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CASE STUDY OF THE SCHOOL TRAJECTORY OF A RIVERINE STUDENT AT THE AMAZONAS FEDERAL UNIVERSITY¹

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ABSTRACT: The school trajectory of students from riverine communities is marked by factors such as difficulties with access and transportation, lack of financial assistance, educational policies, and personal life histories, so that not only does the entry of these students into higher education become difficult, but also their permanence. Through a unique case study that includes individual interviews with open narratives and thematic content analysis, we present how a riverine student describes his schooling trajectory and his experiences at the Amazonas Federal University, Parintins *Campus*. We discuss it according to the following categories: schooling trajectory (multigrade classes, travel to study); difficulties (lack of access to student retention policies, low family income, difficulties with remote teaching); and facilitators of staying at university (scholarship/financial aid programs, social support). We conclude that the interviewee's case indicates that rural educational policies failed to keep him in rural areas, but due to a personal ideal and social support from friends, professors, and family, he shows a desire to return to the riverine community. The university offers various student support programs, but not all were accessible to the interviewee; research and teaching grants were major financial incentives that helped him remain in the course. Remote learning revealed significant technological difficulties faced in rural municipalities, at the university, and by students, especially those from low-income backgrounds like the interviewee. Finally, we consider that the “riverine” should be made visible with the aim of affirmative policies.

Keywords: Rural community, school trajectory, university, rural education, Amazon.

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ESTUDO DE CASO DA TRAJETÓRIA ESCOLAR DE UM RIBEIRINHO NA UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO AMAZONAS

RESUMO: A trajetória escolar de estudantes oriundos de comunidades ribeirinhas é marcada por fatores como dificuldades de acesso e transporte, desassistência financeira, políticas educacionais e história de vida pessoal, de modo que não somente a entrada destes discentes no Ensino Superior se torna dificultosa, mas também a sua permanência. Por meio de estudo de caso único com entrevista individual com narrativa aberta e análise de conteúdo temática, apresentamos como um estudante ribeirinho significa sua trajetória de escolarização e as suas vivências na Universidade Federal do Amazonas, *Campus* Parintins. Discutimo-lo segundo as seguintes categorias: trajetória de escolarização (classes multisseriadas, deslocamentos para estudos); dificultadores (falta de acesso a políticas de permanência a estudantes, baixa renda familiar, dificuldades com o ensino remoto); facilitadores da permanência na universidade (programas de bolsa/auxílio financeiro, apoio social). Concluímos que o caso do entrevistado indica que as políticas de Educação do Campo não conseguiram mantê-lo na zona rural, mas, por um ideal pessoal e apoio social de amigos, docentes e familiares, ele demonstra desejo de retornar à comunidade ribeirinha. A universidade possui distintos programas de apoio estudantil, mas nem todos foram acessíveis ao entrevistado, sendo as bolsas de pesquisa e docência grandes incentivadores financeiros, que colaboraram para sua permanência no curso. O ensino remoto revelou grandes dificuldades tecnológicas enfrentadas pelos estudantes e universidades nos municípios do interior, especialmente os alunos de baixa renda, como o entrevistado. Consideramos, por fim, que é necessário visibilizar o “ribeirinho” como alvo das ações afirmativas.

Palavras-chave: Comunidade rural, trajetória escolar, universidade, Educação do Campo, Amazônia.

ESTUDIO DE CASO DE LA TRAYECTORIA ESCOLAR DE UN RIBEREÑO EN LA UNIVERSIDAD FEDERAL DEL AMAZONAS

RESUMEN: La trayectoria escolar de los estudiantes de comunidades ribereñas está marcada por dificultades de acceso y transporte, falta de asistencia financiera, políticas educativas e historia de vida, por lo que no solo se dificulta el ingreso a la educación superior, sino también su permanencia. A través de un estudio de caso con entrevistas individuales con narrativa abierta y análisis de contenido temático, presentamos cómo un estudiante ribereño significa su trayectoria escolar y sus experiencias en la Universidad Federal de Amazonas, *Campus* Parintins. Lo discutimos según las siguientes categorías: trayectoria escolar (clases multigrado, traslados para estudiar), dificultades (falta de acceso a políticas de retención de Estudiantes, bajos ingresos familiares, dificultades con la enseñanza remota); facilitadores de la estancia en la universidad (programas de becas/ayudas económicas, apoyo social). Concluimos que el caso del entrevistado indica que las políticas de educación del campo no lograron retenerlo en la zona rural, pero debido a un ideal personal y al apoyo social de amigos, docentes y familiares, expresa su deseo de regresar a la comunidad ribereña. La universidad cuenta con diversos programas de apoyo estudiantil, pero no todos fueron accesibles para el entrevistado, siendo las becas de investigación y docencia los principales incentivos financieros que contribuyeron a su permanencia en la carrera. La educación a distancia reveló importantes dificultades tecnológicas que enfrentan los municipios rurales, la universidad y los estudiantes, especialmente aquellos de bajos recursos como el entrevistado. Finalmente, creemos que la población ribereña debe ser visibilizada como objetivo de acciones afirmativas.

Palabras clave: Comunidad rural, trayectoria escolar, universidad, educación del campo, Amazonía.

INTRODUCTION

In the quest for educational rights among rural populations, the field of Education emerges as a clear pioneer. It has collaborated with social, labor, and academic movements to promote the proposals for *Educação do Campo* (Rural Education) (Borges, 2012). Since the 2010s, there has been a burgeoning interest in Psychology regarding rural issues, particularly in Latin America. This has fostered a moment aimed at connecting psychological sciences with the challenges faced in rural areas, leading to the establishment of an interdisciplinary field known as Rural Psychology. Additionally, this movement has culminated in the formation of the Latin American Network of Rural Psychology (RedPsiRural), which seeks to advance knowledge and practice in this area across the continent (Calegare, 2017; Olivera-Méndez et al., 2023). According to a literature review by Santos and Calegare (2022), there have been advances in publications within the Psychology that engage with rural issues, specifically gender, labor, epistemology, intergenerational dynamics, human rights, race, and education, with the latter topic showing the least volume of publications. Consequently, we recognize the importance of further research that integrates psychosocial, rural, and educational themes.

Martín-Baró (1996) stated that it is essential to recognize that psychological practice does not take place in spaces devoid of meaning; rather, it occurs alongside the popular majorities, within their history, their socioeconomic and political contexts, and amidst their aspirations, conflicts, struggles, needs, resources, and sources of satisfaction. Thus, a critical practice, one that integrates Psychology, Education, and rural contexts, can contribute to the mobilization and enhancement of resources that foster activism and the empowerment of rural communities. These elements are essential for a praxis capable of transforming reality. Consequently, Lopes et al. (2018) and Silva and Macedo (2019) pointed out that one of the major challenges facing Latin American Rural Psychology is the training of students and future professionals who can shift their perspective away from the urban-centric focus typically embedded in their theories and concepts. It is imperative to seek new knowledge about rural populations, given the unique characteristics of their modes of existence, specific demands, productive practices, access to rights, and interactions with the urban world.

Psychology plays a crucial role in understanding the trajectory of the rural population's pursuit of education, as it recognizes that social and political emancipation processes can only be realized when critical subjectivities are constructed, specifically, both individual and collective subjects who take ownership of their own emancipatory processes (Pontual, 2019). Through Critical Social Psychology, which contributes to the interdisciplinary perspective of Rural Psychology, individuals are viewed as the producers of their own histories, situated at the intersection of society (Gruda, 2016). In this way, the historical-dialectical subject is not merely determined by history. They are also its transformative force. Through praxis, they find a way to act as protagonists within social relationships. In this context, Molina et al. (2019) stated that peasant communities and the peasantry must be understood through their relationship with the land, as it constitutes the very foundation of their existence, serving as their workplace, the place for meeting their needs, and the locus for the (re)production of the peasant family unit, whether accomplished collectively or individually. Based on this perspective, the authors argued that Rural Education is rooted in the agency of socio-historical subjects who understand and actively promote the transcendence of capitalist societal structures through the struggles fought within rural schools.

As Fernandes and Molina (2004) noted, the paradigm of the traditional rural sector in Brazil tended to serve the interests of economic capital and to shape the concept of “rural education,” disregarding the countryside as a living territory and excluding the logic of the rural world, as well as alternative forms of knowledge and practice. However, a counter-response emerged from rural social movements. There was a recognition of the existence of rural social movements and of a pedagogical movement inherent to them, which merited attention and established as a right to land, knowledge, and

culture for peasant peoples, forming the context for *Educação do Campo* (Rural Education) (Arroyo, 1999). Consequently, Caldart (2002) highlighted that the elements characterizing Rural Education were: the struggle for universal access to education; the subjects of Rural Education, those residing within peasant territories; and an education intrinsically linked to rural social struggles, an educational process driven by dialogue among diverse peasant subjects, focused on constructing a specific educational project, and encompassing the establishment of “*Escolas do Campo*” (Rural Schools), whose educators are subjects of Rural Education. Caldart (2012) defined Rural Education as a concept that “designates a phenomenon within contemporary Brazilian reality, spearheaded by rural workers and their organizations, that seeks to influence educational policy based on the social interests of peasant communities” (p. 259).

Molina et al. (2019) summarized that Rural Education is a “set of practices, principles, and policies that have been formulated since the late 1990s by individuals involved in constructing a school project articulated with a project for the countryside and for society” (p. 03). The authors described that the architects of the Rural Education Movement (*Movimento da Educação do Campo*) were the collective organizations of peasant communities, resulting in public policies and educational practices tailored to the rural context. Antunes-Rocha et al. (2023) identified three principles of Rural Education: (1) the centrality of the individuals involved and their contexts, which entails the participation of the community and rural social movements in the pedagogical, political, and social oversight of the quality of educational provision; (2) the organization of the struggle for the school as a right, referring to access, retention, and the completion of the educational trajectory; and (3) the construction of a school project linked to a project for the countryside from a sustainable and emancipatory perspective, which frames pedagogical practices as aligning with the (re)production of the peasant way of life. Thus, the Rural School is not limited to literacy; rather, it encompasses social and economic projects oriented toward the countryside, blending education and political commitment.

Faced with a challenging social, economic, and political reality, many young peasants did not even consider pursuing higher education. For those from low-income families, this dream remains even more distant due to a series of difficulties in accessing higher education, prejudice in the city, transportation challenges, and a lack of financial means, in addition to the family responsibilities tied to work performed by their families in rural areas (Paulo, 2018). Consequently, the journey toward higher education has not been easy for young people from rural schools, and they have had difficulty maintaining their enrollment.

In the Brazilian context, studies demonstrate how inequalities in educational opportunities impact educational transitions and the persistence of disparities, which, following the extensive expansion of educational systems, are gradually transferred to subsequent stages of education (Koslinski & Bartholo, 2020). In a study conducted with rural youth regarding their educational trajectories, Melo et al. (2019) demonstrated that one of the strategies used by these young people to complete their Basic Education was migration: 55.3% of the students pursued their regular elementary education in rural schools, yet a significant portion of these youth (44.7%) left their rural environments and communities during the very first years of school. By the time they reached High School, 31.6% of the students remained in rural schools, while the others (68.4%) began attending schools in the cities. These data indicate that, as the level of schooling advances, the exodus from rural communities toward the cities increases.

When considering the educational trajectories of young people in the rural Amazon, we must, first and foremost, acknowledge that this region, in its environmental, cultural, and historical aspects, embodies both complexity and diversity. The Amazon comprises grasslands, *cerrado* savannas, forests, *igapó* flooded forests, *terra firme* uplands, and *várzea* floodplains, all crisscrossed by various types of streams, lakes, and rivers featuring waters that are crystalline, muddy, or dark (Tavares, 2018). As argued by Lira and Chaves (2016), an “Amazonian way of life”, particularly among riverine populations, has taken shape within this environment; this way of life is the result of historical exchanges among diverse social groups and ethnic communities, giving rise to a heritage made manifest through the sociocultural expressions of Amazonian people in their relationships regarding work, education, religion, legends, and dietary and family habits.

On the other hand, the Amazonian context is the focus of several projects aimed at economic and educational development in the region. However, these projects treat the local inhabitants as passive subjects, disconnected from their own history. This detachment ultimately leads to an estrangement from their culture and local knowledge, in favor of an educational model that aligns more closely with capitalist interests (Tavares, 2018). Furthermore, there is a lack of incentives for the Amazonian population to remain in their communities, and public policies targeting the region are frequently poorly formulated and fail to adequately address regional needs (Calegare et al., 2013).

Basic Education aimed at populations within Amazonian rural territories has been the subject of debate and research, with particular emphasis placed on the issue of multigrade classes. These classes pose a significant challenge to teachers who, in many cases, also fulfill the roles of principal, coordinator, cleaner, gatekeeper, and secretary, a form of “single-teacher” work, as noted by Borges et al. (2022). Andrade et al. (2023) argued that multigrade classes have students with heterogeneous profiles, that is, with varying ages and distinct activities. On one hand, this is difficult for teachers trained in the traditional graded system; on the other, it fosters mutual learning among students, wherein older students teach younger ones. Consequently, the authors underscored that multigrade classes require teachers in the interior of Amazonas (AM) to be specifically trained for this context and to receive ongoing professional development that equips them with both theoretical and practical tools. However, they did not receive the necessary preparation during their undergraduate studies. This point was reinforced by Benigno et al. (2023), who indicated that, notwithstanding the need to adapt the education provided in rural territories, Early Childhood Education instruction in rural schools across Amazonas has suffered from a lack of both initial and continuing professional development for teachers.

On the other hand, Borges et al. (2022) highlighted the continuing education work undertaken with teachers in Amazonian rural schools through the *Escola da Terra* (School of the Land) Program. This initiative has helped these educators understand the identity of the rural subject and recognize them as protagonists of their knowledge, strengthening the objectives of Rural Education through multi-grade classes using the Pedagogy of Alternation and alternation-based training. As explained by Vieira et al. (2024), the Pedagogy of Alternation is a pedagogical approach that originated in France in the early 20th century and was introduced to Brazil in the late 1960s. It gained prominence in the Northern Region in subsequent decades, driven by the specific realities of riverine communities and other traditional peoples, by structuring the educational process around alternating periods: time spent by peasant students at school (*tempo escola* – school time) and time spent with their families or communities (*tempo comunidade* – community time). As the authors noted, the success of this pedagogical innovation is also anchored in partnerships with peasant families, local associations, and other institutions, fostering a sharing of experiences that supports the holistic development of local young farmers. Alternation-based training refers to the teacher education experience within undergraduate degree programs in Rural Education (*Licenciaturas do Campo*) and the potential for converging these practices with the broader field of Rural Education (Molina et al., 2021).

Silva et al. (2022) also highlighted the importance of the participation of workers, community associations, public agencies, and universities in the construction of an education of and in the countryside, one that leads to a dignified education and life in rural areas, waterways, and forests, describing the case of the municipality of Parintins (AM). Campos (2024) also indicated that rural workers belonging to trade union organizations have influenced the formulation of public policies for Rural Education in the Amazon, fostering a recognition of the distinct characteristics of forest, rural, aquatic, and urban spaces, while valuing Amazonian culture, knowledge, and identity. Despite this, the author underscored the persistence of teacher shortages, inadequate training, a lack of schools and appropriate facilities, curricula disconnected from rural realities, and multi-grade classrooms.

Pantoja and Custódio (2023) argued that there is a distance between the discourse, theories, and actions regarding educational policies for Rural Education in the Amazon, emphasizing the critical need for continuing teacher education, physical infrastructure, and instructional materials to ensure quality education. Mourão et al. (2020) noted that Rural Education is a public policy that was hard-won. However, it has not been implemented across all Amazonian territories, despite rural populations

maintaining a form of work of and in the countryside, rooted in a collective way of life, that aligns with the original conceptual underpinnings of Rural Education. Thus, Silva et al. (2021) pointed out that the backdrop for Rural Education in the Amazon is the intricate interplay between issues related to the Amazonian peasant's way of life, social inequalities, and the historical exploitation of the region's natural resources.

Given this context, many financially well-off families prefer to send their children to study in the city. In the Amazon, the rural population faces neglect and a devaluation of their culture and labor, leading them to believe that opportunities for better living conditions lie outside their rural communities (Calegare, 2023). Studies such as those by Breitenbach and Corazza (2019) and Zancanella (2017) have indicated that parents of rural youth want their children to pursue higher education in the cities and not return to the countryside, as they believe this is where their children will find more substantial opportunities. These authors noted that young people pursuing higher education, who constantly travel back and forth between the city and their home communities, ultimately give up on returning to the rural environment due to a lack of opportunities and sheer exhaustion, remaining in the cities.

According to Lima (2021), research on educational trajectories of young riverine people indicates that, while these individuals do have access to rural schools, they still face various difficulties, such as: migration from their communities to urban areas to attain the highest possible level of education; the sadness resulting from separation from family members, their community, and nature; and a disconnection from the river, which, throughout their lives, is regarded as a vital means of transportation, recreation, and sustenance. Souza (2022) noted that the trajectory of young riverine individuals is marked by various challenges, including commuting migration and rural exodus, a lack of policies designed to support university retention, and the devaluation of their identity as people hailing from the interior. Conversely, Nunes (2022) demonstrated that the recognition of shared values and beliefs within the student-teacher relationship in the academic context, along with emotional support and a sense of belonging, constitute crucial elements in the educational trajectories of young riverine people.

In 2012, Law 12,711, also known as the Quota Law, came into force. This legislation establishes a system reserving 50% of vacancies in higher education programs for students from public schools who self-identify as Black, Brown, or Indigenous, as well as for persons with disabilities, within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) funded by the Federal Government (Law 12,711, 2012). The Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM) has fully implemented this Law since 2016, having admitted 16,823 new university students who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, or persons with disabilities between 2012 and 2021, according to the Pro-Rectorate for Undergraduate Education (Universidade Federal do Amazonas [UFAM], 2022). Although the quotas used by UFAM encompass students from any municipality in the country, no specific portion of these vacancies is reserved exclusively for students from rural communities within Amazonas, or for those who completed part of their education in rural schools within the state.

In addition to admissions, affirmative action policies emphasize the importance of student retention and promoting incentives for degree completion in higher education (Campos & Feres, 2014). Therefore, retention policies or their absence constitute a contributing factor in whether students persist or withdraw from their studies. These policies are designed to foster academic success, reducing rates of academic stagnation and dropout that often arise from economic factors (Maciel et al., 2016). However, retention policies alone are insufficient; supporting and monitoring policies are also essential, given that high dropout rates in higher education may be linked to the university failing to provide housing assistance, pedagogical guidance, or financial aid for purchasing educational materials (Angnes et al., 2014; Calegare & Sales, 2023).

In this context, UFAM, through its Department of Student Assistance (DAEST), offers a variety of student assistance programs and grants, including Academic Aid, Internet Aid, and Housing Aid, among others. At the Parintins Campus, situated in the eponymous city in the interior of the state of Amazonas, there is a University Residence (RUNI) designed primarily to accommodate students duly selected by DAEST who do not reside in the municipal seat and who face socioeconomic vulnerability.

However, it raises the question: do the students at this UFAM campus truly feel that their needs are being met, and do they perceive their academic experiences in Higher Education as satisfactory?

Given that the educational trajectory leading to Higher Education for individuals, particularly young people, from rural communities is neither simple nor free of obstacles (Paulo, 2018), and that Amazonian riverside communities possess various distinct characteristics that act as impediments in the pursuit of formal education, the following questions arise: How do riverside students from the communities of Parintins make sense of their academic trajectory? What experiences do they undergo while at the university? What factors promote and/or hinder their retention at the university? Based on these questions, this article aims to present and discuss a case study regarding the meanings that a riverside student ascribed to his educational trajectory and his experiences at UFAM, Parintins Campus, with an emphasis on the factors that promote and/or hinder university retention.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative and exploratory research, which Gil (2022) characterized as an investigation into human experience, grounded in an understanding of the interactions, interpretations, and meaning-making processes that individuals apply to themselves and the world. To this end, a single-case study approach was used. The author defines this methodology as an in-depth and exhaustive examination of a single object, thereby enabling a comprehensive and detailed understanding of it. As argued by Menezes (2009), the single-case study distinguishes itself by examining an individual or phenomenon within a real-world context, drawing upon a variety of evidence regarding their experience, and, in doing so, revealing processes that shed light on more complex social issues.

The participant in our study is a 24-year-old man, whom we will refer to as “José” to protect his anonymity. To maintain confidentiality, we have also omitted specific details about the location involved, which will be addressed later. José is the son of farmers and fishermen and was born and raised in a riverside community of just over 70 families, located in the interior of the municipality of Barreirinha, in the state of Amazonas. He completed his education through the 4th grade of Elementary School I (grades 1 through 5) in his community, attending a multi-grade classroom at a rural school.

To complete the 5th grade, Middle School (6th through 9th grades), and High School, he had to enroll in a school located in a neighboring district, where classes were organized by grade level. During the first two years, he had to walk to school every day. Subsequently, school transportation became available. This stage of his basic education was completed in 2015, without any grade retentions. That same year, he took the National High School Exam (ENEM-*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*), the State University of Amazonas’s Serial Admission System (SIS-*Sistema de Ingresso Seriado*), and the UFAM’s Continuous Selection Process (PSC-*Processo Seletivo Contínuo*). This last one was specifically for the Philosophy program, but he did not pass. He spent a year in his community.

The following year, in 2016, he used his ENEM score to apply through the Unified Selection System (SISU-*Sistema de Seleção Unificada*), which centralizes the selection process for vacancies at public universities, qualifying as a low-income applicant. His first choice was Pedagogy, and his second was Animal Science. He successfully secured a spot in his second choice and had to relocate once again. This time, he traveled even further than before to the city of Parintins, home to the UFAM campus, which is also known for its sole academic unit: the Institute of Social Sciences, Education, and Animal Science (ICSEZ-*Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Educação e Zootecnia*). He spent three semesters in the Animal Science program. Then, after retaking the ENEM and securing a spot in Pedagogy, he began that degree program in 2018.

We contacted the participant, and following confirmation of their interest in the research, a date was scheduled for the interview (May 2022). The signing of the Informed Consent Term (ICT) was completed and signed electronically via Google Forms. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview was conducted using the Google Meet platform. As our research instrument, we employed an open-

ended narrative interview, lasting approximately 40 minutes, as this approach aids in mapping and understanding the interviewee's world, life, and specific social contexts (Gil, 2022). We began with the following opening question: "Tell me your life story." The interviewee experienced significant difficulties with internet access, as the signal at their residence was poor, resulting in frequent "screen freezes" and disjointed audio during the interview.

Following the transcription of the recorded interview, we used thematic content analysis, as proposed by Bardin (2016). It is structured into three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment of the results. José's narrative, expressed during the interview and about his educational trajectory, was analyzed, yielding three categories and subcategories: 1) educational trajectory; 2) factors hindering university retention (lack of access to student retention policies; low family income; difficulties with remote learning); and 3) factors facilitating university retention (scholarship/financial aid programs; social support from friends and family).

The research adhered to Resolution 510/2016 of the National Health Council (CNS), which establishes guidelines for research in the human and social sciences, and was approved by the UFAM Research Ethics Committee under Opinion 4,082,840. We followed the guidelines of Vieira et al. (2022) regarding ethical considerations for online data collection, explaining the Informed Consent Form before its signature, ensuring the secrecy and confidentiality of the collected information, and refraining from storing the interview recordings in a database. Upon completion of the research, the report was sent to the participant to provide feedback on the results of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Trajectory

José's academic journey began at a rural school situated in a riverside community in the municipality of Barreirinha, the very place where our participant was born and raised. José recounts his early years of education at the aforementioned institution: "I began my school life there at the age of six. I completed my entire Elementary School in multi-grade classes at the school right there in the community, the Rural School." According to the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP-*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira*) (2007), multi-grade classes consist of "students from different grades and levels within the same classroom, regardless of the number of teachers responsible for the class" (p. 25).

As explained by Hage et al. (2016), in the Amazon region, riverside schools are organized into multi-grade classes due to the vast distances between communities, the low number of students in each grade level, and a shortage of teachers, both in the early and final years of Elementary School, as also observed in our research with José. The authors highlighted that this mode of education involves a series of challenges for both teachers and students, such as a lack of teacher preparedness, a slow and protracted learning process, and a scarcity of pedagogical resources and inadequate infrastructure.

Despite the challenges imposed upon Rural Education by the instructional model based on multigrade classes in riverside communities (Borges et al., 2022; Mourão et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2021; Souza, 2023), the participant in this study is committed to the maintenance and improvement of this model, through research projects developed at UFAM and plans for the future following graduation, telling us: "If I am at a university today, my foundation was a multigrade class; therefore, I intend to return to the community and teach at the very school where I studied." He continued: "I am conducting research on multigrade classes within the Rural School system of the municipality of Barreirinha (...), and I am currently in the final stages of the research development."

We observed that José intends to undertake a contrary movement to what is generally practiced by young people from rural backgrounds. Koslinski and Bartholo (2020) state that many students, encouraged by their parents, migrate to cities to pursue higher education and remain in urban

environments even after graduation, in search of better employment opportunities. From a psychosocial perspective, this is grounded in the understanding that the city symbolizes progress and civilizational advancement, while rural or forested areas are perceived as places of backwardness and rusticity, mere sources of raw materials that require development (Calegare, 2023) and modernization to serve the interests of Capital (Fernandes & Molina, 2004).

In his educational journey during the final years of elementary school and high school, José tells us that he had to leave his community to commute daily to a district located within the municipality of Barreirinha. During this time, he faced countless difficulties in accessing the school building: “We didn’t have school transportation back then; we would walk all the way from the community where I lived to the district (...), there were many shortcomings, the bus would break down, and our transport was often that famous *pau de arara* [an improvised truck].” Castro (2018) argued that numerous variables influence a student's educational trajectory, such as their social background, their parents' level of education and occupation, the relationship between the family and the institution, and the school's resources, its size and geographic location, student accessibility to the site, safety, the relationships established there, and even the teachers' expectations. On this point, José recounted: “Even with all these difficulties, you know, I never stopped attending school, thanks to the teachers and the education the school provided.”

To get to the university, José’s journey was shaped by the quota system, implemented through Law 12,711. This legislation mandates the reservation of vacancies in federally funded higher education institutions for students from public schools, specifically those who self-identify as Black, Brown, or Indigenous, and for persons with disabilities (Law 12,711, 2012). According to Heringer (2018), through this law, affirmative action policies began to be implemented, enabling the admission of students from public schools and those belonging to groups historically neglected by public policy, groups that have long been targets of violence, prejudice, and discrimination, such as Black people (both black and brown), Indigenous peoples, *quilombolas*, and riverine communities.

One of the admission methods accepted by UFAM is the PSC, a selection process that involves continuous and systematic assessments conducted throughout the three years of high school. This process fills 50% of the available spots in the institution's degree programs. The remaining 50% of vacancies are filled using SISU, the selection criterion for this portion. José initially tried to gain admission to the university via the PSC, as he shared: “I took the UFAM entrance exam, the PSC, for Philosophy, but it was not meant to be.” He eventually succeeded in entering the university through the second admission method: “I took the ENEM exam and secured a position through the SISU program; (...) in early 2018, I began my studies in the Pedagogy program.” He mentioned that he was admitted under the NDC1 quota, which is for students graduating from public schools who do not self-identify as Black, Brown, or Indigenous and can demonstrate a monthly gross per capita family income of equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages (Normative Ordinance No. 18, 2012). From that point onward, José embarked on his academic journey at UFAM’s Parintins Campus, situated in a municipality adjacent to Barreirinha.

There are several observations regarding José’s educational trajectory leading up to his university enrollment. First, he said that his education took place within multigrade classrooms, a modality criticized by some authors (Gama et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2020; Souza, 2019) but defended by others (Arroyo, 1999; Borges et al., 2022). However, this form of instruction enabled him to acquire the foundational education of his academic journey. As being essential, he resolved to dedicate himself to advocating for and improving this educational modality throughout his university studies: “I always say that multigrade classrooms are a cause I agree with because I came from them; therefore, I am living proof that multigrade classrooms yield results.” In his defense of this type of instruction, he stated his intention to return to living in rural communities rather than remaining in the city: “If I am at a university today, the foundation was a multigrade classroom; therefore, I do indeed intend to return to the community and teach at the very school I attended.” José also underscored the role of his academic training, highlighting the value of multigrade classrooms through an extension project and through his close collaboration with his academic advisor and research group:

I participated in a project titled 'Rural Education and Youth Empowerment; so, on weekends, we would go out to the communities in the local rural area (...) and had discussion groups with community members, specifically with the youth, to highlight precisely this empowerment of rural young people, and just how much they have to offer. The research group is also focused on this, as my advisor's background lies in Rural Education; other professors support during multi-grade classrooms and Rural Education, and they consistently approach their work with this specific perspective.

This passage initially indicates that Rural Education entails the participation and active agency of rural social actors, ensuring that the direction of the pedagogical, political, and social project aligns with the perspectives of the peasantry (Arroyo, 1999; Borges et al., 2022; Caldart, 2002, 2012; Fernandes & Molina, 2004). José is a riverine individual who attended a rural school and received part of his education in a multi-grade setting. He is currently receiving formal instruction at the university to become a teacher qualified to practice following the principles of Rural Education. We may view his participation in an extension project and a research group focused on this theme as a response from the university to criticisms regarding the lack of adequate training for teachers in rural schools across the Amazon region (Andrade et al., 2023; Benigno et al., 2023; Pantoja & Custódio, 2023; Silva et al., 2021). On the other hand, it is not possible to determine whether José's case is an isolated example and a success of multi-grade instruction, given that he completed only the early years of elementary school in this format and is currently receiving training that specifically values this type of teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the educational trajectories of other students to reach a broader conclusion.

From a psychosocial perspective, the socio-historical subject is characterized by their status as both a producer and a product of society, possessing the capacity to reflect upon their personal and contextual conditions (socioeconomic, political, etc.), to develop critical consciousness, and to act as an agent of reality transformation through their praxis (Martín-Baró, 1996). Thus, it is evident that José is a producer and an active subject of his history, giving meaning to the education he received, valuing it, and even defending it. He is not an ignorant individual with a "backward" rural culture, as he might be prejudicially stereotyped (Calegare, 2023). Pontual (2019) argued that it is crucial for Psychology, when aligning with the defense of Rural Education, to incorporate an understanding of the processes of social and political emancipation. These processes can only be realized when critical subjectivities are constructed, that is, by individual and collective subjects who take ownership of their emancipatory processes.

José entered the university through the NDC1 quota, which applies to students graduating from public schools who did not self-declare as Black, Brown, or Indigenous, and whose monthly per capita gross family income is equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages (Normative Ordinance 18, 2012). As noted by Lima and Urnau (2023), numerous social markers, such as race, class, and territoriality, reveal educational inequalities that reflect the living conditions of Amazonian riverside populations, particularly those who are Black, Brown, or Indigenous, impoverished, and residing in rural contexts. Despite the absence of a specific quota or institutional policy recognizing riverside students, the authors contend that the lack of systematic data on this group within universities significantly hampers the development of targeted public policies for these populations in Higher Education. Although riverside students align with existing affirmative action policies, they do not receive the specialized attention afforded to Indigenous and *quilombola* students. This is particularly concerning given the social, cultural, and historical significance of riverside communities to the Amazon region.

Obstacles to University Retention

José's journey at the university was marked by several obstacles, such as the lack of access to student retention policies, low family income, and difficulties with remote learning. Regarding the lack of retention policies, José specifically emphasized the issue of housing, saying: "Since I came from the interior, the difficulties here in the city were numerous, because I had nowhere to live." He also shared the experiences of colleagues and friends who, due to a lack of access to the retention policies provided

by the university, were forced to give up on their dream of earning a bachelor's degree: "I know many colleagues who dropped out because they lacked financial aid, a place to live, or people to guide them (...) I believe the university must be prepared to provide this support to its students."

In 2008, the National Student Assistance Plan (PNAES-*Plano Nacional de Assistência Estudantil*) was implemented, with the following objectives: to enhance the conditions for student retention in federal public Higher Education institutions; to democratize education; to minimize the effects of social and regional inequalities on the persistence and completion of Higher Education; to reduce retention and dropout rates; and to contribute to the promotion of social inclusion through education (Decree 7,234, 2010). However, José has made it clear that there remain countless students whose needs are not being met. This is a situation that points to a lack of effective public student assistance policies specifically tailored to students from riverine communities, particularly in universities located in the country's Northern Region. It is as if the young peasant, upon entering the university, occupies a space that is not "his own", precisely because he is from the interior and is poor, disrupting the traditional structures of university operations; consequently, the adoption of affirmative and inclusive measures becomes necessary (Bierhals et al., 2018).

Therefore, low family income is another factor that negatively influences José's trajectory from the very beginning of his education journey: "Many of us come from the interior to study in Parintins, and our parents are not salaried employees; they are fishermen and farmers who make do with very little, so it was very difficult." According to a study conducted with students from the Amazon region, specifically those at UFAM, Resende et al. (2022) reported that approximately 40% of the students came from families with an income of up to two minimum wages. This finding reinforces data from the National Association of Leaders of Federal Higher Education Institutions (ANDIFES-*Associação Nacional dos Dirigentes das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior*), which, in 2019, indicated that about 31.7% of students in the Northern Region fell within the family income bracket of one to two minimum wages. The authors noted that such students face significant challenges due to a lack of financial resources to cover housing, transportation, food, and the materials necessary for their academic education, a burden felt particularly by students from riverine communities, such as José, a participant in our research. Ganam and Pinezi (2021) contended that retaining young individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in university poses a significant challenge. These students face both material difficulties, such as financial struggles, and symbolic difficulties concerning their sense of belonging within the academic environment. These obstacles contribute to experiences of discrimination and exclusion, leading these students to strive for the social status of a "standard student" in an effort to align themselves with peers who do not rely on student assistance.

Molina et al. (2024) discussed that Rural Education must be conceptualized through the triad of Education, Public Policies, and the Countryside, to foster an emancipatory educational project that aligns with the reality of the peasant population. The authors emphasized that Rural Education is directly linked to public policies that ensure the advancement of the rights of peasant communities. The right to education is at stake, recognized as an accomplishment, a public good, an obligation of the State, a social right, and a matter of social justice. Therefore, it is essential to implement affirmative actions to facilitate the access and retention of rural youth, not only in Basic Education but also in Higher Education. It is unjust to expect these young individuals to compete on equal footing with others who have benefited from a distinctly privileged educational experience. In this context, Batista and Silva (2024) noted an ongoing trend by the State to deny peasants the right to Higher Education, underscoring the urgent need for the democratization of universities and the development of an academic culture that respects the unique cultural characteristics of rural communities. According to these authors, it is essential to expand the provision of access and retention of rural youth in Higher Education, since, in social inequalities, these individuals rely on the State to gain access to education.

Remote education is another challenge. In 2020, José's academic journey, like that of many students, was influenced by remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most public universities in the country prioritized the implementation of remote education, adapting to the suspension of various in-person activities. In addition to a lack of financial resources and inadequate equipment for participating

in online classes, the difficulty of securing internet service was a predominant factor in Amazonas, particularly in the state's interior municipalities. In this region, internet access primarily relies on cabling or fiber optics to the capital, Manaus. However, in the interior regions, it is accessible only via radio and satellite due to geographical factors and vast distances (Fernandes et al., 2022).

Numerous variables come into play in this context, extending beyond just the internet connection: the type of connection available; whether personal equipment is at hand to access course materials and attend classes; and whether a mobile cellular signal, for either voice calls or internet access, can be reliably received within the home, particularly when considering more remote and rural areas (Castioni et al., 2021). For our participant, this proved to be a major obstacle in his academic journey: "It was quite difficult at first, because I had arrived prepared to study at the university in person." During the interview, conducted with the participant via Google Meet, both the audio and video frequently cut out or experienced interference, confirming the instability of the internet signal in the municipality of Parintins, where José currently resides and studies. This corroborates the participant's statements regarding the difficulties faced during remote learning during the pandemic: "The internet around here isn't exactly the best; so, when class time rolled around, it would be just like it is right now, the audio would start cutting out, and we could barely understand what the professor was explaining."

Thus, we know that an academic trajectory is characterized not only and exclusively by professional training, but also by the challenges faced and unusual situations (Oliveira & Dias, 2014), as highlighted in this section of the article. Despite all the factors that hinder the retention of students from riverine communities in the university, there were certain facilitators in the academic journey of young people like José, which we will highlight below.

Factors Facilitating University Retention

José's trajectory at the university is also marked by factors that facilitated his journey, such as scholarship and financial aid programs, and social support (friends and family). Financial aid programs such as UFAM, through DAEST, offer students the following programs and forms of assistance (UFAM, 2023): Academic Aid, Housing Aid, Digital Inclusion Aid, Internet Aid, Childcare Aid, High-Cost Educational Materials Aid, a Support Program for Undergraduate Student Participation in Scientific, Technological, Sports, and Cultural Events, Emergency Aid, the Student Retention Scholarship Program, and forms of aid specific to the pandemic period (Emergency Food Benefit, "Back Home" Aid, "Back to UFAM" Aid, and Digital Inclusion Aid, Internet Modality). However, José does not use all of these programs and forms of assistance offered by the university, despite being aware of them. He highlighted the importance of the University Residence (RUNI) at the Parintins Campus: "An incoming student can begin studying at UFAM and can immediately move in as a guest at the university residence, pending the release of a formal call for applications that would allow them to secure a permanent spot, reside there, and receive a stipend." We may surmise that there is a shortage of vacancies sufficient to meet the demand of students requiring university housing, leading them to opt for alternative forms of accommodation, as José did.

José is a recipient of student scholarships from the Institutional Scientific Initiation Scholarship Program (PIBIC-*Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação Científica*), the Institutional Teaching Initiation Scholarship Program (PIBID-*Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação à Docência*), and the Curricular Extension Activity Program (PACE-*Programa Atividade Curricular de Extensão*).

Right in my very first semester, I participated in the teaching initiation program, you know, PIBID (...) These initiation scholarships were extremely important; they helped me out a great deal. I was able to split the rent with a friend of mine (...) In my fourth semester, I enrolled in the PIBIC program, which I'm currently working on as well; I'm in the final stages now (...) I've already completed two PACE projects, and I'm currently working on my third.

Scholarships are a subsidy to support students during their undergraduate studies, particularly those from other cities and communities, such as riverine populations. According to Silva and Sampaio

(2022), four categories of aid characterize student retention policies: welfare-based, academic, financial, and need/vulnerability-based. Scholarships, including those for scientific research initiation, extension activities, and other modalities, consistently serve as an incentive for students to remain at the university, functioning as an additional financial facilitator alongside other forms of student assistance, such as student housing, transportation, university dining services, and psychological counseling. In this regard, Morais (2021) noted that various individual student factors, both internal and external to the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), can lead to dropout. However, programs designed to foster retention, such as financial aid provided through various modalities, have reduced attrition rates. Thus, student programs that provide financial benefits to mitigate socioeconomic barriers within the university setting, enabling students from lower-income families to persist in their studies (Carneiro et al., 2024).

Another factor contributing to our participant's persistence at the university is social support, also referred to as a support system, support network, or social and emotional support network. It is constituted as a web of systems and individuals that form the bonds of social interaction and relationships within an individual's life (Lacerda et al., 2022). In José's case, this network consists of individuals who fulfill the role of mentors: "My friend had already gotten in; so, since he had been at the university for a while, he guided me and showed me how to do it (...) I was truly blessed to (...), meeting friends who immediately gave me a sense of direction regarding how things worked." This network also comprises family members: "I can say that my driving force is my family; none of this would make sense were it not for them standing behind me, they are the foundation that sustains me." Thus, it is evident that family ties hold immense significance for the interviewee, as the peasant family unit constitutes a fundamental element in the (re)production of the peasant way of life (Carvalho & Costa, 2012), a factor that, in this context, must be duly considered within proposals for Rural Education (Molina et al., 2019).

A support network can manifest in various spheres; corroborating studies conducted by Aragão et al. (2009) and Macedo et al. (2018), we can observe how relationships cultivated throughout the academic journey, in addition to family ties, are fundamental factors enabling university students from riverine communities to face the challenges imposed during their undergraduate studies.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through an interdisciplinary approach linking Education and Psychology, this research presented and discussed a case study examining the meanings a student from a riverine community ascribed to his educational journey, from his early education through his experiences at UFAM, Parintins Campus. From a family of fishermen and farmers in a riverine community within the municipality of Barreirinha (AM), he completed part of his elementary education at a rural school using a multi-grade classroom model. Despite criticisms often leveled against this type of instruction, our interviewee argued that this model was well-suited to his needs, and remains so for riverine communities in general. As he advanced to the higher grades, he was required to commute daily to a different community. His entry into a public university was his only option due to his low-income family background. It was not achieved on his first attempt, as he failed to secure a sufficient score in the entrance examinations. Upon gaining admission, he initially had to settle for his second-choice major. However, after three semesters and undergoing a new selection process, he finally succeeded in enrolling in his desired program of study. To attend university, he was compelled to relocate to the city and live apart from his family, a transition in which he faced a variety of challenges.

This educational journey from the community school to the university has led us to several observations. First, we cannot generalize that José is an isolated case of either success or failure regarding multigrade instruction; he completed only a portion of his education in this format, and a larger sample of cases is required to facilitate comparison and reach a more comprehensive conclusion. However, he did not gain immediate admission to the university, nor did he initially secure a spot in his desired

program, due to an insufficient entrance exam score. On the other hand, the participant has deliberately chosen the improvement of multigrade classes in rural schools as the central theme of his research and professional practice. He has expressed a desire to return to the community where he was born and raised to teach at the local school. We think that it is related to the training in Rural Education he has been receiving through a university-based research and extension project, to the support network he cultivated throughout his academic journey, to the mentorship provided by friends and senior students, and to the strong bond the participant shares with his family. Driven by his personal life plan, he demonstrates a clear intention to return to his native riverside community, bucking the trend of rural exodus that affects the majority of young people in rural areas.

This journey indicates that educational policies aimed at rural populations have not yet been sufficiently effective to retain the interviewee within his community. During his Basic Education, he lacked access to Rural Education strategies tailored to the Amazon region, such as schools using the Pedagogy of Alternation or other educational models designed for rural youth. At the Higher Education level, despite not having chosen a specific degree in Rural Education (a program available at other universities across the country), José was exposed to Rural Education frameworks within his Pedagogy program through extension and research activities. This demonstrates that, for our interviewee, specialized training in Rural Education was not acquired through a dedicated degree program (the Degree in Rural Education), but rather through “sub-fields” within the broader discipline of Pedagogy that relate to this theme. This does not imply that UFAM is failing, as it is possible to acquire this more specialized training through graduate-level studies at the Manaus campus. However, we are prompted to ask: had a degree in Rural Education been available at UFAM, much like the existing Degree in Indigenous Teacher Training, would our interviewee have been better equipped, upon graduation, to work within Amazonian riverside communities?

Regarding the university experiences that either foster or hinder a student's continued enrollment at the institution, we observed difficulties related to a lack of access to student retention policies at UFAM, despite the existence of a range of aid programs. However, it is necessary to examine additional cases to determine whether José failed to use all available student assistance opportunities due to individual circumstances or if there is an institutional context that impedes student access. Some of the policies to which he did have access, particularly the student housing program and scholarships for scientific research and teaching internships, were financial incentives that helped him remain enrolled in his undergraduate program. Therefore, we can conclude that it is essential to broaden the dissemination of information about these various programs and to increase the number of students benefiting from such university incentives. Financial aid helps mitigate the low-income socioeconomic conditions from which many students are from, including the subject of our study.

The COVID-19 pandemic period was globally challenging and compelled all UFAM students to transition to remote learning. This situation further underscored the lack of technological access that students in the interior of the Amazon face, ranging from a shortage of adequate equipment to the scarcity of quality internet service in these municipalities. Any form of remote or distance learning presents numerous obstacles to the educational process of students in the Amazon region. To ensure the effective implementation of Rural Education across all levels of instruction, from Elementary to Higher Education, in the Amazon, it is imperative to prioritize strategies for technological access within the region's rural, riverine, and forest territories.

Finally, it is crucial to engage in a forceful discussion regarding public policies for university access and retention aimed at the riverside students, as these individuals are rendered invisible under the classifications of “low-income” or “public school graduates”, labels that fail to do justice to their distinctive trajectories and lived experiences. Our psychosocial interpretation of the riverside student’s journey, which expands upon studies in Rural Psychology, showed that educational policies do not unfold within spaces devoid of meaning, nor do they apply to subjects without a history; rather, they take shape within a specific socioeconomic and political context, mediated by individuals with their aspirations, conflicts, struggles, needs, resources, and sources of satisfaction. Recognizing the particularities of these riverside subjects is a means of valuing Amazonian rurality while simultaneously strengthening the regional way of life.

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The content underlying the research text is in the manuscript.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 – Study design, data collection, data analysis, and writing of the text.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the present article.