baby Suggs played in facilitating this process. *Beloved* evokes the powerful sense of place and memory associated with the Clearing, it underscores the importance of having a safe space to express emotions freely and the need for a compassionate leader to help navigate the journey towards healing, because, “In the Clearing, Sethe found Baby's old preaching rock and remembered the smell of

leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts. With Baby Suggs' heart in charge, the people let go” (94). Sethe's recollection of “Baby's old preaching rock” serves as a tangible connection to Baby Suggs, who is a maternal figure and spiritual leader for the community. The rock symbolizes the foundation and strength of Baby Suggs' influence, as well as the stability she provided to those around her.

The sensory details of “the smell of leaves simmering in the sun” and “the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs of the chestnuts” create a vivid and immersive atmosphere. These elements highlight the Clearing as a place alive with energy and transformation, where the natural environment responds to the collective emotions of the people gathered there. The phrase “With Baby Suggs' heart in charge” personifies her heart as the driving force behind the community's ability to “let go.” It suggests that Baby Suggs' compassion, wisdom, and spiritual leadership were instrumental in allowing the people to release their pent-up emotions, whether it be pain, sorrow, or joy. Her heart represents the emotional core of the community, guiding them through the process of healing and finding some semblance of peace.

In essence, Morrison speaks to the core struggle of the characters in *Beloved* to not only survive the horrors of slavery but to also find a way to live with the freedom they have fought so hard to achieve. She underscores the idea that true freedom encompasses both the physical and the psychological, and that the latter can be a more arduous and enduring battle. Sethe “Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (95). The distinction between physical liberation and psychological or emotional emancipation is another profound theme in *Beloved*. The process of “claiming oneself” is depicted as a gradual and multifaceted journey that goes beyond the mere act of escaping physical bondage.

The phrase “Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself”

suggests that the protagonist's self-possession is a collective experience as much as it is an individual one. The reference to "124" and "the Clearing" signifies the importance of place in this process. "124" is the address of Sethe's home, a space that has been both a sanctuary and a site of haunting, while "the Clearing" is a communal natural space where the characters gather for spiritual and emotional healing under the guidance of Baby Suggs. To Sethe, the Clearing is essential for her physical healing and psychological liberation.

The distinction between "freeing yourself" and "claiming ownership of that freed self" highlights the two stages of liberation. The first stage, "freeing yourself," refers to the physical escape from slavery, a tangible and immediate form of liberation. However, the second stage, "claiming ownership of that freed self," is more complex and involves an internal journey towards self-realization and autonomy. This internal emancipation requires one to confront and process the psychological scars of enslavement, to rebuild a sense of identity that is not defined by the trauma of the past, and to assert one's agency and worth in a world that has dehumanized and objectified them.

The Clearing represents a place that holds historical and emotional significance for the characters. It underscores the importance of community and the act of caring for one another as a means of healing from the wounds of the past, Morrison writes: "We must look a sight, she thought, and closed her eyes to see it: the three women in the middle of the Clearing, at the base of the rock where Baby Suggs, holy, had loved. One seated, yielding up her throat to the kind hands of one of the two kneeling before her" (97). This quote is rich with symbolism and speaks to the themes of healing, community, and the reclaiming of self that are central to the novel. The image of Sethe, Beloved, and Denver in the Clearing, a place of spiritual significance and communal gathering, is a powerful representation of the support and solidarity that the characters find in each other as they work through their traumatic pasts.

The Clearing is where Baby Suggs, the spiritual mother of the community, preached and where she encouraged the formerly enslaved to love themselves—a radical act after a life of being treated as property. The reference to Baby Suggs and the love she embodied sets a tone of reverence and continuity, suggesting that the healing practices she initiated in the Clearing continue to resonate with the characters. The woman seated and "yielding up her throat to the kind hands" symbolizes vulnerability and trust. The throat can be seen as a metaphor for voice and self-expression, and in yielding it up, the woman is allowing herself to be cared for and to potentially find her voice again after being silenced by the trauma of slavery. The "kind hands" represent the gentle and nurturing support of the community, which is essential for individual healing. Sethe's thought, "We must look a sight," indicates an awareness of how they might appear to an outsider, but her closing her eyes to "see it" suggests that the true significance of this moment is not in how it looks but in how it feels. It is an intimate and transformative experience that transcends the visual and is deeply felt within the community of women.

The Clearing and the natural world are spaces of healing for the living and spaces of honor for the dead. The Clearing is an important place for the Black community, but, also, a space of tension between African American cultural practices and the imposed rules of white society. Upon the death of Baby Suggs:

Sethe had no instructions except "Take her to the Clearing," which he tried to do, but was prevented by some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest. Baby Suggs went down next to the baby with its throat cut—a neighborliness that Stamp wasn't sure had Baby Suggs Approval. (171)

The Clearing is a significant location within the novel even for the dead, a space where the community, particularly the formerly enslaved, could gather for spiritual and emotional healing led by Baby Suggs, who is a central figure of solace and guidance. Sethe's simple instruction to "Take her to the Clearing" upon Baby Suggs'

death signifies a desire to honor her in a place that held profound meaning for her and the community she nurtured. However, the imposition of “some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest” represents the ongoing control and interference of white society, even in death. This rule is an extension of the systemic oppression that the characters have faced throughout their lives, dictating their actions and undermining their autonomy even in their mourning and burial practices.

The juxtaposition of Baby Suggs’ burial next to the baby with its throat cut is a stark reminder of the violence and trauma that the characters have endured. The “neighborliness” of their final resting places is questioned by Stamp Paid (the former slave who smuggled Sethe and her family across the Ohio River into Cincinnati), who doubts whether Baby Suggs would have approved of being buried next to the evidence of such a horrific act. This doubt reflects the complexity of emotions and relationships within the community, as well as the difficulty in finding peace and closure after a life marked by such brutality. This is another illustration of the struggle for self-determination and the right to honor one’s dead in a way that is meaningful to the community, as opposed to conforming to the dictates of an oppressive society. It also underscores the deep scars left by slavery and the challenges of reconciling a painful past with the desire for a respectful and dignified remembrance of loved ones.

In summary, the Clearing in *Beloved* is a potent symbol of resistance, healing, and reconnection with the natural world. It stands as a testament to the resilience of the characters and their ability to carve out spaces of freedom and self-expression within a postcolonial landscape marked by trauma and displacement. Toni Morrison’s characters in *Beloved* exhibit a profound environmental attachment, particularly in relation to the Clearing, which serves as a space of spiritual and emotional significance. The Clearing is not merely a backdrop but an active participant in the lives of the characters, offering a place of solace and communal connection that is deeply intertwined with the natural world. The

environmental attachment of Morrison’s characters is evident in the way they interact with the Clearing. It is a place of sensory experiences, where the characters are attuned to the sounds, sights, and smells of nature. The Clearing is a living, breathing entity that responds to and reflects the characters’ emotions and states of being, making it an essential element in their journey toward healing, growth, love, fulfillment, and reclaiming their lives. As Barbara Christian notes: “Morrison views humans as part nature and nature as part of human beings; consequently, each person has an inherent need for growth, love, and fulfillment” (qtd, in Wallace and Armbruster 217).

#### IV. BELOVED AS A SPACE OF AN INESCAPABLE PAST: THE GHOST AND THE HAUNTED 124 HOUSE

The haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, serves as a symbol of the inescapable past, particularly the traumatic legacy of slavery. This space can be analyzed as both a physical and psychological environment that embodies the scars of colonial history and the ongoing struggle for identity and agency in the aftermath of slavery. So, Does Morrison succeed in portraying the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road as a space of an inescapable past? Additionally, how can the presence of the ghost in this space be considered a form of environmental agency?

The haunted house itself, as a physical structure, is a repository of memories and experiences. It is where Sethe and her family lived, where she made the harrowing decision to kill her own child to protect her from the horrors of slavery, and where the ghost of her deceased daughter, *Beloved*, manifests. The haunting of 124 is a constant reminder that the past is not dead; it is not even past, as William Faulkner famously wrote. The ghost represents the trauma that continues to pervade the lives of those who have suffered under the dehumanizing institution of slavery. The environment of 124 Bluestone Road is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the narrative. The house’s response to the characters’ emotions and the ghost’s presence suggests a

form of environmental agency. The natural world in *Beloved* is not passive; it bears witness to the atrocities of slavery and carries the weight of history.

The house at 124 Bluestone Road is a space wherein power dynamics and the struggle to reclaim identity unfold in a world shaped by colonial forces. The characters in *Beloved* are not only haunted by personal memories but also by the collective history of their people. The haunted house at 124 becomes a microcosm of the larger world, where the characters must navigate the complexities of their past and seek a way to move forward:

The article on “Haunting” in the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* says that tradition established two main factors in haunting: an old house or other locale and restlessness of a spirit. The first represents an unbroken link with the past, the second is believed to be caused by remorse over an evil life or by the shock of violent death. (qtd. in Carol E. Schumde 409)

The concept of haunting is deeply rooted in tradition, which identifies two primary elements: an old house or locale and the restlessness of a spirit. The old house or locale serves as a tangible connection to the past, embodying history and memories that transcend generations. This physical manifestation of history provides a setting where past events continue to resonate in the present, creating a space where the past is not entirely past but lingers on, influencing current perceptions and experiences. The enduring nature of such structures allows them to become repositories of collective memory and personal histories, making them ideal settings for hauntings. The restlessness of a spirit, on the other hand, is often attributed to unresolved issues from the spirit's lifetime, such as remorse over misdeeds or the trauma of a violent death. This aspect of haunting emphasizes the emotional and psychological dimensions of unresolved past events. Spirits are depicted as unable to find peace due to their inability to reconcile with their actions or the circumstances of their demise. This restlessness is a manifestation of the unresolved,

the unacknowledged, or the repressed, seeking acknowledgment or resolution. It suggests a need for closure, not only for the spirit but also for those who are haunted, as the presence of such spirits often forces confrontation with uncomfortable truths or forgotten histories.

Together, these elements create a narrative framework that explores themes of memory, guilt, and the impact of history on the present. Hauntings, in this traditional sense, become a metaphor for the ways in which the past continues to influence the present, often in ways that are unsettling or unresolved. They challenge the living to confront what has been left behind, suggesting that ignoring or forgetting the past does not free one from its influence. Instead, acknowledging and engaging with these lingering presences can lead to a deeper understanding of both personal and collective histories.

The haunted house also serves as a metaphor for the characters' psyches. The fragmented and disjointed nature of their thoughts and memories reflects the brokenness of their spirits and the difficulty of piecing together a coherent identity after the trauma of enslavement. The community's response to the house's haunting underscores the social dimension of the struggle, highlighting the need for collective healing and the importance of community support in overcoming the shadows of the past.

Morrison uses the natural landscape around 124 to create a space that is rich with symbolic meaning, reflecting the themes of memory, trauma, and the search for identity that run throughout the novel, as the characters grapple with the haunting legacy of slavery and its impact on their lives and relationships. Skillfully, Morrison prepares the surroundings of 124 to be overloaded with historical events, and symbolism:

Back beyond 124 was a narrow field that stopped itself at a wood. On the yonder side of these woods, a stream. In these woods, between the field and the stream, hidden by post oaks, five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring, had started stretching towards each other four feet off the ground to form a round,

empty room seven feet high, its walls fifty inches of murmuring leaves. (Morrison, *Beloved* 28)

The space around 124 is rich with representations of the past, the natural world, and the concept of a liminal space. Firstly, the description of the landscape around 124 creates a sense of isolation and boundary. The “narrow field that stopped itself at a wood” suggests a transition from the domestic space of the house to the wildness of nature. This transition can be seen as a metaphor for the characters’ journey from the horrors of their enslaved past to the possibility of freedom and the unknown future. The “yonder side of these woods” and the stream represent a further boundary, perhaps one between the world of the living and the world of the dead, or between the harsh reality of the characters’ lives and a more peaceful, natural state. Water in literature often symbolizes cleansing and renewal, and the stream may represent the potential for the characters to wash away the traumas of their past.

Furthermore, the “five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring” are particularly evocative. The circle is a universal symbol of unity, wholeness, and infinity. In this context, the ring of bushes could represent the unbroken connection between the characters and their ancestors, as well as the cyclical nature of life and history. The bushes stretching toward each other to form an “empty room” suggest a space that is both protective and secretive—a place where one can be surrounded by the natural world and yet hidden from the outside. Also, the “round, empty room seven feet high, its walls fifty inches of murmuring leaves” is a space that is alive with memory and sound. The murmuring leaves could be interpreted as the whispered stories of the past, the voices of those who have gone before, and the collective memory of the community. This hidden room is a sanctuary, a place for reflection and perhaps for spiritual communion, where the characters can connect with their history and with each other on a deeper level. In the context of the novel, this space could also be seen as a representation of the characters’ inner lives—their thoughts, fears, and desires that are hidden from the world. It is a space where they can confront their traumas and

perhaps find some measure of peace or understanding.

In the novel at hand, Morrison takes her readers into a journey of memories and the past’s intrusion into the present. The ghost represents the inescapable legacy of slavery and the personal traumas that the characters carry with them. It also touches on the idea of home and the ways in which the characters find comfort or discomfort in their surroundings. *Beloved* represents an exploration of how individuals and communities deal with the scars of their collective history:

Whatever they were or might have been, Paul D messed them up for good. With a table and a loud male voice he had rid 124 of its claim to local fame. Denver had taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking for more. None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but knowing the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it scared them; Grandma Baby knew, but it saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of ghost company. Even Sethe didn’t love it. She just took it for granted—like a sudden change in the weather. (37)

This quote delves into the complex relationship Sethe and her family have with the supernatural presence in their home at 124 Bluestone Road. The passage reflects on the aftermath of Paul D’s actions, which have disrupted the haunting that gave the house its “local fame.” Paul D’s use of “a table and a loud male voice” to expel the ghost represents a forceful, masculine intervention into a space that had been defined by a feminine spirit—the ghost of Sethe’s deceased daughter. His actions are described as having “messed them up for good,” suggesting a permanent alteration of the household’s dynamics and the loss of something that had become an integral part of their lives.

Denver, Sethe’s daughter, has a unique perspective on the haunting. She had come to take “pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped

on them,” indicating that the community’s fear and judgment had become a source of identity for her. The haunting set them apart, and Denver found value in that distinction. The “downright pleasure of enchantment” that Denver speaks of suggests an intimate connection with the supernatural, a deeper understanding of “the things behind things,” which is the hidden reality beneath the surface of everyday life.

The reactions of other characters to the ghost are varied. Denver’s brothers were afraid, while Baby Suggs, her grandmother, was saddened by the presence. These differing responses highlight the individual ways in which people cope with trauma and the supernatural. Denver’s assertion that “None could appreciate the safety of ghost company” reveals her own comfort with the ghost, which she sees as protective rather than threatening. Sethe’s relationship with the ghost is more ambivalent. She doesn’t love the presence but has come to “take it for granted,” suggesting a resignation to the haunting as an inescapable aspect of her reality, much like the trauma of her past. The comparison to “a sudden change in the weather” implies that the haunting is a natural, if unpredictable, part of her environment. The shadow of the past embodied by the presence of the ghost, and the multiple reactions of 124 residents towards it, represent the multiplicity of African American community’s acceptance or rejection of their history and the tragedies which accompanied it.

*Beloved* explores the enduring impact of slavery on the individual and collective psyche of African Americans, the loss of community and connection, and the haunting presence of past traumas that continue to shape the present especially within the space of the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road:

“Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed,” she said, “and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks.” 124 shut down and put up with the venom of its ghost. No more lamp all night long, or neighbors dropping by. No low conversations after supper. No watched barefoot children playing in the shoes of strangers. (89)

Sethe and the African American community felt a profound sense of loss and betrayal due to the systemic oppression and violence perpetrated by white people. The speaker’s assertion that “Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed” conveys a deep sense of dispossession and the destruction of hope and aspirations. The phrase “broke my heartstrings too” is a powerful metaphor for the emotional devastation that goes beyond material losses, indicating a rupture in the very fabric of Sethe’s being. The reference to “whitefolks” as the source of “no bad luck in the world” underscores the belief that the misfortunes experienced by the characters are not random or due to fate, but are the direct result of actions taken by white people. This statement reflects a worldview shaped by the historical trauma of slavery and its aftermath, where the systemic racism and violence inflicted by white society are seen as the root cause of suffering for black individuals.

The ghost has a multifaceted impact on 124, the house where the main characters reside. The haunting has led to the isolation of the household, as indicated by the absence of communal activities such as “lamp all night long, or neighbors dropping by” and “low conversations after supper”. The image of “barefoot children playing in the shoes of strangers” evokes a sense of innocence lost and the intrusion of external forces into the lives of the most vulnerable. The ghost, a manifestation of the traumatic past, has created a barrier between the inhabitants of 124 and the outside community, further entrenching their alienation and grief.

Morrison connects her characters with the natural world surrounding them in *Beloved*. Nature is a reflection of the character’s troubled psychology. The novelist uses the natural phenomenon of snow surrounding 124 to symbolize the pervasive and inescapable influence of the past on the present, the isolation of the characters, and the depth of their trauma, “The couple upstairs, united, didn’t hear a sound, but below them, outside, all around 124 the snow went on and on and on. Piling itself, burying itself. Higher. Deeper” (134). The use of imagery of snow conveys a sense of isolation and the weight

of the past that envelops the characters and the space they inhabit. The “couple upstairs, united,” refers to Sethe and Paul D, who, in their moment of unity, are oblivious to the world outside 124. Their connection contrasts with the external environment, where the snow continues to fall relentlessly around 124, the house that is central to the novel’s narrative.

The snow “piling itself, burying itself” suggests a natural process of accumulation and concealment, which can be seen as a metaphor for the way traumatic memories and the history of slavery accumulate and are buried within the characters’ psyches. The repetition of “on and on and on” emphasizes the unending nature of this process, as well as the persistent presence of the past that cannot be easily escaped or ignored. The snow’s act of “burying itself” also implies a self-contained cycle, where the environment is both the subject and object of the action, much like the characters in the novel who are both shaped by and actively shaping their own narratives. The snow creates a barrier, a blanket of silence that isolates 124 from the outside world, mirroring the isolation of the characters who are haunted by their personal and collective histories. Furthermore, the snow’s depth, described as “Higher. Deeper,” can be interpreted as the depth of the emotional and psychological scars that the characters carry with them. It also reflects the profound impact of slavery and its aftermath on the African American community, suggesting that the legacy of such trauma is not easily removed and continues to affect subsequent generations.

124 is also a space of community, healing, resistance to otherness, and the struggle for identity and belonging in the aftermath of slavery. It also embodies the tensions that can arise within a community that is still grappling with the scars of its past and the challenges of building a future.

Morrison’s portrayal of the characters in *Beloved* is a profound exploration of the enduring scars of slavery, as she delves into the psychological trauma and fragmented identities that result from such a dehumanizing experience. Her characters are not only survivors of their past but also bearers of their culture’s collective memory, each

embodying the struggle to reconcile a horrific history with the need to forge a sense of self and community in its aftermath. 124 is a space of rememory and community, but also a map for the future:

Baby Suggs’ three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe’s two hens became five turkeys. The one block of ice brought all the way from Cincinnati—over which they poured mashed watermelon mixed with sugar and mint to make a punch—became a wagonload of ice cakes for a washtub full of strawberry shrug. 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone. (137)

Baby Suggs, is a central figure in the novel who serves as a spiritual leader and healer within the African American community. The description of the food—pies, turkeys, and the elaborate watermelon punch—symbolizes the generosity and nurturing nature of Baby Suggs, as well as the sense of community she fosters. 124 as a space haunted by past difficult memories can’t prevent the Black community sharing this space from creating joy and generosity. The transformation of modest offerings into a feast “three maybe four pies grew to ten maybe twelve” can be interpreted as a metaphor for the resilience and resourcefulness of the formerly enslaved community. Despite the scarcity and hardship they have faced, they create a space of plenty and celebration. This act of communal sharing and celebration is a form of resistance against the dehumanization and deprivation experienced during slavery.

The “wagonload of ice cakes” and the “wash tub full of strawberry shrug” represent not just physical nourishment but also the emotional and spiritual sustenance that Baby Suggs provides.

The ice, brought from Cincinnati, signifies the lengths to which the community goes to care for one another, and the effort put into creating moments of joy and relief from their traumatic pasts. However, the passage also touches on the undercurrent of resentment and suspicion from others in the community “made them angry”. The questions “Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy?” and “Why is she and hers always the center of things?” reflect a sense of unease or jealousy regarding Baby Suggs’ role and the attention she receives. This tension highlights the complexities within the community, where support and solidarity can coexist with envy and mistrust, possibly stemming from the internalized trauma and competition for scarce resources that were part of the legacy of slavery.

Baby Suggs’ multifaceted role—giving advice, healing the sick, hiding fugitives, and loving everyone—is indicative of the leadership roles that women often assumed in African American communities, particularly in the post-emancipation period. Her actions are described almost as a divine calling “her job and hers alone”, suggesting that her work is both a personal mission and a communal necessity.

From another perspective, even if “None could appreciate the safety of ghost company” (37), the ghost at 124 Bluestone Road embodies environmental agency by actively engaging with and altering the physical and emotional landscape of the house, reflecting the way in which environments can bear the imprint of history and trauma and, in turn, exert influence on the lives of those within them. The ghost’s actions—shaking objects, crying, and smashing things—demonstrate an ability to affect the physical world, suggesting that the environment of 124 is not passive but rather responsive and dynamic. This agency is further emphasized when Paul D arrives and disrupts the ghost’s hold on the house, indicating that the environment of 124 is subject to change and can be reshaped by the characters’ actions. Moreover, the ghost’s influence extends beyond the walls of the house, affecting the community’s perception of the space. The house is seen as “full of trouble” and “Anybody got the money don't want to live out

there” (264) is characterized by the voices and the strong feelings it once contained, which have now fallen silent, indicating a shift in the house’s environmental agency.

By the end of the novel, Morrison talks about the duality of 124 as both a physical space in need of repair and a repository of the characters’ pasts. The house’s quietness as described by Stamp Paid is a momentary condition that belies the deep and inescapable imprints of history that it holds within its walls, “Unloaded, 124 is just another weathered house needing repair. Quiet, just as Stamp Paid said” (264). The house at 124 Bluestone Road is a space where the past is both inescapably present and yet, at times, eerily absent. Throughout the novel, 124 is depicted as a place where the characters confront their traumatic histories, and the house itself almost becomes a character, imbued with the emotions and memories of those who live there.

The term “Unloaded” suggests that the house has been relieved of its emotional burden, at least temporarily. This could refer to a moment when the ghostly presence that has haunted the house is no longer active or when the characters’ own psychological burdens have been lifted or set aside. The description of 124 as “just another weathered house needing repair” implies that, stripped of its haunting and the weight of the past, it is merely a physical structure that shows signs of neglect and decay, much like any other old house. However, the simplicity of this description belies the complex history of the house and the people associated with it. The quietness that Stamp Paid observes is not necessarily a sign of peace but could be indicative of a suppressed or temporarily dormant past. The house’s silence can be seen as a deceptive calm, one that might precede or follow the tumultuous events and emotional outpourings that have characterized its existence. The house has been a vessel for the characters’ grief, pain, and longing, and even in its quiet state, it cannot fully escape the history that has shaped it.

In conclusion, the space of 124 Bluestone Road in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* serves as a critical nexus where the personal and collective histories of the

characters intersect, embodying the inescapable past of slavery and its enduring traumas. Through the haunting of the house, Morrison creates a space where the characters must confront their memories and the ghosts of their former selves, offering a poignant exploration of the ways in which the past continues to shape and inform the present. Furthermore, this space becomes a character that illuminates how this environment itself bears witness to the histories of its inhabitants, participating in the narrative as a living testament to the characters' struggles for identity, agency, and healing in the face of a legacy of oppression.

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# Between Yesterday and Today: Education for Young People, Adults and the Elderly, A Story in a Distant Construction Process

*Alex Trajano*

*Universidade Federal de São Paulo – UNIFESP  
Associação Comunitária Educacional Cícera Tereza dos Santos – ACECTS*

## ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to provide a concise historical overview of the establishment of Education for Youth, Adults, and the Elderly in Brazil, culminating in its consolidation as a distinct modality of education through Article 37 of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) No. 9,394/1996, emphasizing the contributions of civil society and social movements. Numerous social movements played a pivotal role in weaving and embodying the foundation of Education for Youth, Adults, and the Elderly (EJAI) in Brazil, stimulating the creation and/or strengthening of what is today a recognized educational modality. Between the 1950s and 1960s, popular movements, labor unions, and civil society organizations intensified demands for the right to education for youth and adults, particularly workers who had been excluded from the regular education system. These mobilizations served as a catalyst for incorporating EJAI into the public agenda, influencing the 1988 Constitution and, subsequently, the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), which established EJAI as a constitutional right.

*Keywords:* youth and adult education. educational campaigns. adult literacy. illiteracy. legislation.

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# Between Yesterday and Today: Education for Young People, Adults and the Elderly, A Story in a Distant Construction Process

Entre o Ontem e o Hoje: Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos, Uma História num Longínquo Processo de Construção

Alex Trajano

Universidade Federal de São Paulo – UNIFESP  
Associação Comunitária Educacional Cícera Tereza dos Santos – ACECTS

## ABSTRACT

*The present study aimed to provide a concise historical overview of the establishment of Education for Youth, Adults, and the Elderly in Brazil, culminating in its consolidation as a distinct modality of education through Article 37 of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) No. 9,394/1996, emphasizing the contributions of civil society and social movements. Numerous social movements played a pivotal role in weaving and embodying the foundation of Education for Youth, Adults, and the Elderly (EJAI) in Brazil, stimulating the creation and/or strengthening of what is today a recognized educational modality. Between the 1950s and 1960s, popular movements, labor unions, and civil society organizations intensified demands for the right to education for youth and adults, particularly workers who had been excluded from the regular education system. These mobilizations served as a catalyst for incorporating EJAI into the public agenda, influencing the 1988 Constitution and, subsequently, the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), which established EJAI as a constitutional right. However, despite these numerous efforts and initiatives, they have proven insufficient to eradicate illiteracy in Brazil. As of 2024, over 11 million individuals aged 15 and older remain unable to read, write, or even sign their names, underscoring the need for increased efforts and investments in public policies. These efforts face significant challenges under a state increasingly*

*shaped by neoliberal and privatizing ideologies, which render the consolidation of such policies and the shift from an assistentialist approach to one focused on awareness and critical thinking increasingly arduous. The methodology employed was based on bibliographic research with descriptive characteristics, drawing on a variety of literature sources, including books, scientific articles, laws, online journals, and academic websites addressing topics pertinent to the theme. Materials published over the past 145 years (from 1879 to 2024) were utilized to construct the historical narrative of Education for Youth, Adults, and the Elderly in Brazil.*

**Keywords:** youth and adult education. educational campaigns. adult literacy. illiteracy. legislation<sup>1</sup>.

## RESUMO

*O presente estudo objetivou realizar uma breve síntese histórica da constituição da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos no Brasil, até consolidar-se como uma modalidade de ensino, por meio do artigo 37 da LDB 9.394/1996, ressaltando a participação da sociedade civil e dos movimentos sociais. Diversos foram os movimentos sociais que tiveram um papel preponderante na tessitura e encarnadura da constituição da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos (EJAI) no Brasil, instigando a criação*

<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal de São Paulo. Presidente da Associação Comunitária Educacional Cícera Tereza dos Santos – ACECTS. Diretor do Departamento de Educação e Alfabetização – DEDUALFA/ACECTS.

*e/ou fortalecimento dessa, hoje, modalidade de ensino. Entre 1950 e 1960, movimentos populares, sindicatos e organizações da sociedade civil intensificaram a reivindicação pelo direito à educação para jovens e adultos, trabalhadores que foram excluídos do sistema regular de ensino. Essas mobilizações foram a mote para incluir a EJAI na agenda pública e influenciar a Constituição de 1988 e posteriormente, a Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (LDB) de 1996, que passaram a garantir a EJAI como direito constitucional. Porquanto, embora tantas ações e esforços tenham sido realizados, ainda assim não foram suficientes para sanar o analfabetismo em nosso país, pois, ainda hoje, em 2024 temos mais de 11 milhões de pessoas que não sabem ler, escrever e sequer assinar o seu próprio nome, acima dos 15 anos de idade, exigindo mais esforços e investimentos em políticas públicas, que frente a um Estado completamente inspirado numa concepção neoliberal e privatista, são cada vez mais difíceis de se consolidar e romper com o caráter assistencialista, dando lugar à conscientização e à criticidade. A metodologia pautou-se em uma pesquisa bibliográfica com características descritivas, na qual foram consultadas variadas fontes de literatura, a saber: livros, artigos científicos, Leis, revistas online, sites acadêmicos que discutem os conteúdos concernentes ao tema, utilizando-se de materiais publicados nos últimos 145 anos (entre 1879 a 2024) com o intuito de constituir a história da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos no Brasil.*

*Palavras-chave:* educação de jovens e adultos. campanhas educacionais. alfabetização de adultos. analfabetismo. legislação.

## I. CONSIDERAÇÕES INICIAIS

Neste estudo, ao abordarmos o tema central – a constituição da Educação de Jovens e Adultos no Brasil, como uma modalidade de ensino – defendemos também a ideia de que nessa modalidade seja acrescida a palavra “idosos”, por uma série de fatores e, sobremaneira e principalmente, levando-se em consideração os dados do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e

Estatística (IBGE) de 2022, que mostram que mais de 20,3% da população analfabeta brasileira tem 65 anos ou mais.

Sobre essa questão comenta Fresneda:

A elevada taxa de analfabetismo entre os mais velhos é um reflexo da dívida educacional brasileira, cuja tônica foi o atraso no investimento em educação, tanto para escolarização das crianças, quanto para a garantia de acesso a programas de alfabetização de jovens e adultos por uma parcela das pessoas que não foram alfabetizadas nas idades apropriadas. (Fresneda, 2022, n.p.).

Esses dados reafirmam veementemente a necessidade de políticas públicas assertivas com enfoque para essa faixa etária, que historicamente enfrentou barreiras de acesso à educação e ainda hoje continua marginalizada em termos de direitos básicos, como a alfabetização e a escolarização.

O acréscimo da palavra “idosos” na nomenclatura da Educação de Jovens e Adultos não é meramente simbólico; ela reflete o reconhecimento de que o analfabetismo entre idosos é uma dívida social que precisa ser reparada. Muitas dessas pessoas cresceram em contextos de desigualdade extrema, nos quais o acesso à educação formal era limitado ou inexistente, especialmente em regiões rurais ou em famílias de baixa renda. Essa exclusão inicial perpetuou um ciclo de privação que ainda afeta a autonomia e a qualidade de vida dos idosos analfabetos.

O impacto do analfabetismo nessa população é profundo e multifacetado e o fato de não saber ler e/ou escrever dificulta o seu acesso a informações essenciais, serviços de saúde e programas sociais, além de limitar a sua participação ativa na sociedade, podendo assim gozar dos seus direitos e compreender os seus deveres. Em um mundo cada vez mais digitalizado e globalizado, a exclusão educacional torna-se ainda mais acentuada, restringindo as oportunidades de interação com tecnologias que facilitem a vida cotidiana. Além disso, o analfabetismo afeta a

autoestima e a integração social dos idosos, muitas vezes levando-os a sentimentos de isolamento e inutilidade.

A inclusão explícita dos idosos na Educação de Jovens e Adultos é mais uma forma de promover justiça social e oferecer uma oportunidade e/ou caminho educacional a essa população. Mais do que ensinar a ler e escrever, a educação para idosos deve buscar e resgatar a dignidade, fortalecer a autonomia e promover o envelhecimento ativo. Estudos mostram que a aprendizagem ao longo da vida contribui para a saúde mental, previne o declínio cognitivo e melhora a qualidade de vida dos idosos, permitindo-lhes participar de forma mais plena e significativa na sociedade – não iremos nos ater em discorrer sobre essa questão, pois não é o objeto central deste estudo.

Portanto, ao destacar os idosos na Educação de Jovens e Adultos, reconhecemos suas necessidades e desafios específicos, criando espaços educativos que respeitem seu ritmo de aprendizado, valorizem suas experiências e promovam sua inclusão. Essa abordagem não apenas repara injustiças históricas, como também fortalece a convivência intergeracional e contribui para a construção de uma sociedade mais justa, equânime e inclusiva para todas as idades.

Num País de dimensões continentais como é o Brasil, em que sua gênese está envolta em contrastes e injustiças sociais, o analfabetismo ganha notoriedade como uma questão estrutural em sua tessitura histórica, devido a uma série de fatores sociais e econômicos que se entrelaçam de maneira complexa ao longo do tempo, bem como, também é resultado de uma educação voltada para a [in]lógica da produção e do capital que relega a vivência dos sujeitos e de seus contextos históricos e sociais. Suscitamos que no cenário educacional brasileiro, infelizmente o analfabetismo transpôs anos, décadas, séculos, sociedades e gerações e que, todavia, denuncia e anuncia com altiloquência a falta de investimento e a ausência e precariedade de políticas públicas assertivas no campo educacional.

O primeiro Censo foi realizado no Brasil no ano de 1872, registrando o índice de analfabetismo de 83,30%, levando em consideração a população tanto livre quanto escravizada da época. Na literatura brasileira encontramos uma denúncia concernente a esse cenário que cabe aqui citarmos, por dialogar sobre esse panorama educacional e político do Brasil daquele momento, por parte do escritor Machado de Assis que alude:

A nação não sabe ler. Há 30% dos indivíduos residentes neste país que podem ler; desses uns 9% não lêem letra de mão. 70% jazem em profunda ignorância. 70% dos cidadãos votam do mesmo modo que respiram: sem saber por que nem o quê. Votam como vão à festa da Penha, – por divertimento. A constituição é para eles uma coisa inteiramente desconhecida. Estão prontos para tudo: uma revolução ou um golpe de Estado. (Assis, 15 de agosto de 1876).

A alfabetização é um direito humano, essencial e primordial na vida de todo e qualquer ser humano, sobremaneira levando em consideração que vivemos numa sociedade fortemente grafocêntrica, ou seja, onde a escrita é o centro de tudo. Imaginemos os milhões de homens e mulheres na história do Brasil, aos quais nunca foi dada a oportunidade de adentrarem a um ambiente letrado e que tiveram seus direitos negados e negligenciados, passando assim, sua vida, à sombra do analfabetismo, sem conhecerem os seus deveres e tampouco gozando dos seus direitos.

Quando falamos em alfabetização é importante salientar que a mesma não é somente um processo mecânico de ensinar a ler e/ou escrever, codificar e/ou decodificar palavras, consoante a Soares (2014), mas, ao olharmos pela ótica freireana (1983), é possível compreender o ato de alfabetizar como um processo de construção da identidade humana, antropológica, social, política e histórica de homens e mulheres que têm como papel primordial instigar a conscientização, a reflexão, a criticidade, e que indubitavelmente visa contribuir para a edificação de um mundo mais justo, igualitário, solidário, equânime e

democrático. Nessa perspectiva, recorreremos às palavras de Freire,

Se antes a alfabetização de adultos era tratada e realizada de forma autoritária, centrada na compreensão mágica da palavra, doada pelo educador aos analfabetos; se antes os textos geralmente oferecidos como leitura aos alunos escondiam muito mais do que desvelavam a realidade, agora, pelo contrário, a alfabetização como ato de conhecimento, como ato criador e como ato político é um esforço de leitura do mundo e da palavra. (Freire, 1989, p. 19).

Alude-nos ainda que,

Para que a alfabetização não seja puramente mecânica e assunto só de memória, é preciso conduzir os adultos a conscientizar-se primeiro, para que logo se alfabetizem a si mesmos. (Freire, 1979, p. 26).

Copiosos projetos e campanhas educacionais foram criados, com o intuito de acabar com o analfabetismo, como veremos no decorrer deste estudo que objetivou realizar uma breve síntese histórica da constituição da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos no Brasil, até consolidar-se como uma modalidade de ensino, por meio do artigo 37 da LDB 9.394/1996, ressaltando a participação da sociedade civil e dos movimentos sociais.

A pesquisa teve como problemas a serem respondidos: Como a EJAI se consolidou como uma modalidade de ensino? Quais ações foram criadas para combater o analfabetismo no Brasil, por parte do poder público? E o analfabetismo, foi combatido?

A metodologia pautou-se em uma pesquisa bibliográfica com características descritivas, na qual foram consultadas variadas fontes de literatura, a saber: livros, artigos científicos, Leis, revistas *online*, sites acadêmicos que discutem os conteúdos concernentes ao tema, utilizando-se de materiais publicados nos últimos 145 anos (entre 1879 a 2024) com o intuito de constituir a história da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos no Brasil.

Os autores principais utilizados foram: Brasil (1879, 1964, 1967, 1971, 1988, 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013), Freire (1979, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1989, 2000), Haddad e Di Pierro (2000), Paiva (1973, 1981).

A escolha dos autores mencionados fundamenta-se na relevância de suas análises sobre a problemática em questão, além de sua abordagem crítica acerca dos desafios decorrentes do analfabetismo no Brasil e da condição do indivíduo iletrado na sociedade. Esses estudiosos destacam a imperiosa necessidade de uma intervenção do poder público e a formulação de políticas públicas que respondam de maneira eficaz a tais questões estruturais. A pesquisa também contempla de maneira breve a atuação dos movimentos sociais, sindicais, religiosos e das organizações não governamentais, que desempenharam um papel decisivo na promoção da educação popular, sendo fundamentais para a concepção e implementação de iniciativas governamentais. Essas ações culminaram na formalização da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos como uma modalidade educacional, conforme preconizado pela referida lei.

A realização deste estudo se justifica pela relevância em compreender o percurso histórico, as políticas e as ações que moldaram a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos no Brasil, uma vez que esse campo educativo desempenha um papel fundamental na promoção da inclusão e da justiça social. Ao longo dos anos, a EJAI se consolidou como uma modalidade de ensino essencial para possibilitar a alfabetização e a escolarização de pessoas que por diferentes razões, não tiveram acesso à educação básica na infância.

A análise da constituição histórica e das políticas implementadas, bem como das limitações e avanços no combate ao analfabetismo, contribui para identificar os obstáculos e as lacunas ainda existentes no sistema educacional brasileiro e além disso, compreender o papel dos movimentos sociais e da sociedade civil na criação e sustentação da EJAI e permite vislumbrar as forças que podem ser mobilizadas para fortalecer essa modalidade de ensino.

Conquanto, este estudo oferece subsídios para educadores, gestores, formuladores de políticas públicas, pesquisadores e estudantes compreenderem de maneira mais aprofundada a trajetória e os desafios da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos, possibilitando que essas informações fundamentem o desenvolvimento de práticas pedagógicas e políticas mais efetivas. Dessa forma, a pesquisa contribui não apenas para o avanço acadêmico do campo, mas, sobretudo, para a construção de uma educação inclusiva, democrática e transformadora para jovens, adultos e idosos que buscam o direito ao conhecimento e à cidadania.

Além do mais, frisamos que neste estudo iremos tratar especialmente da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos, nos seus anos iniciais – compreendidos do 1º ao 5º ano – sobretudo com enfoque para o processo de alfabetização, o que justifica a análise e a discussão sobre o analfabetismo presente.

## II. RESULTADO DAS DISCUSSÕES

### 2.1 *As Primeiras Iniciativas Lançadas no Campo da Educação Brasileira: uma Breve Retrospectiva Histórica*

Com a palavra, o homem se faz homem. Ao dizer a sua palavra, pois, o homem assume conscientemente sua essencial condição humana. E o método que lhe propicia essa aprendizagem comensura-se ao homem todo, e seus princípios fundam toda pedagogia, desde a alfabetização até os mais altos níveis do labor universitário. (Fiori, 1987, p. 07).

Numa visão “ingênua” o analfabetismo é interpretado e tratado,

Ora como uma ‘erva daninha’ – daí a expressão corrente: ‘erradicação do analfabetismo’ –, ora como uma ‘enfermidade’ que passa de um a outro, quase por contágio, ora como uma ‘chaga’ deprimente a ser ‘curada’ e cujos índices, estampados nas estatísticas de organismos internacionais, dizem mal dos níveis de ‘civilização’ de certas sociedades. Mais ainda, o analfabetismo aparece também, nesta visão ingênua ou astuta, como a manifestação da ‘incapacidade’

do povo, de sua ‘pouca inteligência’, de sua “proverbial preguiça” (Freire, 1981, p. 11).

Todavia, numa visão crítica o analfabetismo,

Nem é uma ‘chaga’, nem uma ‘erva daninha’ a ser erradicada, nem tampouco uma enfermidade, mas uma das expressões concretas de uma realidade social injusta. Não é um problema estritamente linguístico nem exclusivamente pedagógico, metodológico, mas político, como a alfabetização através da qual se pretende superá-lo. Proclamar sua neutralidade, ingênua ou astutamente, não afeta em nada a sua politicidade intrínseca. (Freire, 1981, p. 13).

Imaginemos que a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos “é uma árvore que, apesar de dar frutos, não tem raízes” – fazemos uso dessa metáfora que sugere uma reflexão crítica sobre a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos. Nela, a “árvore” representa a própria EJAI, enquanto os “frutos” simbolizam os resultados e/ou benefícios que a mesma pode proporcionar aos seus alunos, como a aquisição de novos conhecimentos, habilidades e até mesmo a transformação social dos indivíduos que participam desse processo educacional.

Outrossim, a metáfora também indica que, embora a EJAI seja capaz de produzir esses “frutos” positivos, carece de “raízes”, ou seja, de uma base sólida e estruturada. As raízes de uma árvore são fundamentais para garantir sua estabilidade, nutrição e crescimento. Da mesma forma, uma educação de qualidade precisa de um fundamento robusto para garantir sua efetividade e sustentabilidade ao longo do tempo. Nesse sentido, a falta de “raízes” aponta para deficiências estruturais, como a falta de políticas públicas consistentes, de recursos adequados, de uma metodologia bem definida e de uma integração eficaz com o sistema educacional em geral.

Essa análise metafórica sugere que, embora a EJAI consiga alcançar resultados significativos (os frutos), muitas vezes não conta com as bases e o apoio institucional necessários para oferecer uma educação consistente e duradoura. A falta de

raízes pode se referir à precariedade no planejamento de longo prazo para a EJAI, à falta de investimentos em infraestrutura e formação de professores, à escassez de materiais didáticos adequados e até mesmo à falta de um currículo que realmente atenda às necessidades dos jovens, adultos e idosos que buscam essa modalidade de ensino.

Para mais, a ausência de raízes também pode se referir à marginalização histórica da EJAI dentro do sistema educacional, como uma modalidade muitas vezes vista como secundária ou menos importante, em comparação à educação infantil ou ao ensino regular. Isso implica que, embora seja capaz de gerar frutos, ou seja, de contribuir com a inclusão social, a qualificação e a melhoria das condições de vida de seus alunos, ela carece de uma base forte que a sustente e a torne uma educação permanente, eficaz, estruturada, sólida e profícua.

É importante suscitar que no Brasil, a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos foi criada para favorecer a camada social desprivilegiada, que por inúmeros motivos não teve a oportunidade de frequentar uma escola no período propício. Conexo fato que merece destaque é que, somente na metade do século XX, de fato a educação de jovens e adultos começou a ser pensada como um problema de política nacional, despertando o interesse do governo para a criação de políticas públicas para mudar esse cenário de analfabetismo que se perpetuava no país. A partir das necessidades de alfabetizar aqueles e aquelas que não tiveram a oportunidade de se escolarizar na idade própria, foram criadas campanhas destinadas à Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos, a fim de minimizar a desigualdade social.

Sublinhamos que a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos apresentou seus primeiros indícios e/ou tentativas de maneira assistemática, no período colonial brasileiro (1549–1759), sendo orquestrada pelos padres jesuítas, incumbidos da instrução no Brasil. Esses missionários buscavam a alfabetização de crianças, jovens e adultos indígenas, através do processo de catequização. Em 1759, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, o Marquês de Pombal, foi investido como

Primeiro-Ministro de Portugal, implementando a Reforma Pombalina, a qual resultou na expulsão dos jesuítas e na centralização da educação sob a égide do Estado, dissociando-a da Igreja. No entanto, nesse período, não houve qualquer esforço voltado para a instrução de jovens e adultos.

Já no período do Brasil Império, a Lei de autoria de Leôncio de Carvalho, instituída por meio do decreto 7.247 de 19 de abril de 1879, foi responsável pela promoção da Reforma da Instrução Pública Primária e Secundária no Município da Corte e do Ensino Superior em todo o Império e previa “que adultos analfabetos frequentassem as aulas no período noturno”. Já na Reforma de Benjamin Constant – primeira da era republicana - por meio do decreto 981 de 1890 criou-se o Curso Madureza.

Iniciou-se o século XX com um grande contingente de pessoas analfabetas no Brasil, o que chamava a atenção de vários países e mecanismos internacionais considerados desenvolvidos que focavam seu olhar para esse cenário vergonhoso enfrentado pela população brasileira.

A fim de ilustrar a situação do analfabetismo no século XX, chama-se a atenção para o quadro a seguir:

*Quadro 1:* Analfabetismo na faixa de 15 anos ou mais - Brasil - 1900/2000<sup>2</sup>

Ano	População de 15 anos ou mais		
	Total (1)	Analfabeta (1)	Taxa de Analfabetismo
1900	9.728	6.348	65,3
1920	17.564	11.409	65,0
1940	23.648	13.269	56,1
1950	30.188	15.272	50,6
1960	40.233	15.964	39,7
1970	53.633	18.100	33,7
1980	74.600	19.356	25,9

<sup>2</sup> Quadro extraído de: [https://download.inep.gov.br/e\\_indicadores/mapa\\_do\\_analfabetismo\\_do\\_brasil.pdf](https://download.inep.gov.br/e_indicadores/mapa_do_analfabetismo_do_brasil.pdf).

1991	94.891	18.682	19,7
2000	119.533	16.295	13,6

Fonte: IBGE, Censo Demográfico. Nota: (1) Em milhares. (Quadro organizado pelo Ministério da Educação e INEP).

Realçamos que ainda hoje, em 2024, de acordo com dados do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) 2022, o Brasil permanece com cerca de 7% de pessoas analfabetas – o que chega a somatizar aproximadamente 11,4 milhões de pessoas, sendo a mais afetada, a região Nordeste – que não sabem ler e escrever o seu próprio nome, sendo consideradas analfabetas por inteiro. Sob essa perspectiva, a fim de esclarecermos o que é ser considerado analfabeto, atualmente também recorreremos à definição do Indicador de Alfabetismo Funcional – Inaf que aponta cinco níveis do alfabetismo funcional, a saber: analfabeto; rudimentar; elementar; intermediário e proficiente<sup>3</sup>.

Evidenciamos a definição que ele faz do analfabeto: “São considerados analfabetos os indivíduos que não conseguem realizar tarefas simples que envolvem a leitura de palavras e frases, ainda que uma parcela deles consiga ler números familiares como os do telefone, da casa, de preços etc.”.

Com o passar dos anos e as fortes pressões por parte da grande massa de trabalhadores e trabalhadoras, movimentos sociais, sindicatos, igrejas, etc. que cobravam escolas gratuitas e de qualidade, foram gestadas as primeiras políticas públicas voltadas para a educação de adolescentes e adultos.

Sem sombra de dúvida, os anos 40 foram cruciais para a EJAI, quando nasceu a primeira grande ação educativa formulada pelo então Ministério da Educação e Saúde, a Campanha de Educação para Adolescentes e Adultos - CEAA, implantada no ano de 1947 – funcionando até o ano de 1963, quando foi extinta-, sendo coordenada pelo professor Lourenço Filho. Diante das palavras de Paiva (1973. p. 173): “é a primeira grande campanha de educação dirigida predominante

<sup>3</sup> A este propósito, ver as definições do Inaf: <https://alfabetismofuncional.org.br/habilidades-e-niveis-de-alfabetismo/>

mente ao meio rural”, cabe ressaltar que: “durante o Estado Novo, Vargas havia explicitado a sua orientação ruralista como meio de conter a migração rural-urbana ‘em suas fontes’ e a CEAA é o primeiro programa a colocar essa orientação em prática e em larga escala.” Paiva (1973, p. 173).

Foram ainda criadas outras ações com o intuito de “erradicar” o analfabetismo no Brasil e preparar a mão de obra para o mercado de trabalho capitalista, demonstrando assim o avanço de uma nação progressista, a saber: Campanha Nacional de Educação Rural – CNER em 1952; Campanha Nacional de Erradicação do Analfabetismo – CNEA, 1958; Mobilização Nacional Contra o Analfabetismo – MNCA, 1962<sup>4</sup>, criada alguns dias antes da renúncia do Presidente da República, Jânio da Silva Quadros, sendo retomada pelo governo de João Goulart através do decreto nº 51.470 de 22 de maio de 1962.

A Mobilização desempenhou nesse momento o papel de um programa tampão; as antigas Campanhas do MEC estavam paralisadas e pretendia-se através da MNC aplicar os recursos disponíveis para a educação dos adultos, enquanto não aprovava o Plano Nacional de Educação, em elaboração naquele momento. (Paiva, 1973, p. 226).

Ulterior a Paiva (1973) a Mobilização focava os seus objetivos na educação popular, almejando a ampliação do processo de escolarização em larga escala, bem como dos métodos de ensino elementar voltados não somente para as crianças na faixa etária de 7 a 11 anos, como também na educação dos adultos.

Não poderíamos deixar de registrar a efetiva participação de alguns movimentos populares que nasceram nos anos 60 e que foram fulcrais na criação de iniciativas voltadas ao combate do analfabetismo e no resgate e promoção da cultura popular de nossa gente, e que, ainda “pretendia-se as condições políticas e culturais vividas naquele

<sup>4</sup> Tais campanhas podem ser consultadas com maior detalhamento na obra da Professora Vanilda Paiva, “Educação popular e educação de adultos: contribuição à história da educação brasileira”, Edições Loyola, São Paulo, 1973.

momento”. (Paiva, 1973, p. 230). É importante salientar que:

Eles nasceram das preocupações dos intelectuais, políticos e estudantes com a promoção da participação política das massas e do processo de tomada de consciência da problemática brasileira que caracterizou os últimos anos do governo Kubitschek. (Paiva, 1973, p. 230).

E ainda,

Deles participaram os liberais, as esquerdas marxistas e os católicos, influenciados pelos novos rumos abertos pela reflexão de filósofos cristãos europeus e pelas transformações que se anunciavam na doutrina social da Igreja; o número de católicos interessados em tais problemas multiplica-se, principalmente a partir do momento em que os membros da JUC começam a buscar um “ideal histórico”, em função do qual pudessem orientar sua ação no mundo. (Paiva, 1973, p. 230).

Foi um momento de grande entusiasmo, euforia e engajamento da população brasileira na busca não somente de tentar combater a mácula do analfabetismo, mas de construir um país melhor e de oportunidades para todos os brasileiros, sobremaneira possibilitando uma formação conscientizadora, política e libertadora para a valorização nacionalista dos saberes e das culturas populares do nosso povo, apartando-se dos laços com o exterior e suas possíveis influências.

Destacamos a atuação do Centro Popular de Cultura – CPC criado em 1961 que a partir do ano de 1962 começou a se espalhar pelo Brasil, ligado à União Nacional dos Estudantes – UNE; Movimento de Cultura Popular – MCP, no Recife em 1960; Campanha “De Pé no Chão também se aprende ler”, no Rio Grande do Norte em 1961; Movimento de Educação de Base – MEB, ligado à Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil – CNBB que funciona desde 1961 e a Associação de Educação Católica – AEC fundada em 1945, que desde de 2008 passou a se chamar Associação Nacional de Educação Católica do Brasil – ANEC.

Em 1963 foi realizado o I Encontro de Alfabetização e Cultura Popular que reuniu cerca de 77 movimentos, dentre os quais, os movimentos públicos e privados com ideologias marxistas e não marxistas, que todavia tinham como objetivo comum a valorização do analfabeto como “sujeito capaz e produtivo” sendo esses movimentos instrumentos que vociferavam em seu âmago a conscientização e indubitavelmente a organização política das massas envolvidas e os métodos de ensino a serem utilizados no processo educacional dos adultos. (Paiva, 1973).

Não podemos falar de alfabetização de adultos sem mencionarmos a atuação do educador Paulo Freire (1921-1997) que teve grande desempenho e participação no cenário educacional de nosso país, sobremaneira quando o assunto foi e é concernente à educação de pessoas jovens e adultas.

Assim, no ano de 1963 na pequena cidade de Angicos, agreste do Rio Grande do Norte aconteceu uma grande transformação na vida dos cidadãos que ali viviam, não somente na mudança do *status* de analfabeto para alfabetizado, como também no que tange à construção e conscientização do direito à cidadania de homens e mulheres que passaram uma vida no obscurantismo por não saberem ler e escrever. Consoante dados do IBGE, da época, no início dos anos de 1960 o Rio Grande do Norte contava com uma população de aproximadamente 61,8% de pessoas analfabetas. Na cidade de Angicos, somente entre os adultos, a taxa superava 70%.

Nesse cenário temerário e desastroso que demonstra o abandono e descaso com as políticas públicas no campo educacional, Freire foi convidado para desenvolver um trabalho de alfabetização para jovens e adultos, o que o tornaria conhecido em todo o País e num futuro próximo, projetaria, a nível nacional o Programa Nacional de Alfabetização, criado através do decreto nº 53.465 de 21 de janeiro de 1964.

Paulo Freire, em apenas 40 horas ensinou a ler e a escrever mais de 300 trabalhadores rurais utilizando como ponto de partida e também de chegada a experiência trazida, de *per si*, pelos

educandos, valorizando assim os saberes de cada um, ancorando-se numa prática eminentemente dialógico-dialética que visava instigar o sujeito à construção da conscientização e da criticidade para que se tornasse protagonista atuante de sua própria história e coadjuvante da história do outrem, rompendo com a relação *status quo* dominante de sujeito oprimido para ser livre, autônomo e arquiteto de sua própria cultura, tendo clareza de seu papel na sociedade. (Freire, 1987).

A Abordagem desenvolvida por Freire, registrada em sua obra: “Conscientização”, 1979 pode ser compreendida em três passos, a saber: 1- Investigação: momento em que o educador observa no grupo, a maneira como falam, como se expressam, como agem, etc. e vai anotando e juntos escolhem as palavras e temas a serem debatidos; 2- Tematização: momento em que os debates concernentes aos “temas geradores” são realizados e contextualizados à realidade dos envolvidos e que irá conduzir a prática educativa. 3- Problematização: momento crucial em que ocorrem os questionamentos a partir de temas reais vividos no dia a dia, que são colocados para serem debatidos com o intuito de que os envolvidos desenvolvam sua capacidade de pensar, criticar, questionar e assim venham a superar suas dificuldades, adquirindo uma visão real e consciente, capaz de “ler o mundo”.

Mediante todo esse cenário de grandes transformações políticas, educacionais e culturais eram crescentes as expectativas para a construção de um país que propiciasse a seus cidadãos condições mínimas para se viver, sendo uma delas, o acesso à educação. No ano de 1964, o então Presidente da República João Goulart e o Ministro da Educação, Paulo de Tarso dos Santos, resolveram convidar Paulo Freire para integrar a equipe do Ministério da Educação e construir um programa que tivesse como foco a eliminação do analfabetismo - eis que surge o Programa Nacional de Alfabetização - PNA:

Considerando que o Ministério da Educação e Cultura vem provando, através da Comissão de Cultura Popular, com vantagem o Sistema

Paulo Freire para alfabetização em tempo rápido, DECRETA:

Art. 1º Fica instituído o Programa Nacional de Alfabetização, mediante o uso do Sistema Paulo Freire, através do Ministério da Educação e Cultura.

Art. 2º Para execução do Programa Nacional de Alfabetização, nos termos do artigo anterior, o Ministro da Educação e Cultura constituirá uma Comissão Especial e tomará todas as providências necessárias.

Art. 3º O Ministério da Educação e Cultura escolherá duas áreas no Território Nacional para início da operação do Programa de que trata o presente Decreto.

Art. 4º A Comissão do Programa Nacional de Alfabetização convocará e utilizará a cooperação e os serviços de: agremiações estudantis e profissionais, associações esportivas, sociedades de bairro e municipais, entidades religiosas, organizações governamentais, civis e militares, associações patronais, empresas privadas, órgãos de difusão, o magistério e todos os setores mobilizáveis.

Art. 5º São considerados relevantes os serviços prestados à campanha de alfabetização em massa realizada pelo Programa Nacional de Alfabetização. (Brasil, 1964, n.p.).

Propunha-se criar 20 mil círculos de cultura por todo o Brasil, visando atingir um público de 2 milhões de pessoas. Todavia, esse projeto não foi realizado, pois no dia 31 de março de 1964 o país sofreu o golpe cívico-militar, que durou por longos 21 anos. Freire foi exilado e considerado como um subversivo, tratado como comunista e inimigo da Pátria e de Deus, conforme ele mesmo relata em entrevista ao Jornal Folha de São Paulo, no ano de 1994.

Na história da educação brasileira, quando discutida sobre educação de adultos, não nos esqueçamos do Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização – MOBRAF, criado pela Lei nº.

5.379 de 15 de março de 1967, pelos militares que assumiram o poder, por meio de um Golpe de Estado, deixando claro o exemplo real de como a educação é, e pode ser um “aparelho ideológico de Estado”, conforme expressa Althusser (2023) para controle e repressão social. Esse Programa, ao invés de proporcionar uma educação de qualidade e emancipação, não somente social, mas também de cunho conscientizador de maneira a possibilitar que os indivíduos fossem instigados a criticar e a refletir sobre o *status quo*, funcionou como mecanismo de homogeneização ideológica dos militares para propagar suas ideias à Nação brasileira. O tipo de educação ofertada era alfabetização funcional, mecanizada, completamente engessada, tolhendo qualquer tipo de manifestação adversa ao ideário militar: ordem e controle social.

O projeto de “acabar com o analfabetismo entre a população de 15 a 35 anos de idade em dez anos”, conforme expressou o então presidente do Mobral, Mario Henrique Simonsen, de acordo com matéria do Jornal O Estado de São Paulo, publicada em 1970 - depois de comprovadas muitas irregularidades - ruiu por terra, pois chegou-se à década de 80 com um índice de analfabetismo de 25,5% entre os cidadãos acima dos 15 anos de idade. Após 21 anos sob o jugo dos militares, em 1985 a ditadura foi extinta e junto com ela o MOBREAL, por meio do decreto: 91.980 de 25 de novembro de 1985, substituído pela Fundação Educar.

Lembremos também, que por meio da Lei 5.692/1971 foi criado o Ensino Supletivo e que segundo Di Pierro e Haddad,

[...] foi apresentado a sociedade como um projeto escola de futuro, elemento de um sistema educacional compatível com a modernização socioeconômica, observada pelo país nos anos 70. Não se tratava de uma escola voltada aos interesses de uma determinada classe popular, mas de uma escola e por sua clientela pois a todos deveriam atender uma dinâmica permanente de atualização. (Haddad; Di Pierro, 2000, p. 117).

Com a extinção da ditadura militar e do MOBREAL, deu-se início a um novo processo de redemocratização, mobilizando educadores, estudantes, organizações sociais, políticos e etc. em prol da defesa da escola pública, laica e de qualidade para todos.

A Constituição Cidadã, promulgada em 1988 é crucial para a educação brasileira, sobremaneira para a EJAI, simbolizando avanços, esperança e novas perspectivas, onde ficou preconizado que o ensino fundamental seria ofertado de maneira obrigatória e gratuita, passando a ser uma garantia constitucional também para os que a ele não tiveram acesso na idade apropriada.

[...] nenhum jeito institucional foi mais importante para a Educação de Jovens e Adultos, nesse período que a conquista do Direito Universal ao Ensino Fundamental Público e gratuito, independentemente da idade, consagrado no artigo 208 da Constituição de 1988[...]. (Haddad; Di Pierro, 2000, p. 120).

Nesse interim, Paulo Freire que ora fora exilado, havia retornado ao Brasil e no ano de 1989 foi convidado pela então Prefeita da cidade de São Paulo, eleita pelo Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT, Luiza Erundina para compor a equipe de secretariado, assumindo assim a pasta da Educação, tendo como seu Secretário Adjunto o Professor e Filósofo Mário Sérgio Cortella. Freire criou o Movimento de Alfabetização de Jovens e Adultos – MOVA que tinha como objetivos:

1. Desenvolver um processo de alfabetização que possibilitar aos educandos uma leitura crítica da realidade;
2. Através do Movimento de Alfabetização contribuir para o desenvolvimento da consciência política dos educandos e educadores envolvidos;
3. Reforçar o incentivo à participação popular e a luta pelos direitos sociais do cidadão, ressaltando o direito básico à educação pública e popular;
4. Reforçar e ampliar o trabalho dos grupos populares que já trabalhassem com alfabetização de adultos na periferia da cidade. (Secretaria Municipal de Educação de São Paulo, 1989, p. 3).

Esse Movimento tinha em seu âmago, não somente a proposta de ser mais um projeto contra o analfabetismo, mas, outrossim, consolidava-se como um movimento de caráter político, na medida em que, através da alfabetização, procurava desenvolver um processo de “conscientização” dos envolvidos que incorresse num incremento da luta popular. (Freire, 2000).

No ano de 1996 foi sancionada a nova e atualmente vigente Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional – LDB 9.394 – remodelada no ideário democrático – que legitimou a luta de milhões de brasileiros trabalhadores que não tiveram a oportunidade de adentrar a um espaço escolar por diversas questões, quando a Educação de Jovens e Adultos se transformou numa modalidade de ensino, prevista no artigo 37.

A educação de jovens e adultos será destinada àqueles que não tiveram acesso ou continuidade de estudos no ensino fundamental e médio na idade própria. § 1º Os sistemas de ensino assegurarão gratuitamente aos jovens e aos adultos, que não puderam efetuar os estudos na idade regular, oportunidades educacionais apropriadas, consideradas as características do alunado, seus interesses, condições de vida e de trabalho, mediante cursos e exames. § 2º O Poder Público viabilizará e estimulará o acesso e a permanência do trabalhador na escola, mediante ações integradas e complementares entre si. (Brasil, 1996, n.p.).

Asseveramos que, para se inscrever na EJA, a idade mínima exigida para cursar os anos iniciais do Ensino Fundamental (1º ao 9º ano) é de 15 anos, enquanto que para o Ensino Médio é necessário ter, no mínimo, 18 anos. Neste contexto, cabe uma definição de jovem, conforme disposto na Lei nº. 12.852/2013, artigo 1º, §1º, que considera como jovens as pessoas entre 15 (quinze) e 29 (vinte e nove) anos de idade. Já o §2º da mesma lei define como adolescentes as pessoas com idades entre 15 (quinze) e 18 (dezoito) anos. No que tange ao idoso, de acordo com a Lei nº. 10.741/2003 é considerada a pessoa com 60 anos ou mais.

Ademais, destacamos que o enfrentamento ao analfabetismo e às desigualdades educacionais e sociais – sobretudo para esse público – ainda persiste, sendo respaldado pela LDB de 1996. Como exemplo, mencionamos que apenas em 2007, com a Lei nº 11.494, que regulamenta o Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica e de Valorização dos Profissionais da Educação (FUNDEB), a EJA foi oficialmente contemplada, o que ocorreu uma década após a criação da LDB.

Em 1997, foi instituído o Programa de Alfabetização Solidária (PAS), com o propósito de reduzir os índices de analfabetismo entre jovens e adultos no Brasil, especialmente na faixa etária de 12 a 18 anos, e impulsionar a ampliação da oferta pública de Educação de Jovens e Adultos.

Por meio do Decreto nº 4.838, de 8 de setembro de 2003, o Ministério da Educação (MEC) lançou o Programa Brasil Alfabetizado (PBA), que tinha como objetivo diminuir os índices de analfabetismo na população com 15 anos ou mais. O programa, apesar de novas reformulações, permanece em vigor até os dias de hoje, sendo a última iniciativa do governo federal no âmbito da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos.

Desventuradamente, essa modalidade ainda é muito desvalorizada, sendo frequentemente relegada a segundo plano nas políticas públicas e no orçamento educacional. Essa desvalorização revela não só a falta de prioridade para com a educação dos jovens, adultos e idosos, mas também um descaso com a inclusão e com o direito à aprendizagem ao longo da vida. Valorizar a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos é reconhecer o papel transformador da educação e garantir que todos os cidadãos possam ter acesso a oportunidades educacionais de qualidade, contribuindo para uma sociedade mais igualitária e consciente de seu valor histórico e cultural.

### III. CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Como este estudo mostrou, diversas iniciativas foram criadas ao longo dos anos para combater o analfabetismo entre a população adulta do Brasil. Todavia, ao falarmos da Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos, não devemos esquecer que essa

modalidade está intrinsecamente ligada à Educação Popular, à luta de milhões de pessoas e de movimentos sociais organizados, sindicais e religiosos. Esses grupos, indignados com as injustiças sociais, educacionais, culturais e econômicas, lutaram e continuam lutando pela construção de um mundo mais democrático, justo, equânime, fraterno, humano e solidário.

Discutir a Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos é abordar não apenas uma modalidade de ensino oficialmente reconhecida em lei há menos de 30 anos, mas também trazer à luz a concretização de uma reparação histórica de mais de 500 anos que a sociedade brasileira deve a milhões de brasileiros que viveram à margem do processo educativo e se viram imersos no analfabetismo, nas desigualdades e na opressão social, diante de uma sociedade moldada pela “disputa de classes” e poder, como aponta Poulantzas (1980) em seus estudos.

Ademais, a alfabetização na EJAI deve permitir que o indivíduo seja valorizado nos “diversos letramentos” que traz consigo, considerando não só a habilidade de ler e escrever, mas também a compreensão e a valorização dos saberes acumulados no decorrer da vida. Seguindo a perspectiva de Miguel Arroyo (2017), é essencial que a EJA permita ao indivíduo “leer-se” – ou seja, desenvolver uma consciência crítica sobre si mesmo e sobre seu papel na sociedade. Esse processo de leitura de si mesmo fortalece a autoestima e o senso de pertencimento do aluno, contribuindo para sua emancipação social.

Porquanto, é possível concluir que embora tantas ações e esforços tenham sido realizadas, como demonstradas no decorrer deste estudo, ainda não foram suficientes para sanar o analfabetismo em nosso país, pois, ainda hoje, em 2024 temos mais de 11,4 milhões de pessoas que não sabem ler, escrever e sequer assinar o seu próprio nome, acima dos 15 anos de idade, exigindo mais esforços e investimentos em políticas públicas, essas que frente à um Estado completamente inspirado numa concepção neoliberal e privatista, suas “ações e estratégias sociais governamentais incidem essencialmente em políticas compensatórias, em programas focalizados,

voltados àqueles que, em função de sua ‘capacidade’ e escolhas individuais, não usufruem do progresso social”. (Höfling, 2001, p. 39).

A Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos é fundamental para a promoção da justiça e da equidade social, ainda que sobreviva, numa constante luta, frente a uma sociedade que convive com um futuro grávido de incertezas e instabilidades, onde predomina a relação dominador-dominado e é necessária a tomada de consciência e compreensão, de que o Estado não é somente uma estrutura unidimensional, constituído pela sociedade política, mas também se constitui pela sociedade civil organizada, ulterior a Gramsci (1999) em sua concepção de Estado Integral.

Por fim, este trabalho também visa convocar os pares para que contribuam com suas pesquisas nas mais diversas frentes atinentes à Educação de Jovens, Adultos e Idosos, promovendo um diálogo interdisciplinar e colaborativo, com o intento de fortalecer as discussões para a formulação de políticas públicas assertivas, nesse campo onde ainda sofre tantos preconceitos, e é silenciada e relegada a segundo plano dentro de tais políticas.

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