VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, YOUTH AND WORK: CONTRADICTIONS IN RELATION TO CONTEXTUALIZED EDUCATION IN THE SEMI-ARID REGION OF CEARÁ

Educação Profissionalizante, Juventude e Trabalho: contradições frente à educação contextualizada no Semiárido Cearense

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ABSTRACT
The growing unemployment among the younger segments of society, in the current context of a globalized world, is not only a regional phenomenon but a global one. The number of young people aged between 18 and 24 who neither work nor study has increasingly risen, causing negative impacts on local economies. Faced with the challenges of addressing the shortage of qualified labor to meet local and regional market demands and ensuring that new generations are properly trained for this purpose, vocational education in Ceará, integrated with full-time secondary education, has emerged as a public policy aimed at integrating young people from Ceará into the labor market and promoting regional economic development. From this perspective, this study sought to understand, through an empirical analysis of factual reality, the relationship between vocational education, youth, and employment in the semi-arid territory of Reriutaba-CE, based on a holistic-phenomenological approach associated with the geosystem framework in addressing the object of study. The results indicate that vocational education functions primarily as a means of preparing students for the ENEM and/or for the local labor market, generally in areas different from their original technical course, as most students aspire to other professional fields. This reveals a significant distance from the study of local reality, that is, from a contextualized education grounded in the semi-arid region.

Keywords: Full-time education; Rural youth; Employment; Integrated nature.

RESUMO
O crescente desemprego nas camadas mais jovens da sociedade, no atual contexto do mundo globalizado, é um fenômeno não só regional, mas global. Cada vez mais tem aumentado o contingente de jovens com idade entre 18 e 24 anos que nem trabalham nem estudam, causando impactos negativos na economia local. Diante dos desafios de suprir a carência de mão de obra qualificada para atender às demandas dos mercados locais e regionais e garantir que as novas gerações se qualifiquem para esse propósito, a educação profissionalizante no Ceará, integrada ao ensino médio em tempo integral, surgiu como uma política pública que visa à inserção das juventudes cearenses no mercado de trabalho e ao desenvolvimento econômico regional. Nessa perspectiva, buscou-se compreender, por meio da análise empírica da realidade factual, a relação entre educação profissionalizante, juventude e emprego no território semiárido de Reriutaba-CE, a partir de uma visão holístico-fenomenológica, associada ao geossistema no tratamento do objeto. Os resultados deste estudo apontam para o entendimento de que a educação profissionalizante se configura como meio de preparação dos educandos para o ENEM e/ou para o mercado de trabalho local, geralmente em áreas distintas do seu curso de origem, cuja maioria dos cursistas visa outras áreas profissionais. Daí bastante distante com o estudo da realidade local, ou seja, uma educação contextualizada no semiárido.

Palavras-chave: Ensino em tempo integral; Juventude do campo; Emprego; Natureza integrada.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over time, the ethnic identity of the sertanejo in relation to the semi-arid region has been shaped through his relationship with nature, within the process of production and reproduction of spaces in the rural environment. In this context, labor is configured as a mediating factor in the relationship between society and nature, according to the perspective of Santos (2006) in The Nature of Space, and Lukács (2018) in For an Ontology of Social Being, among other thinkers.

The peculiar climatic adversities of the Brazilian semi-arid region, associated with the historical socioeconomic issues of this region, have contributed to labeling the Brazilian Northeast (NEB) as a backward area marked by misery and hunger. However, it is known that the region in question is very rich, not only from an economic standpoint but also culturally. In this semi-arid environment, individuals build their ethnic identity with the place through their relationship with nature, constructing and reconstructing their living spaces, increasingly demonstrating themselves to be a resilient and strong people, as stated by Cunha (1984) in his classic work Os Sertões: “The backlands man is, above all, strong.”

In the last decades of the current century, after the peak of the national rural exodus, which occurred between the 1950s and 1980s, whose main corridor was the Northeast/Southeast axis of Brazil, the Brazilian government made efforts toward the economic development of the Northeastern region through the creation of specific programs and agencies, such as the Superintendence for the Development of the Northeast (SUDENE), created in 1959 and reestablished in 2007, a federal

agency established for this very purpose: the socioeconomic development of the Northeast and parts of northern Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo.

From the 1960s onward, with technological advances in the countryside and the so-called Green Revolution, extensive agriculture and livestock farming in smallholdings were replaced by intensive and mechanized activities in large estates. In this context, rural labor was redefined and replaced, requiring farmers to acquire greater technical knowledge about production processes and demystifying certain cultural knowledge related to peasant activity, historically cultivated in the sertanejo imagination. Thus, survival in the countryside has imposed new challenges on native populations.

However, it should be emphasized that changes do not occur only in rural areas but are reflections of a process of re-signification of the urban environment, insofar as large urban centers no longer offer employment opportunities for all city dwellers, as they did at the beginning of Brazilian urbanization, when urban agglomerations required more labor and consumer mass.

From the mid-1970s and 1980s onward, with urban overcrowding, the implementation of labor policies, and improvements introduced in rural areas, urban centers ceased to be attractive places for the sertanejo, since not all those living in these spaces are able to enter the formal labor market and afford the urban cost of living, having to submit to conditions of underemployment and a difficult life, sometimes under very precarious social conditions.

In order to mitigate the socioeconomic issues of rural areas and, at the same time, alleviate the social problems associated with population overcrowding in urban centersgenerated in part by the migration of sertanejo populations in search of better living alternatives in the city and by the disordered growth of these spaces the federal government, together with local governments, has launched several affirmative public policies focused on strengthening family farming and environmental sustainability, promoting local employment and income opportunities through the Secretariat for Agrarian Development (SDA), such as the São José Project in Ceará.

In this context, institutional actions have been implemented through various initiatives within educational policies in rural schools and vocational schools since the 2000s, primarily aiming at the technical preparation of new rural generations for the world of work and, in this way, contributing to regional economic progress, with the protagonism of local subjects.

It is observed that, as a result, there is a process of the denaturalization of nature, according to Santos (1996, 2006), in which the technical-scientific-informational milieu is constituted as a mediating factor in the relationship between society and nature. In this process, the younger population is the most affected, influenced by the logic of production associated with the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), reinforced within an urbanized educational

process that reflects the urban mode of production. These young people, therefore, seek alternative life possibilities outside the countryside. In this scenario, rural areas come to be viewed pejoratively by them as backward places; in some cases, they even feel ashamed to acknowledge their sertanejo origin and attempt to adapt themselves to the urban way of life.

In this context, the municipality of Reriutaba stands out as the spatial focus of this study, located in the northwestern portion of the state of Ceará, bordering the municipalities of Ipu, Graça, Cariré, Varjota, Pires Ferreira, Guaraciaba do Norte, and Pacujá, covering an area of 345 km². It is located on the Ipu topographic map (SB.24-V-A-III) and has an atypical semi-arid climate hot tropical semi-arid, with variations toward sub-humid and humid zones at the foothills of the Ibiapaba cuesta (IPECE, 2011).

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2026), Reriutaba had 18,606 inhabitants in the 2022 Census, with an estimated population of 19,059 for 2024. The population density was 49.89 inhabitants per km² within the municipal territory. Reriutaba is situated at 167 meters above sea level, at geographic coordinates latitude 4° 8' 4" south and longitude 40° 34' 7" west. Its territorial division comprises three districts: the main district, with sixteen urban communities and eighty-one rural communities; the district of Campo Lindo, with one urban and nine rural communities; and the district of Amanaiara, with one urban and nineteen rural communities.

The municipality of Reriutaba originated, like most municipalities in the interior of Ceará, from the expansion of colonial domination in the territory of Ceará in the mid-17th century. Its main economic activity, guided by the Portuguese expansionist policy of that time, was cattle ranching and extensive agriculture, which have persisted, albeit with difficulty, to the present day in rural areas.

However, these activities have been in decline in recent decades in the region due to various factors (natural, political, and economic), despite investments through federal and state public policies implemented in recent years to mitigate the effects of seasonal droughts in the semi-arid region and promote local economic development.

The development of the technical-scientific-informational milieu drives the emergence of new ruralities in the countryside, directly affecting the peasant mode of production and way of life. In this context, according to Foucault (1975), education functions as an instrument of power and domination.

Within this framework, it can be stated that the curriculum of vocational education schools falls within the scope of the labor market, which dictates training models based on the labor needs of the regional market, focusing on technical and urbanized training to the detriment of a contextualized and humanized education. This approach disregards individuals' prior knowledge and the socioeconomic and geographic characteristics of rural areas as elements of fundamental importance for the critical formation of local subjects.

The municipality of Reriutaba currently has two state public basic education schools: one full-time secondary school and one vocational education school, which serve the majority of youth from rural areas within the municipality. In this scenario, according to Santos (2006), considering the technical-scientific-informational milieu in which science, technology, and information integrate to create a highly artificialized space, connected by networks of flows and strongly dependent on technology and information for global economic and social organization the following questions arise: does vocational education at EEEP Francisca Castro de Mesquita meet the professional interests of its students and the needs of the local labor market?

The initial hypothesis is that this educational modality does not, in fact, meet either the professional interests of the students or the immediate needs of the local labor market. Furthermore, it provides a learning environment disconnected from the factual reality of rural subjects, reinforcing their disconnection from nature through an urbanized education.

Thus, in order to address these issues, an empirical analysis of the object was conducted, with the aforementioned EEEP, located in the urban center of Reriutaba-CE, as the spatial focus. The analysis was based on a holistic-phenomenological view of factual reality, associated with the geosystem approach. Accordingly, a questionnaire survey methodology was applied to collect primary data, following Bastos et al. (2023). The research instrument was developed according to the Likert scale, as proposed by Luna (2012).

For better delineation and understanding of the facts analyzed in this study, this manuscript was divided, in addition to the introductory section, into three main sections, subdivided into subsections for clearer organization and comprehension: 1) the first section presents the materials and methods applied in the study; 2) the second addresses the results and discusses the findings; and 3) the final section presents the conclusions drawn from the analyzed data.

It is further added, as a critical counterpoint, that the consolidation of contextualized education in the Brazilian semi-arid region requires the recognition and valorization of the knowledge of the land, historically constructed by farmers in their coexistence with climatic irregularity, shallow soils, the caatinga biome, and water storage strategies. This empirical knowledge, transmitted across generations, constitutes a cultural and environmental heritage that must engage in dialogue with technical-scientific knowledge within the school environment. Contextualized education, unlike a strictly urbanized and market-oriented training model, begins with the lived territory, local productive practices, social technologies for living in the semi-arid region, and the critical reading of the landscape, thereby strengthening sertanejo identity and promoting autonomy. Thus, incorporating knowledge of the land through ethnoknowledge whether through ethnogeomorphology or ethnopedology (Falcão Sobrinho, 2026) into the school curriculum may represent not only a cultural

recovery but also a strategy for sustainable territorial development, capable of articulating technical training, environmental awareness, and a sense of belonging to place.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodological procedure applied in this case study was grounded in a holistic-phenomenological perspective and primarily encompasses the requirements of a scientific investigation of a quantitative-qualitative and exploratory nature. The process of collecting primary data occurred through careful attention to the empirical and factual dimensions of the object under analysis, based on the perceptions of the subjects students enrolled in vocational basic education at EEEP Francisca Castro de Mesquita considering both the objective and intersubjective aspects of the facts. The data collected were analyzed through the empirical and factual examination of the object, as emphasized by Demo (2000, p. 21).

According to Fontelles et al. (2009), proper methodological and technical-operational design constitutes a sine qua non condition for the validation of results, in order to meet the fundamental and epistemological requirements of scientific knowledge, thereby granting it greater technical accuracy and scientific credibility. The research in question consists of the practical application of a set of objective procedures aimed at producing concrete results to serve as a basis for further studies of this nature.

From this perspective, the methodological and technical-operational procedure undertaken in this research qualifies it as triangular and quantitative-qualitative, guiding the intended investigation through the most effective means of accessing the object and interpreting the data, with the greatest possible coherence and accuracy. This approach ensures closer alignment between factual reality and the results obtained in the investigation (Ferreira, 2021; Pinho, 2019b).

According to Silva and Faustino (2024), the qualitative method occupies a fundamental place in scientific research, providing a deep and contextualized understanding of social, cultural, and behavioral phenomena. Unlike the quantitative method, which focuses on measurement and statistical data analysis, the qualitative method prioritizes the exploration of the subjects' empirical experiences, as well as the meanings and interpretations constructed by individuals within their natural contexts. This approach makes it possible to capture the complexity and richness of human interactions, offering valuable insights that often remain hidden in traditional quantitative approaches.

2.1. Technical-Operational Procedure

The object of study in question was approached in two distinct and complementary phases. Initially, it was addressed from an epistemological and interdisciplinary perspective (desk-based

activity), through a bibliographic survey of diverse sources on the subject under analysis (official websites, scientific articles, books), aiming to build a theoretical-methodological and interdisciplinary framework capable of providing greater accuracy and epistemological support in addressing the object of study.

Subsequently, primary information was collected through the application of a semi-structured questionnaire containing eighteen questions, designed according to the Likert scale model. This was followed by the categorization, analysis, and tabulation of the information collected in loco.

The methodological and technical-operational procedure of the research was primarily grounded in the holistic and phenomenological methods, associated with a geosystemic perspective in addressing the object, from the viewpoint of landscape as the stage of anthropic action and the visual aspect of integrated nature, according to Falcão Sobrinho (2006), and of the technical-scientific-informational milieu, as defined by Santos (2006), as a connecting factor in the relationship between society and nature.

In this field, it is understood that the systemic-holistic methodological procedure adopted as the starting point for the analysis of the object of this study, associated with the systemic perspective, made it possible to establish a more accurate interrelation among natural, social, and technological components, linked to the formation of subjects and their role in the modern capitalist production process. This analysis considered vocational school education as a technical-scientific-informational support and examined its implications for the subjects' conception of nature, as shaped by an urban educational system.

From the perspective of an integrated analysis of nature, according to Ross (2009), the object must be approached from the viewpoint of the subjects as protagonists in the processes of territorial transformation and formation. Thus, the interlocutors of this study are conceived as integral subjects in the analysis and elucidation of the guiding questions of this research.

Therefore, for a better technical-operational design of the investigative proposal, it was necessary to establish a schedule of activities including the following stages:

I) desk-based activities, methodological structuring, literature review, development of research instruments, preparation of cartographic products, data analysis, categorization and compilation of information into tables and graphs, writing and preparation of the final research product;

II) field activities, cartographic and phytogeographic characterization of the study area, synchronous presentation of the study through the digital platform Google Meet, guidance and application of research instruments online through free applications: WhatsApp and the digital platform Google Forms.

The technical-operational procedure of this study was carried out through the survey technique using a questionnaire administered to the respondents. This research instrument consisted of eighteen semi-structured and multiple-choice questions, designed according to the Likert scale (1932).

The research questionnaire, according to Gil (1999, p. 128) as cited by Chaer et al. (2011), can be defined as an investigative technique composed of a greater or lesser number of questions presented in writing to respondents, aiming to obtain knowledge of their opinions, beliefs, feelings, interests, expectations, and lived situations, among other aspects.

The Likert scale emerged in the United States around 1932, initially as a market opinion research instrument. This tool combines statistics and psychology in order to promote a deeper and more logical immersion into respondents' minds, enabling a better understanding of their positions regarding the issues addressed. Faced with the difficulty of measuring character and personality traits in market research, Likert (1932) developed a series of questions with five response alternatives each: 1) strongly approve; 2) approve; 3) undecided; 4) disapprove; and 5) strongly disapprove. The researcher's intention was to combine responses from a series of questions to create a scale for measuring attitudes.

The application of the research instrument in the field (online questionnaire) was conducted directly, with the assistance of a volunteer teacher from the aforementioned vocational school, who guided the students in accessing and completing the online form in the school's computer laboratory. The teacher received training and guidance for the remote application of the research instrument, conducted online, and the entire process was coordinated through the digital tool WhatsApp. During the collection of primary data, which lasted three weeks, one hundred and thirteen vocational high school students were interviewed, the majority from the first year.

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY

Historically, humanity's endeavor to seek new solutions capable of ensuring its survival on Earth, in light of the limitations and scarcity of available natural resources—especially water resources in recent times—has challenged human populations to reinvent themselves in terms of land use and spatial occupation. This challenge is even greater for the inhabitants of the semi-arid region of Northeastern Brazil (NEB), which is characterized by a low concentration of water resources, holding approximately 10% of the total available throughout the Brazilian territory (Barros, 2000).

According to Suassuna (2011, p. 1), about 70% of the surface of the Northeastern semi-arid region consists of crystalline geology. In this type of structure, surface runoff exceeds soil infiltration. Due to the geomorphoclimatic characteristics of the Brazilian semi-arid surface, the practice of dam construction and other techniques and technologies has historically been implemented as an

alternative for water storage and mitigation of the seasonal effects of droughts as a public policy measure.

However, it is known that all of this constitutes only palliative measures to the problem of water scarcity in the Brazilian semi-arid region, since irregular rainfall patterns and low precipitation rates, combined with crystalline geological structure, shallow and poor soils, intermittent rivers, and the misuse and mismanagement of water resources, are predominant factors in this issue. Their effects are visually materialized in the local landscape as a reflection of anthropic action.

The natural conditions of the Brazilian semi-arid region, whose economic activity long depended entirely on regional climatic conditions (Falcão Sobrinho, 2025a), generating a climate of insecurity and local economic instability, made the semi-arid NEB a region that historically dispersed labor to other regions of the country, most commonly toward the South–Southeast axis of Brazil.

However, according to Escócio and Dutra (2008), although many backlands inhabitants migrated to the Southeast region in the mid-twentieth century, data from a study conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2011) indicate that this rural exodus has currently decreased. In this context, the authors ask: “What, then, has been causing the backlands population to remain in the semi-arid region if droughts still occur?”

The authors’ hypothetical answer is related to the subjects’ ethnic identity with the place. The meaning they attribute to this relationship concerns: being familiar; belonging to; living alongside. According to them, this existential dimension can also be understood as a human possibility of “feeling at home,” welcomed and belonging somewhere within everyday dispersion, closely articulated with the existential dimension of disposition/mood, as discussed by Escócio and Dutra (2008).

In this sense, the semi-arid backlands inhabitant, according to the aforementioned authors, is rooted in a universe of historical meanings of exploitation, scarcity, religiosity, and resistance, since the human being inhabits a pre-understanding of oneself and of the world that moves them. In this movement of unveiling and concealing meanings and senses, within this historical horizon imbued with power relations and cultural and religious multiplicity, the semi-arid region blossoms as a possibility of human dwelling through each backlands inhabitant’s experience in the hinterland (Escócio; Dutra, 2008).

In this context, investigation from a geosystemic perspective enables an integrated analysis of the facts, understanding that the worsening of adverse climatic phenomena in the semi-arid region results from the dialectic between physical and anthropic components associated with land use and occupation by humans. Thus, for the epistemological and methodological grounding of this research, support was sought in the works of Sotchava (1963), Bertrand (1972), and Tricart (1977).

According to Santos and Araújo (2020), Geography teaching conducted in a contextualized manner directly influences students' perception of the environment in which they live. Therefore, it is understood that the geographic education of subjects first involves the discussion of the socioeconomic, political, and environmental issues that constitute their space as their habitual locus.

However, it is known that the model of contextualized education does not, in fact, meet the interests of the capitalist system, which directs individuals' professional training according to market needs, while ethnic issues associated with place identity are relegated to the background. In this case, the schooling of rural subjects reflects the urban production model.

> [...] From this reality of urbanized education inserted into rural areas, the local context begins to be disregarded within schools, becoming institutionalized through ready-made packages (urban teachers, urbanized textbooks, verticalized curricula), in which the peculiarities of contexts and the identity of subjects in peasant territories are denied. Supported by urbanized educational models and mediated by educators who themselves do not undergo training aimed at dealing with the specificities of such realities, a banking model of education is consolidated, increasingly distant from the subjects, instilling in the educational process the conception of a countryside and a Brazilian semi-arid region incapable of sustaining life (Silva et al., 2018).

The geomorphoclimatic characteristics of the study area, associated with traditional practices of land use and occupation, the climatic adversities peculiar to the area under analysis, the decrease in rural production, the growing difficulties for the survival of autochthonous populations in the rural environment, the greater access to information and schooling among the new generations of the backlands all of this constitutes an important set of factors for analyzing and understanding the socio-environmental metamorphosis that has occurred in rural areas in recent decades as the object of study.

The expression Contextualized Education refers to a pedagogical approach that seeks to relate educational content and practices to the sociocultural, economic, historical, and environmental context of learners from a local perspective, valuing the territory as their habitual locus. It also aims to value students' knowledge and lived experiences, as well as the specificities of the community in which they are inserted, making the teaching-learning process more meaningful and connected to the reality of places, based on the lived experiences of subjects in loco, according to Falcão Sobrinho (2025b).

For the aforementioned author (op. cit.), Contextualized Education presupposes educational practices developed primarily within schools that promote the connection between subjects and their reality; that is, the local community plays an important role in their educational process. Moreover, it enables teaching that leads students to critically analyze their own habitual locus and their place within it, giving them the capacity to build and rebuild their histories in a way that values the actors who shape the territory, through dialogue among educators, students, and local communities.

In this sense, it is understood that contextualized education in the semi-arid region, with a focus on Geography teaching and its natural components, proves to be a fundamental strategy for promoting territorial appreciation and the development of critical environmental awareness among students. According to Falcão Sobrinho (2025), by integrating the environmental, social, and cultural specificities of the region into the educational process, students are encouraged to recognize the semi-arid region not only as a space of challenges but also as a territory rich in potentialities. Likewise, Santos and Araújo (2020) believe that Geography teaching conducted in a contextualized manner directly influences students' perception of the environment in which they live.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The employment dimension reflects the condition of young people's absorption into the formal labor market. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Report (2026), young people aged 15 to 24 are the most affected by unemployment. In probabilistic terms, a young person in this age group is three times more likely to be unemployed than an adult (aged 25 or older). The global unemployment rate for this youth age group was 18% in 2020. Considering only Latin America and the Caribbean, the estimate was 9.4 million unemployed young people.

According to QEDU (2026), Brazil has approximately 48.5 million young people, a number that represents nearly one quarter of the national population. These are youths with different realities and marked by inequalities related to gender, color and/or race, per capita household income, as well as regional disparities. A large portion of this youth population does not have its minimum rights guaranteed, such as quality education and access to decent work capable of promoting the full exercise of citizenship.

According to the aforementioned survey (QEDU, 2026), 34.9% (17 million) of Brazilian youth aged 15 to 29 were living in poverty in 2022, a rate that reached 55.4% in the Northeastern region (NEB), while in the South it was 18.1%. There are also significant differences regarding race/color: 22.8% of white youth were living in poverty, compared to 39% of Black youth and 43.6% of mixed-race (brown) youth. Regarding young people who neither worked nor studied and had not completed basic education (4.1 million), 52% were aged 18 to 24; 73.4% were Black or mixed-race; 62.2% were women; and 74.5% lived in urban areas.

Araújo et al. (1970) emphasize that, from an economic perspective, in light of the deconcentration of productive activity across the national territory due to various factors, the Northeastern region of Brazil began to develop as an important area of investment and economic growth in the national scenario starting in the 1980s. However, this development has not encompassed the entire NEB region, and the dry Northeast still faces significant adversities to this day due to issues

linked to the region's particular climatic factors. According to the author, land tenure issues continue to constitute a serious problem for the economic and social development of this semi-arid region.

According to IBGE (2026), in 2023 Ceará had 1.7 million urban youth and 453 thousand rural youth. Between 2012 and 2023, there was a 19.8% reduction in the number of young people aged 15 to 29 in rural areas. During the same period, urban youth decreased by 10.5%. It is noteworthy that this scenario reflects the progressive decline in the fertility rate of Brazilian women, which in 1940 was 6.16 children per woman; by 2022 this rate had dropped to 1.55 nationwide, representing a reduction of 74.83%. In Ceará, the fertility rate, which had been 2 children per woman, fell to 1.51 children per woman in 2022, a reduction of 24.4% during the period analyzed (IBGE, 2026; DN, 2025).

According to QEDU (2026), currently 78.8% of young people in Ceará live in urban areas and 21.2% live in rural areas. In this context, 51.1% of the youth population in Ceará, aged 15 to 29, live below the poverty line, in a highly precarious social situation. According to the website, during the evaluated period, 19.9% of these young people did not complete basic education, and 36% did not continue their studies due to the need to work. Additionally, 28% dropped out of school due to a lack of interest in studying.

According to IPECE (2025), the participation rate of young people in the Brazilian labor market has been declining. In the 2000s, this rate exceeded 53%. By 2020, however, the proportion had fallen to only 48.7%. Among young people aged 15 to 29, data provided by the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNADC), released by IBGE, indicate an increase of more than 55% in the unemployment rate of young people in Ceará between the last quarter of 2012 and the last quarter of 2019. This indicator rose from 13.1% at the end of 2012 to 20.4% at the end of 2019. During the same period, the rate corresponded to 24.6% and 20.6% for Northeastern and Brazilian youth, respectively.

4.1. Demographic Data and Labor Market in Reriutaba-CE

According to Caravela (2026), the population aging index of Reriutaba-CE is 60.8% (6.1 elderly people for every 10 children), a value higher than the state average (50.5%), indicating that the municipality is aging faster than the average in Ceará. Compared to other municipalities in the state, the city ranks 68th highest in aging index. In this context, the youth rate is 30.7%. There are 3.1 young people (aged 15 to 24) for every 10 adults (25 to 64 years old), a value above the state average (28.6%), suggesting a strong short- and medium-term insertion of economically active individuals.

Traditionally, the economic base that gave rise to the territorial formation of Reriutaba, as well as other cities in the interior of the state of Ceará, was agriculture and livestock farming, particularly

the raising of small animals: pig farming and poultry such as pigs and chickens. However, it should be noted that these activities currently represent only a small portion of Reriutaba's economic base, which has been replaced by other activities more closely linked to the urban environment.

According to Caravela (2026), Reriutaba is a small city that stands out in the regional context for presenting new business opportunities and high sales regularity throughout the year. However, low consumption potential and economic performance are local points of concern. The municipality is the 8th most populous in the small Sobral region, with 19.1 thousand inhabitants.

In 2016, Reriutaba's GDP totaled approximately R$ 140 million. In this scenario, public services accounted for the largest share, representing 77.91% of the total, a percentage higher than the participation of this sector in the state GDP during the same period. The agricultural and industrial sectors were the second and third most significant in the sample, respectively (Reriutaba, 2019).

Within this economic framework, the state GDP amounted to approximately R$ 130.6 billion in 2015, with Reriutaba contributing 0.10% of the total. In 2016, the municipal GDP per capita was R$ 7,773.63. By 2021, it had risen to R$ 10,433.27, representing a growth of 34.2% compared to 2016. In comparison with other municipalities in the state, Reriutaba ranked 112th out of 184 municipalities in Ceará and 4,772nd out of 5,570 municipalities nationwide. The percentage of external revenues in 2023 was 93.21%, placing the municipality 62nd out of 184 in the state and 1,019th out of 5,570 nationally.

In the current economic scenario of Reriutaba, according to Caravela (2026), among the total formal jobs with signed labor contracts, the three activities that employ the most people in the municipality are: general public administration (1,193 positions), retail trade in small grocery markets (56 positions), and providers of access to communication networks (51 positions).

According to SEBRAE (2026), in 2024, 30.6% of workers in Reriutaba were women, with an average salary of R$ 1,517.72; 69.4% were men, with an average salary of R$ 1,425.02. According to data from the Federal Revenue Service (RFB), of the total establishments registered up to 2025 in Reriutaba, 12.7% correspond to other categories (138); 46.4% to individual microentrepreneurs – MEI (502); 38.1% to microenterprises – ME (413); and 2.77% to small-sized enterprises – EPP (30).

4.2. Vocational Education, Youth, and the Labor Market in Reriutaba-CE

According to the Observatory of Education, Secondary Education and Management (Instituto Unibanco), in 2024, 24% of Ceará's population consisted of young people (2.1 million individuals), of whom 19% were aged 15 to 17; 46% were between 18 and 24; and 34.8% were between 25 and 29 years old. Within this group, 67.6% are among those who neither study nor work, the so-called

"NEET" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). According to IPECE (2024), the rate of young people in this situation in Ceará was 28.04% in 2019, rising to 31% in 2020.

From this perspective, we proceed to analyze the educational context of Reriutaba, which has two state public full-time secondary schools: one offering regular education and the other vocational education (Tables 1 and 2). According to QEDU (2026), the approval rate in the third year of secondary education in these state public schools in 2023 was 99.8%, higher than both the state and national rates for the same period, which were 97% and 90.04%, respectively.

Table 1: Educational Data – EEMTI Coronel Alfredo Silvano (2024).

Matrícula 2024	**Ensino Médio**	**EJA**	**Ed. Espacial**
	345	83	25
IDEB	4.0	Taxa de part. ENEM	86%
Senso Saeb	6% das mães dos alunos têm Ensino Superior	30% dos pais costumam conversar sobre o que acontece na escola com os filhos	9% dos alunos costumam ler livros que não são das matérias

Source: https://qedu.org.br/escola/23029943-eem-coronel-alfredo-silvano. Acesso em 24 de maio de 2025. Accessed on May 24, 2025. Organized by the authors.

Table2: Educational Data – EEEP Francisca Castro de Mesquita (2024).

Matrícula 2024	**Ensino Médio**	**EJA**	**Ed. Espacial**
	502	0	3
IDEB	6.0	Taxa de Part. ENEM	Dados não informados
Senso Saeb	20% de mães dos alunos têm Ensino Superior	48% dos pais costumam conversar sobre o que acontece na escola com os filhos	24% dos alunos costumam ler livros que não são das matérias escolar
Cursos oferecidos			
Enfermagem	Administração	Contabilidade	Rede de computador

Spurce: https://qedu.org.br/escola/23030046-eeep-francisca-castro-de-mesquita. Accesse on May 24, 2525. Organized by the authors.

Regarding the mandatory curricular components for secondary education at the aforementioned EEMTI, in addition to the General Basic Education curriculum, elective subjects stand out, generally aimed at reinforcement and learning in the areas of Languages and Their Technologies and Mathematics and Their Technologies. According to QEDU (2026), learning indicators in these curricular components showed positive results, with growth of 13 and 8 points, respectively, between 2019 and 2021. However, despite all the pedagogical effort invested in these areas, these indicators are still considered low: 42% proficiency in Portuguese Language and 14% in Mathematics are regarded as adequate. Nevertheless, Reriutaba's results are above the national average, which is 14% and 5%, respectively.

Within this educational context, Professional and Technological Education integrated with Secondary Education offered by EEEP Francisca Castro de Mesquita also located in the municipal

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seat of Reriutaba (Table 3) stands out. In this public basic education institution, students have access to infrastructure more favorable to learning compared to regular part-time secondary schools, including better pedagogical material resources, as well as an environment more suited to the proposal of secondary education combined with technical and vocational training.

According to the Saeb Census, there is a noticeable difference in the family profile of the respective students. The mothers of students at the vocational school are more educated; fathers are more present in their children's school lives; and these students have greater access to reading materials beyond those related to school content. It is observed that the fact that the EEEP offers better resources, combined with a more qualified family structure that is more actively involved in students' school lives, presupposes satisfactory results for the vocational education proposal. Admission to the available positions is granted through prior selection, as established by Public Notice No. 04/2024 for the 2025 academic year.

> 7.1 For the classification of candidates eligible for admission to EEEP Francisca Castro de Mesquita, the highest arithmetic mean of grades obtained in the curricular components of the National Common Core Curriculum, completed in the final years of Elementary Education (6th to 9th grade or Youth and Adult Education – final years of Elementary Education), as stated in the documentation submitted by the candidate, will be considered (SEDUC, 2026).

The vocational school's technical training proposal aims to prepare qualified labor for the regional job market, in accordance with the training pathway established in § 4 of Resolution No. 6, of September 20, 2012, of the National Education Council (CNE).

> The training pathway encompasses the sequence of articulable possibilities for offering Professional Education courses, planned based on studies concerning professionalization pathways in the world of work, the socio-occupational structure, and the scientific-technological foundations of the productive processes of goods or services. This framework guides and shapes a consistent educational trajectory (BRASIL, 2026).

From this perspective, it is observed that the educational pathway of the EEEPs leaves little room for contextualized education that incorporates individuals' empirical knowledge, based on their lived experiences in the use and occupation of spaces and their understanding of nature from their own habitual locus. Instead, it stems from a technical-market-oriented vision that prioritizes other forms of knowledge for a specific purpose. However, although the courses offered at the EEEPs aim to meet immediate regional labor demands, they do not always correspond to the interests of the respective students.

It should be noted that the two state secondary schools in question, located in the municipal seat of Reriutaba, meet the entire demand of young people from both rural and urban communities in the municipality. In this context, the EEEP offers vocational courses to this youth population in four areas: Administration, Accounting, Nursing, and Information Technology, as shown in Table 3. In

light of this, we will proceed to analyze the relationship between the students' original course of study and their professional aspirations.

Table 3: Relationship between the course offered and the professional aspirations of EEEP students.

Wants to graduate in the same field as the course					Wants to graduate in other fields					
Cursos Oferecidos na EEEP	**Respondentes**	**%**	**Mesma área do curso**	**%**	**Área pretendida**	**Qt.**	**%**	**Área pretendida**	**Qt.**	**%**
Administration	42	37,5	1	0,9	Law	6	4,9	Commerce	11	9,8
Accounting	42	37,5	13	11,6	Public Security	11	9,8	Education	11	9,8
Nursing	8	7,1	15	13,4	Engineering	7	5,7	Does not know	24	21,4
Information Technology	20	17,8	11	9,8	Veterinary Medicine	2	1,6			
TOTAL	**112**	**100**	**40**	**35,7**		**26**	**23,2**		**46**	**41**

Source: Empirical research, Reriutaba, 2025.

According to the sample scenario presented above (Table 1), there is a disparity between the number of students participating in the research in relation to their current course of study and the professional field they intend to pursue. It is observed that only 35.7% of respondents intend to graduate in the same area as the courses offered by the institution, namely 1/42, 13/42, and 11/20 in the Administration, Accounting, and Information Technology programs, respectively. In Nursing, interest in training in this field was 15/8, higher than the number of respondents enrolled in that specific vocational course.

On the other hand, 64.3% of respondents aspire to professional training in other fields, different from those related to the courses in which they are currently enrolled at the EEEP. The areas most frequently mentioned by the students were Public Security, Commerce, and Education, each with 11 respondents (9.8%). In this sample, attention is drawn to the number of respondents who still do not know which professional field they intend to pursue in the future: 20 participants (21.4% of the sample).

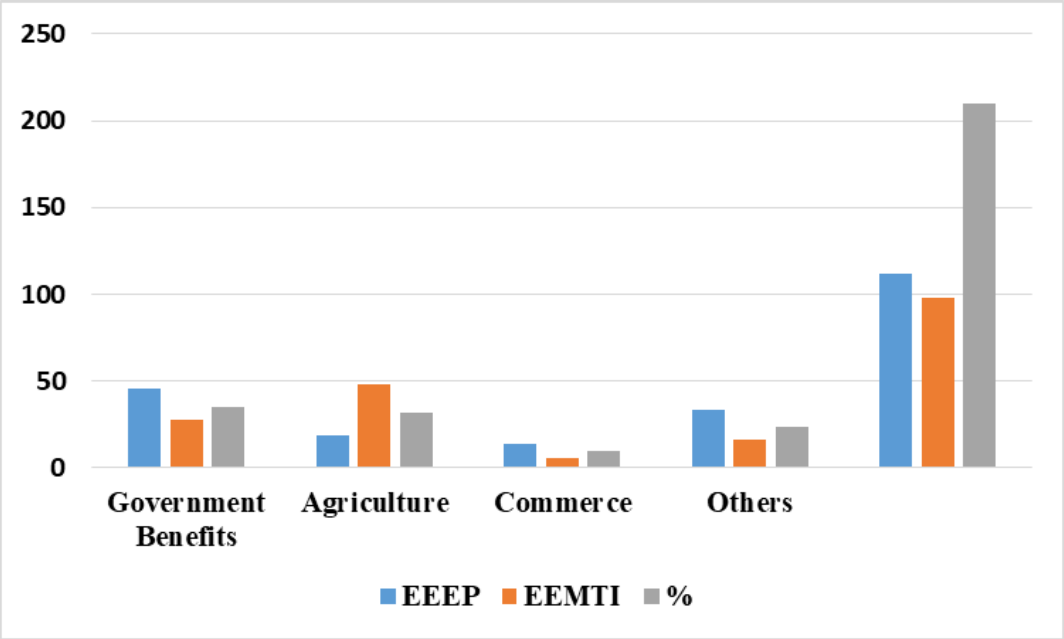
When comparing the data from this sample with the results from EEMTI Coronel Alfredo Silvano, a regular secondary school where the study was conducted during the same period (April 2025) using the same methodology, the following sample framework emerges (Table 4). It presents a comparative analysis between the data collected in the two schools, in which a total of 210 secondary education students were interviewed, 198 of whom (94.3% of the sample) reside in rural areas.

Table 4: Intended Educational Pathways of Students and the Labor Market in Reriutaba-CE

Intended field of study	EEEP Francisca Castro		EEMTI Coronel Alfredo Silvado		Sectors that employed the most in Reriutaba in 2025	
	QT	%	QT	%	Sector	Number of positions
Health	15	13,4	22	22,4	Public Administration	1.193
Administration	1	0,9	2	2,0	Retail Trade	56
Law	6	5,4	8	8,2	Internet Service Provider	51
Public Security	11	9,8	5	5,1	**Total**	**1.300**
Engineering	7	6,3	3	3,1		
Veterinary Medicine	2	1,8	7	7,1	**Predominant Occupation in Reriutaba in 2023**	**N° de postos**
Information Technology	11	9,8	1	1,0		
Commerce	11	9,8	8	8,2		
Education	11	9,8	18	18,4	Building Caretaker	182
Others	13	11,6	10	10,2	Elementary School Teacher	155
Does not know how to answer	24	21,4	14	14,3	Security Guard	110
Total	**112**	**100**	**98**	**100**	**Total**	**447**

Source: Empirical research in Reriutaba (2025); Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2026); Caravela (2026), organized by the author.

The study in question (Table 2) revealed that there are several professional training fields intended by the respondents, with the areas of Health, Information Technology, Commerce, and Education being the most cited by students from the State School of Professional Education (EEEP) Francisca Castro de Mesquita. Among the students of the Full-Time Secondary School (EEMTI), the areas of Health and Education stand out as the most frequently mentioned by respondents in this group. These areas coincide with some of the sectors that generated the most employment in Reriutaba in 2025 and with the predominant occupations in the local labor market in 2023: Public Administration, Services, and Commerce. In light of this, a prior analysis of the respondents' economic profile becomes necessary (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Economic Profile of the Survey Respondents (Family Income Source)
Source: Empirical research in Reriutaba-CE, 2025.

Analyzing the economic profile of the respondents regarding the main source of family income (Graph 1), it was found that, among the principal sources cited, government benefits (e.g., retirement pensions, school allowance, and "pé-de-meia" savings program), accounting for 35.23% of the total sample, were indicated as the main source for students of the EEEP, with 46 responses. Agriculture ranks second, with 31.9% of affirmative responses, the majority of whom are students from the EEMTI, totaling 48 responses. In this sample, the "Other" option also stands out, with 23.3% of responses. This item in the research form represents other sources of family income, such as small businesses and informal work. The source "commerce," with 9.5% of responses, is particularly notable among EEEP students, with 14 responses.

Observing the overall panorama of this sample (Graph 1), it is noteworthy that the foundation of family income for EEEP students is primarily composed of government benefits and commerce, whereas the main basis of family income for EEMTI students is agriculture. This fact leads us to infer that EEEP students present a profile of more urbanized individuals, whose livelihoods are more distant from practices associated with the countryside and, therefore, more distant from nature. In contrast, the other interlocutors display a more ruralized profile regarding their family economic base, maintaining greater proximity to nature, according to their family livelihood.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In light of the analyzed facts, it can be concluded that, in the current global economic scenario, the space for formal employment has decreased over the last decade, with youth aged between 15 and

24 being the most affected. According to Remy and Vaz (2014), the greatest difficulty young people face in seeking their first job is due to their lack of professional experience. For the authors, young entrants into the labor market tend to occupy low-skilled positions, with lower wages and no career plans, and those in more disadvantaged socioeconomic situations are more likely to drop out of school and enter the labor market prematurely.

In Brazil, the difficulty of youth access to the labor market is also marked by inequalities related to sex, color/race, income, and regional disparities. In this context, it is observed that the majority of youth in Ceará live in urban areas and about 20% have not completed basic education, which further hinders their access to the formal world of work. A significant portion of these young people did not complete basic education due to the need to work in order to contribute to family income.

In the municipality of Reriutaba, the spatial focus of this research, according to data from IBGE (2026), 30.7% of the population consists of young people aged between 15 and 24, most of whom reside in urban areas. The socioeconomic scenario of youth in this municipality corresponds to national data. The main sectors of the economy in Reriutaba are associated with urban activities, such as public services and private service-sector activities. The industrial and agricultural sectors are not very significant in the local economy. This fact, combined with the difficulties of survival in rural areas due to the adversities of the semi-arid climate, contributes to the migration of rural youth to the city, where they seek living conditions in areas different from the peasant context.

In this scenario, the formal labor market in Reriutaba, in 2023, according to Caravela (2026), had its highest level of employment in the service provision and public administration sectors, such as building caretaker, security guard, and basic education teacher, with an average salary of 1,900 reais. In 2025, the sectors that employed the most were public administration, retail trade, and internet service providers.

Given this reality, from a regional and national perspective, vocational education emerges as an alternative for training youth labor for insertion into the regional labor market, according to its prevailing needs. However, the curriculum of this educational project prioritizes technical training aimed at a specific economic purpose, to the detriment of individuals' empirical knowledge regarding their lived experiences and spatialities as part of a whole.

The national research conducted by the Ministry of Education (MEC) on vocational education revealed that the majority of students enrolled in upper secondary vocational courses in Brazil do not know what they want to become professionally; those who do know depend on completing the course. Most students in this educational modality are already engaged in some remunerated activity.

Analyzing the socio-educational scenario of Reriutaba, it is noteworthy that the difference in the socioeconomic profile of EEEP students compared to EEMTI students, as well as the

infrastructure of the EEEP, makes a significant difference in learning outcomes. Access to this educational modality occurs through prior selection, using students' grades from previous years as the criterion. However, not all those who fit the EEEP student profile aim to professionalize themselves in the course in which they were admitted. In general, the EEEP is viewed by students as an opportunity to enter the labor market, even in areas different from their course, and as preparation for the ENEM.

From this perspective, the study revealed that the majority of students from the aforementioned EEEP do not wish to professionalize in the area of their original course, but rather in other areas distinct from their technical training at the EEEP. Likewise, most EEMTI students aspire to professional training different from the formative itinerary of the EEEP, which aims to train qualified labor for the regional labor market. Among the areas intended by the students, only those associated with commerce and information technology coincide with the sectors that employed the most in Reriutaba in 2025.

Thus, rather than concluding, this study seeks to shed light on this issue as a warning about the need to deepen research on the impacts of vocational education across the Brazilian semi-arid hinterland, where the rural population suffers from difficulties associated with agricultural production in the face of semi-arid climatic conditions. The economic markets of small local urban centers are unable to absorb all regional labor. Vocational courses, which aim to mitigate this problem through the qualification of local youth, impose an urbanized and technical education, further distancing rural youth from their habitual locus and from nature.

It is therefore concluded that vocational education does not fully achieve its primary objective, although it offers higher-quality education, with much better human and infrastructural resources than other basic education modalities. However, it is believed that this educational modality, associated with contextualized education for living in the semi-arid region, would be the best strategy for preparing individuals for the world of work, based on local needs and potentialities and on the empirical knowledge of the subjects, valuing them as protagonists of local development. It is understood that this would contribute to reducing rural youth migration, urban overcrowding, and the socio-structural problems resulting from regional unemployment.

It should also be added that the lack of systematic pedagogical activities linked to contextualized education in the semi-arid region—such as field practices in rural communities, studies on sustainable management of the caatinga, appreciation of social technologies for water capture and storage, dialogue with local farmers (men and women), and integrative projects focused on the productive potential of the territory, reveals a significant training gap. The absence of these actions reinforces the dissociation between school and territory, limiting the construction of critical

awareness about lived space and weakening the recognition of land-based knowledge as legitimate foundations of the educational process. In this way, the school fails to fully fulfill its social role as a mediator between scientific knowledge and lived experience, perpetuating an education disconnected from the geo-environmental and sociocultural realities of the semi-arid region.

SUPPORT

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