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RAQUEL FREIRE DE SOUZA

WHAT EJA STUDENTS THINK ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH

VITÓRIA

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado ao Departamento de Línguas e Letras da Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Licenciatura em Letras Inglês.

Orientador: Profa. Dr. Karen L. Currie

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"Quem ensina aprende ao ensinar. E quem aprende ensina ao aprender."

(Paulo Freire)

RESUMO

Durante os últimos anos, muitos professores e pesquisadores têm demonstrado interesse em pesquisar sobre a EJA. O ensino e aprendizagem da língua estrangeira e suas implicações também têm se apresentado como importantes tópicos de pesquisa na área educacional. Todavia, não há um número significativo de pesquisas voltadas para o ensino de Inglês para alunos da EJA. Ao observamos aulas de inglês em uma escola da EJA na cidade de Vitória, é possível perceber que os alunos possuem dificuldade em aprender inglês. Uma das estratégias para compreender esta dificuldade é através da aplicação de um questionário sobre as aulas. A partir das respostas, podemos identificar os problemas e buscar possíveis soluções para assim garantir que os estudantes tenham uma eficiente aprendizagem da língua inglesa.

Palavras chave: EJA ; Aprendizagem ; Ensino ; Inglês ; Alunos da EJA

ABSTRACT

During the last few years, many educators have demonstrated interest in discovering more about EJA. The implications of learning and teaching a foreign language are also important topics for research in the Educational field. However, there are not a significant number of papers that deal with how English is being taught to EJA students. When we observe English classes in an EJA school in the city of Vitória, it is possible to see that students have difficulties in learning it. One of the strategies to understand why these students are not learning English efficiently is to apply a questionnaire about the classes. Based on the answers obtained, it was possible to identify possible problems and search for solutions in order to guarantee the students a more efficient English learning process.

Key words: EJA ; Learning ; Teaching ; English ; EJA students

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1. INTRODUCTION

The motivation to write this paper started after participating in a university institutional program named PIBID (*Programa Institucional de Iniciação a Docência*). In this program we worked in a group of five UFES undergraduate students together with the coordinator teacher from UFES and the English teacher from the chosen school. During some months at the beginning of the year, we observed English classes from the second segment in an EJA school in the city of Vitória. This is considered a modal school for adult education in the city. However, during the observation period, we faced many problems that are part of the regular public school context, and, more specifically, the EJA context. We can highlight some problems such as the diversity of ages and levels of knowledge inside the same class; a non-appropriate physical structure of the building; the lack of specific English material for EJA groups; as well as many others.

Beside the problems already mentioned, the one that drew our attention most was the great difficulty that students had to understand and carry out the activities in the English classes. It was common to hear some of them claiming that English was too hard to learn and that they were already too old for that. Bearing this situation in mind, a question arose concerning these learners: *what are the EJA students' thoughts about learning English?* It is important to ask ourselves, as teachers, how our students feel about the importance of having a foreign language as a required subject. When the teacher knows more about the students' reality, ideas, thoughts and expectations, he will become more aware of the difficulties and also the positive characteristics of each group of learners, which will make the teaching and learning a more effective process.

Thus, this paper aims to answer the proposed question through research carried out with students from the school which was mentioned previously. In order to formulate a hypothesis and analyze students ideas, this research will be presented as follows: First, there is a summary of the history of EJA in Brazil and an explanation of some specific aspects of this type of education; next, there is a section that focuses on the teaching of EFL to EJA students; the other parts are related to the presentation of the data, with an explanation about the methodology which was used, then the data analysis and a discussion of the results. Finally, the conclusion attempts to make a connection between the literature review and the data which was obtained for this research.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF EJA EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

It is a very complex task to thoroughly explain and summarize in a few lines the history of adult and young adult education in Brazil (called EJA) since it is necessary to refer to different historical records. In fact, there are not enough official records that present all the implanted actions related to EJA (BRASIL, 2002). Therefore, the lines that follow represent a brief historical background of EJA education in Brazil. The information presented in this section was based on the *'Proposta curricular para a educação de Jovens e adultos: Segundo segmento do ensino fundamental'* (2002) which is an official government document that guides educators who work with EJA. The purpose of presenting this historical trajectory is to know more about how EJA became what it is today. It also helps to understand the students' profile and reality.

Throughout the 20th century there was a large number of illiterate people in Brazil. Because of that, several movements emerged aiming to eradicate illiteracy in the country. At the same time, the Decree nº 16.782/, from January, 13th, 1925, which became known as *Lei Rocha Vaz* or *Reforma João Alves*, established the need for the creation of evening schools for adults, since these people usually work throughout the day and have no other time to attend school.

The Brazilian Constitution of 1824 was the first one to formalize the right to basic education for all Brazilian citizens. However, it was only in the 1940s that the education of youth and adults came to prominence as a national policy. The federal government created a national fund for primary schools in which 25% of it was intended to be applied in EJA (MULIK, 2011). This fund aimed to extend primary education to all people in the country, including adolescents and adults. In 1947, a campaign named *Campanha de Educação de Adolescentes e Adultos (CEAA)* helped Brazilian states and cities to acquire a proper structure that could provide good education for adults. (BRAZIL, 2002). However, Mulik (2011) states that in these programs, literacy was seen only as "the ability to sign your own name". Souza (2007, p.85 cited in MULIK, 2011, p. 5194) discusses the fact that the EJA student was seen as an "ignorant person, a person without culture" (our translation)

Initially, EJA was only for those who needed to finish the equivalent to the first years of school. It was only as from the 1960s that this modality was expanded. In this period, the country was passing through a period of many political and student movements that sought to discuss political projects for the country. (MULIK, 2011). These movements influenced the ideas about EJA. The educator Paulo Freire was very important for the implementation and

recognition of EJA in Brazil because he believed that education was necessary to allow people to acquire knowledge about the public life of the country, so they could take a more active part in the administration of the country and have a more critical perspective. Under the influence of Paulo Freire's ideals, the *Plano Nacional de Alfabetização* was approved in January 1964. This educational plan aimed to expand various literacy programs across the country. However, with the military coup, this movement was suspended. (BRASIL, 2002)

The number of illiterate people in Brazil was still large and it was increasing more and more. Thus, the military government created the *Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização* (Mobral) which was a national campaign to 'teach' people who were participating in adult education programs to read and write. The Mobral program continued to grow and spread and it had - as one of its initiatives - the aim of providing primary education in a shorter period of time, also providing the opportunity for people to continue their studies after becoming literate.

In 1971, the *lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (nº 5.692/71)* established what is called 'ensino supletivo'. This is a type of education that aims to teach adults at night. Through the establishment of this type of education, students were now able to complete their elementary education. Therefore, those students who were no longer of the appropriate age to attend the early grades of elementary school could complete their studies in *Centros de Ensino Supletivo* that were implanted by MEC. The LDBEN nº 5692/71 established that 'ensino supletivo' was an education module for adolescents and adults who had not completed regular school at the appropriate age. These studies could also be undertaken through distance learning or through various other means. (BRAZIL, 2002). The Mobral program was extinguished at the end of the military period.

During the 1980's and 90's there were many other movements concerning EJA education. In 1985, the *Fundação Nacional para Educação de Jovens e Adultos* was created. This was a foundation that basically aimed *to "formentar o atendimento às séries iniciais do 1 grau, a produção de material e a avaliação de atividades"* (BRASIL, 2002, p.16). This foundation was also abolished in 1990 and public agencies, civic entities and other governmental institutions had to bear the responsibility of providing education for adults alone. (BRAZIL, 2002, p.17)

In 1996, the LDBEN nº 9394/96 dedicated one section to the education of young adults and adults and it guarantees them the right to have a good basic education that must also be adequate to their reality and social circumstances. It also guaranteed their right to have free

education. It established a new minimum age for taking the 'supletivo' exams: 15 years old for elementary school and 18 for high school. EJA education was also recognized as part of the regular school system. In the 1990s, many movements, debates and laws related to EJA supported the creation and implementation of *Diretrizes curriculares Nacionais para a educação de Jovens e adultos*, which is a national guideline for educators who work with EJA. This document recognizes *"a diversidade cultural e regional presente nos diversos estratos sociais"* (MULIK, 2011, p.5196)

3. EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS (EJA)

As part of school life, there is an age considered appropriate for individuals to complete each step of regular education. In Brazil, according to Law nº 12.796, from April 4, 2013, the obligatory age for people to be enrolled in basic education is from 4 to 17 years old. However, due to different reasons, some citizens were unable to complete or attend regular education at the age which was considered ideal. These people have, by law, the right to continue or return to their studies. For this reason, a specific type of education, called EJA, was created in order to guarantee them the opportunity to have a good education, regardless of their age, as described in the EJA handbook (2007, p.17)

> *A educação de jovens e adultos (EJA) é uma modalidade específica da Educação Básica que se propõe a atender um público ao qual foi negado o direito à educação, durante a infância e/ou adolescência, seja pela oferta irregular de vagas, seja pelas inadequações do sistema de ensino ou pelas condições socioeconômicas desfavoráveis.*

The LDBEN nº 9394/96 is the law that guarantees education for those who were unable to continue their studies of the Elementary and Secondary Education and it also states that this education should be offered free of charge to all citizens.

The personal characteristics of these individuals also need to be taken into consideration. This type of education is for different profiles of students which characterizes it as a diversified education. EJA is composed of students who have never attended school before or for those that - for many reasons - had to interrupt their studies. There are also those individuals who have taken a long time to complete their schooling because they have a history of repetition and also interruptions during their school life. Hence, these people are

> *[...] homens e mulheres, trabalhadores/as empregados/as e desempregados/as ou em busca do primeiro emprego; filhos, pais, mães; moradores urbanos de periferias, favelas e vilas. São sujeitos sociais e culturais, marginalizados nas esferas socioeconômicas e educacionais, privados do acesso à cultura letrada e aos bens culturais e sociais, comprometendo uma participação mais efetiva no mundo do trabalho, da política e da cultura. (...) Trazem marca de exclusão social, mas são sujeitos do tempo presente e do tempo futuro, formados pelas memórias que os constituem enquanto seres temporais (VITÓRIA, 2008, p.1-2)*

As stated in the Articles 1º and 2º of Leis de Diretrizes e Bases – LDB/96, education is a basic human right and it is the responsibility of the family and the state, its main objective concerns the intellectual and human development of all people. This education needs to occur regardless of age and it involves the whole process of human development. EJA students also hold this right to education, the fact that they are the result of social exclusion does not take away their legal right to attend school. As part of this reality of exclusion, they bring with them different kinds of knowledge, realities, concepts and memories that should be connected to school knowledge. Therefore, "*a EJA se apresenta, então, como um momento de humanização do sujeito, como um espaço de estimulação da autonomia, como tempo de aprendizagem, como movimento de vida, como possibilidade de concretização de um direito*" (VITÓRIA, 2008, p.3)

The DCE/EJA highlights the fact that education for adults

> *[...] tem como finalidades e objetivos o compromisso com a formação humana e com o acesso à cultura geral, de modo que os educandos aprimorem sua consciência crítica, e adotem atitudes éticas e compromisso político, para o desenvolvimento da sua autonomia intelectual. (DCE/EJA, 2006, p.27)*

Many adult learners bring with them traditional views about school that were constructed during the time they attended schools, they bring to class "*suas representações sobre a escola, o papel do professor e o do aluno*" (BRASIL, 2002, p. 91). Some of these students expect school to be a place where they will receive knowledge, for them, the teacher is the only one who owns knowledge. This reality is also part of regular schools, but it is even more frequent in the EJA modality which is composed of adults and older people who frequently come from a traditionalist concept of what teaching is. Thus, teachers of adult education must be prepared to deal with some students' resistance to new ideas and it is necessary to find a way to discuss a new vision of education with these individuals.

Since students have specific characteristics and views, the curriculum of adult education also needs to be adapted to their reality. The Resolution CNE / CEB nº 1/2000 establishes the

Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a EJA and it determines in Article. 5°, single paragraph, that

> *[...] a identidade própria da Educação de Jovens e Adultos considerará as situações, os perfis dos estudantes, as faixas etárias e se pautará pelos princípios de eqüidade, diferença e proporcionalidade na apropriação econtextualização das diretrizes curriculares nacionais e na proposição de um modelo pedagógico próprio [...]*

Hence, *"Na organização curricular os conteúdos não se dão a priori. (...) considera-se que a EJA abre possibilidades de superação de modelos tradicionais, disciplinares e rígidos."* (VITÓRIA, 2008. p.17). Therefore, EJA needs to present a specific differentiated curriculum structure that involves meaningful content for students. The learners' individuality must be respected. The knowledge acquired and taught inside the classroom must 'go beyond' the class and be used in real life. In this way, it is possible to encourage students' critical thinking in order to help them recognize that they themselves are an important and significant part of society. The length of the school period is also different in EJA. In the city of Vitória, guided by an EJA project of 2005, the length of time for completing elementary education is six years: three for the so-called *first segment* and another 3 for the *second segment.* These steps are called *Initial, Intermediate* and *Conclusive*. (VITÓRIA, 2008. p.15)

The duration of classes in EJA also needs to be adapted to students' reality and needs. In the city of Vitória, there is a workweek of 12 hours inside the classroom. The classes take place from Monday to Thursday with three hours of duration each day. Fridays are dedicated to the collective planning of teachers and there are no classes for students on that day. (VITÓRIA, 2008)

4. TEACHING EFL INSIDE THE EJA CONTEXT

In the first place it is necessary to understand what English as a foreign language (EFL) means before talking about its effective teaching inside the EJA classroom. Brown (2002, p.116) points out that:

> Foreign language contexts are those in which students do not have ready-made contexts for communication beyond their classroom. They may be obtained through language clubs, special media opportunities, books, or an occasional tourist, but efforts must be made to create such opportunities.

When someone is learning English in Brazil, he is inserted in a foreign language context. In Brazil, English is not an official language and people have the choice as to whether to learn it or not. However, in Brazilian elementary education, it is mandatory to offer a foreign language subject inside classrooms from the 5th year on. This foreign language is usually English, due to its political, economic and social value and also the number of professionals in this area.

According to the '*Proposta de implementação da modalidade EJA no sistema municipal da educação de Vitória*' (2008, p.28),

> *A língua estrangeira moderna é, a partir do segundo segmento do Ensino Fundamental, de oferta obrigatória, ficando a escolha do idioma a cargo da comunidade escolar dentro das possibilidades da instituição, considerando que o Sistema Municipal de Ensino só oferece profissionais da área de inglês.*

As explained in the quote, in the city of Vitória the foreign language which has been chosen is English, as is the case in many different cities around Brazil. However, the way English is taught for EJA students is not necessarily the same as it is taught in regular educational contexts. This occurs for many reasons –which have already been mentioned and discussed during this paper, such as: the students' profile, age, heterogeneity, social contexts, and so on. Once again we are going to use as our theoretical basis the official document '*Proposta curricular para a educação de Jovens e adultos: Segundo segmento do ensino fundamental*' (2002) since its second volume presents the resolutions for the teaching of a foreign language in EJA classrooms all over the country.

The very first question that may come to our minds when talking about teaching English in the EJA context is, in what way this subject is important for adults and young adults to learn. Teaching English for any age group is important since English is now an international language, not used only by native speakers, but also by people who speak different languages all over the world.

> English is increasingly being used as a tool for interaction among nonnative speakers. (…) Most English language teachers across the globe are nonnative English speakers, which means that the norm is not monolingualism, but bilingualism. (…) English has become a tool for international communication in transportation, commerce, baking, tourism, technology, diplomacy, and scientific research. (BROWN, 2001, p.118)

The teaching and learning of a foreign language, as a whole, has the power to change and improve students' abilities and thought processes, creating more critical citizens capable of constructing a better society. If we are talking about English, the advantages go even further

due to its international status. The *'Proposta de implementação da modalidade EJA no sistema municipal da educação de Vitória, volume 2* (2008), also highlights the importance of having another language in EJA classes. It states that:

> *O ensino da língua estrangeira, compreendida como um direito básico de todas as pessoas e uma resposta a necessidades individuais e sociais do homem contemporâneo não só como forma de inserção no mundo do trabalho, mas também, principalmente, como forma de promover a participação social, tem papel fundamental na formação dos jovens e adultos. A língua estrangeira permite o acesso a uma ampla rede de comunicação e à grande quantidade de informações presentes na sociedade atual. (...) O ensino de Língua Estrangeira tem portanto um papel importante na formação interdisciplinar dos alunos jovens e adultos, na medida em que contribui para a construção da cidadania e favorece a participação social, permitindo que ampliem a compreensão do mundo em que vivem, reflitam sobre ele e possam nele intervir.* (BRASIL, 2002, p.67)

It is the right of every human being to have access to a foreign language in Brazilian public education. It can affect and change how people deal with themselves and with the world around them. It is not different with EJA students. The English language can give them different new opportunities in life, such as job offers, and can also contribute to the way they understand society. However, it is crucial to rethink the strategies that are being used to teach a foreign language in order to achieve these goals. The *Proposta curricular para a educação de Jovens e Adultos (2002*) presents a profile of EJA teachers around the country. This profile was constructed based on a questionnaire applied to these teachers. (BRASIL, 2002, p.38) Through some foreign language teachers' answers about how the classes work in EJA contexts, it was concluded that:

> *[...] predominam as aulas essencialmente expositivas, pautadas em material apostilado e em livros didáticos, tendo como conteúdo tópicos como: cumprimentos; dias da semana, meses; profissões; cores; verbos* to be, to have*; pronomes pessoais; nacionalidades; números; artigos; adjetivos; preposições; formas interrogativas; respostas curtas.* (BRASIL, 2002, p.69)

Hence, the foreign language is being taught in a traditional way, considering only the structural aspects of language and teachers' knowledge about it. Students' reality and interests are not being taking into consideration, which is extremely worrying since EJA students – even more than others – need to have more contextualized learning. Another problem is that many teachers do not believe that the methodology needs to be adapted to this age group. Cavalcanti (1999, cited in MULIK, 2002) maintains that "our educational institutions tend to reproduce the same system and teaching strategy for both children and adults". (our translation)

To follow the basic idea for EJA of providing students with significant knowledge that can be applied to their lives, teaching only grammar rules seems to be very inappropriate. This methodology follows the idea of reproduction and repetition and normally excludes learners' own experiences and previous knowledge from the classroom. When the specific characteristics of EJA students, especially their ages, are not taken into considerations while preparing a class, this also goes against the idea of adapting the learning process to students' limitations and needs. Linderman, (cited in CAVALCANTI, 1999, p. 2) was a researcher of the "American Association for Adult Education" when he observed that "our academic system has been developed in reverse order: subjects and teachers are the priority, and students are secondary. The student is asked to fit into a pre-set curriculum. Much of the learning is based on a passive transference of other people's experience and knowledge to students." (Our translation).

The content that is going to be taught in EJA must follow a contextualized perspective. It should not be based on a random choice of topic, it needs to be meaningful. The EJA document (2002) establishes that the themes should focus on *"a cidadania, a consciência crítica em relação à linguagem e os aspectos sociopolíticos da aprendizagem de língua estrangeira, que buscam restaurar o seu papel na formação educacional, permitindo a participação dos cidadãos no mundo contemporâneo".* (BRAZIL, 2002, p. 75).

The '*Proposta de implementação da modalidade EJA no sistema municipal da educação de Vitória'* (2008, p.74) also points out specific objectives that should be developed as the foreign language is being taught in EJA classrooms such as: to develop the possibility of understanding and expressing opinions, values, feelings and information, through speech and writing; to understand communication as an exchange of ideas and cultural values; to compare their own life experiences with the ones for people from different countries; to recognize that the learning of one or more languages gives them the opportunity to have access to cultural assets that were constructed in other parts of the world; and many others. Hence, the official guidelines for EJA education in the city of Vitória also suggest a contextualized and meaningful approach to the teaching and learning process. What needs to change, then, are the ideas that some teachers hold about the EJA context and students.

4.1 ADOLESCENT AND ADULT LEARNERS

As explained in the previous sections, EJA classrooms tend to be very heterogeneous. There are students from different realities, contexts, ages, and so on. Therefore, this type of education not only focuses on teaching adults, but also younger students. The minimum age to enroll in EJA is 15 years old. Hence, it is common to find students from 15 to 18 years old inside the EJA classroom. These people belong to the 'group' of teenagers or young adults. However, this does not change the fact that there are a great number of adult learners involved in this type of education either. The fact is that both age groups present specific characteristics concerning the learning process, and teachers should be aware of them while teaching – especially when teaching a foreign language.

According to Harmer (2007, p.81) "the age of our students is a major factor in our decisions about how and what to teach. People of different ages have different needs, competences and cognitive skills." Thus, as teachers, we must take into consideration the age of our students in order to have a more productive and effective class. It is rarely probable that the same activity that was used with teens is going to work in the same way when applied to an adult group. Considering the process of teaching and learning a foreign language, there are also some myths involving learners' age. People, in general, tend to believe that "young children learn faster and more effectively than any other age group." (HARMER, 2007, p.81) Children can indeed present certain superiority in some aspects when learning a language compared to other age groups, which could happen because of their cognitive abilities. But, Lightbrown and Spada (2006, p. 73 cited in HARMER, 2007, p.81), state that research has shown that older learners "can reach high levels of proficiency in their second language". It is therefore wrong to believe that older learners are not capable of learning a foreign language.

What sometimes interferes in how successful an adult – or young adult – learner will be in his learning process is the way the language is being taught. Some teachers do not think about age group specificities. If we take teenagers as an example, they are very different from children. Brown (2001, p.92) points out that 'the teens' represent "an age of transition, confusion, self-consciousness, growing, and changing bodies and minds. […] Teens are between childhood and adulthood, and therefore a very special set of considerations applies to teaching them." This is not different with EJA teenager students. In fact, teens in EJA can sometimes present even more confusion, fears and emotional changes than regular school students because of their schooling and life background. As was also discussed previously (see section 3), many

young learners in EJA are part of the reality of social exclusion. A lot of them had to stop studying or present a great number of repetitions. Therefore, to teach them, teachers have to be open to try new types of methodology and approaches.

Harmer (2007) also discusses teenager learners. He claims that

> […] it is strange that, despite their relative success as language learners, adolescents are often seen as problem students. Yet with their greater ability for abstract thought and their passionate commitment to what they are doing once they are engaged, adolescents may well be the most exiting students of all. (HARMER, 2007, p. 83)

Hence, adolescents are sometimes a hard group for teachers to work with because of the age changes and characteristics. However, with the right motivation and teaching strategy, many of them can be very successful learners. The same applies to adult students. If the teacher starts teaching this group with the idea that they are incapable of learning, it is almost certain that they will not feel motivated and fail in learning the language. It is true that adults usually bring with them some complex problems that can interfere in their classroom lives. Teachers of adults "often compete with many demands on learners' attention. Concerns about family, jobs, money, and transportation; fatigue; and negative past experiences with education are some of the factors that might inhibit an adult learner's full engagement in class". (MILLER, 2010, p.1). However, this does not mean that learning is impossible. Adults also present plenty of positive characteristics that might help them. Brown (2001) makes a brief comparison between adult and child learners. He points out that:

> Adults have superior cognitive abilities that can render them more successful in certain classroom endeavors. Their need for sensory input can rely a little more on their imaginations […] Their level of shyness can be equal to or greater than that of children, but adults usually have acquired self-confidence not found in children. And, because of adults' cognitive abilities, they can at least occasionally deal with language that isn't embedded in a 'here and now' context. (BROWN, 2001, p. 90)

Therefore, older students also have some specific characteristics that may benefit them while learning a foreign language. Adults have more maturity and, since they have lived through different situations, their background can sometimes be used as a tool to improve the learning process. Harmer (2007, p.84) also affirms that adults "come into classrooms with a rich range of experiences which allow teachers to use a wide range of activities with them", however, these activities always need to be adapted to their reality. Another notable characteristic of this age group is that they already present some expectations about their learning process. Thus, they are going to be more engaged and will focus on their goals.

Brown said, in the quotation above, that adults tend to have more self-confidence when compared to children. That is certainly a characteristic that we observe in older people, however, this reality can be quite different with adult EJA students. Many of them do not believe that they are at a 'learning age', especially concerning a foreign language. Their lack of confidence is a result of their life experience and their relationship with the school environment. The fact that they have been away from school for a long period of time or have never been to a school before directly affect the way they deal with learning. Harmer (2007, p. 85) claims that adults "may have experienced failure or criticism at school which make them anxious and under-confident about learning a language." He also points out that "Many older adults worry that their intellectual power may be diminishing with age".

Hence, teachers assume an important role when teaching adults, which is, to help them understand that age is not an obstacle for learning. It is also necessary to bear in mind students' fears and limitations when preparing a class that will have positive results. When teachers are aware of their characteristics, they involve the adult learners in a "more indirect learning through reading, listening and communicative speaking and writing, they also allow them to use their intellects to learn consciously where this is appropriate. They encourage their students to use their own life experience in the learning process too." (HARMER, 2007, p.85). Miller (2010) also discusses the importance of using students' own experience and reality to design an effective class. She states that

> When instruction is planned with learners' needs and goals in mind, and actively involves students in learning from one another, taps into their life experiences, and is challenging at learners' varying levels, learner engagement is likely to be strong, and learning is more apt to occur". (MILLER, 2010, p.2)

Some students may be resistant to a new way of learning since many of them, specially the old ones, come from a reality where they only receive content passively and do not participate actively in its construction. Hence, to deal with the occasional learner resistance to a new approach, teachers need to be prepared to discuss the new ideas about learning, making it clear to students that they are also expected to participate and contribute in classes and that teachers are not the only ones who have 'control' over knowledge. (BRAZIL, 2002, p. 91)

5. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned previously, the main purpose of this research is to try to discover what EJA students think about the learning of English. In order to do this, the research method used was based on the idea of a quantitative research. Punch (2005, p.3, cited in BLAXTER, 2006, p.64) points out that "quantitative research is empirical research where the data are in the form of numbers". The objective of using this type of approach was to obtain concrete data with the aim of constructing a more objective analysis.

The data collection took place in a school situated in the city of Vitória (ES), during the first semester of 2014. This school is focused on EJA education and it works during three shifts: morning, afternoon and night. This fact is a unique characteristic of this specific school since all other schools in Vitória only offer EJA education at night. The school was founded in 2010 with the main objective of giving young adults and adults who live and/or work in Vitória the opportunity to finish their elementary schooling. The foundation of this school was part of a project that aimed to expand the offer of EJA in the city. The school's objective was to bring education closer to students' reality, therefore, it was necessary to adopt a different pedagogic strategy and different times of classes. (VITÓRIA, 2012)

The school has one 'official location' in Jardim da Penha and it is also 'divided' between different locations around the city. The data which will be analyzed in this paper was collected from three different locations which, from now on, will be identified as L1, L2 and L3. Each location has a different target audience, and the public is very heterogeneous, therefore the data was initially analyzed according to each separate locale before being compared and brought together, when appropriate. Each of these locations presents some specific characteristics. In L2, the class is composed mainly of older students and a large number of women who are looking for different activities in order to vary their routines. However, there are a variety of reasons why they want to come back to school. On the other hand, L3 is a class composed of young people that live around Caratoíra and Santo Antônio. Most of the students were obliged to give up their studies for various reasons in regular schools nearby. (VITÓRIA, 2012). The public in L1 is very similar to the one in L3. There are a great number of young people who interrupted their studies in regular schools. There are also older people who are coming back to school. Another characteristic of this location is the presence of some adolescents that have problems with the law and are in *liberdade assistida,*

or conditional parole, where they are obliged to go to school but they are always being supervised by policemen.

After the selection of the place, the next step was to carry out a survey. Blaxter (2006, p.76) states that "surveys involve *systematic* observation or *systematic* interviewing. They ask the questions which the *researcher* wants answered, and often they dictate the range of answers that may be given". Hence, to obtain more satisfactory and objective answers, the chosen methodology was the application of questionnaires. Blaxter (2006, p.64) also affirms that "the use of questionnaires as a research technique might be seen as a quantitative strategy" and he declares that "questionnaires are one of the most widely used social research techniques". (2006, p.179)

The questionnaire was mainly composed of multiple choice questions with a few open-ended questions. Multiple choice questions are used when "the range of choices is designed to capture the likely range of responses to given statements." (COHEN, 2000, p. 251). Although open-ended questions provide students with more 'freedom' to write their true opinions, they "make it difficult for the researcher to make comparisons between respondents, as there may be little in common to compare." (COHEN, 2000, p. 256). However, in the specific situation of the present study, we decided that the multiple choice approach would be easier since there are many students who still have problems reading and writing in their mother tongue. The questionnaires were in Portuguese (the respondents' mother tongue) and were composed of questions related to the students' personal and professional life and their relationship with the school and the English classes. Because this study is written in English, we decided to translate the information obtained from the questionnaires. Thus, the data presented in this research is an English translation of the original answers.

Initially, the questionnaire was applied to all students in all three locations. However, since each class has an average of 20 people, we decided that it would be too much data for the present study. Therefore, five students from each place were selected to be used as data – which gives the total number of fifteen respondents. It is important to bear this information in mind while reading the graphs because, although five students were selected to represent each group in order to understand the group profile, the numbers do not represent the students as a whole. The selection of questionnaires for analysis took into account the following criteria: balancing the numbers between men and women; guaranteeing a variety of age group; and choosing questionnaires that were fully answered – with no questions left blank.

It was also necessary to produce a selection of questions to be analyzed. Blaxter (2006) discusses the fact that the business of analyzing the data we have collected involves two related processes which he calls 'managing your data' and 'analyzing your managed set of data'. He explains that sometimes we have to manage our data "by reducing their size and scope, so that you can report upon them adequately and usefully." And he suggests that we should analyze our managed set of data "by abstracting from it and drawing attention to what you feel is of particular importance or significance" (BLAXTER, 2006, p. 202). Therefore, the questions that were selected from the questionnaire were the ones which were considered most appropriate for the main purpose of this research. Hence, it was important to follow the process explained by Blaxter (2006) by managing and analyzing the data in order to select the most useful and adequate questions for the present research.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

In this section the data is going to be presented in order to make an analysis of students' answers and ideas. It is important to know and understand who the students are and what they think about learning English. By knowing more about this topic, the teaching/learning process can be more productive. This section was divided into two subsections named *Personal information* and *English classes*. The first one gives a perspective of the students profile and the second one analyses their opinion about the English classes. The objective of making this division was to present the data in a clear way. As mentioned in the *Methodology*, the data is 'divided' between three locations, therefore each graph is going to present data based on these locations which will be identified as L1, L2 and L3.

6.1 PERSONAL INFORMATION

To analyze what respondents think about English, it is first necessary to know who these people are. Hence, this section aims to present some personal information about the students. The first graph shows students' gender:

Graph1: Students' gender
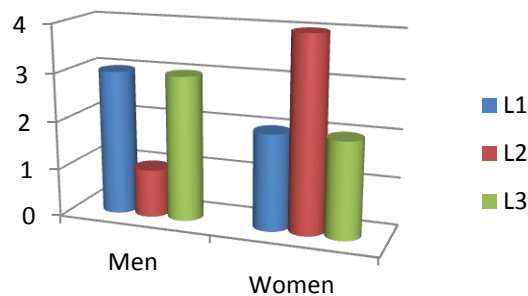
We can observe that the number of men and women are a little different. In L1 and L3 the numbers are the same: 3 out of 5 students are men. But, in location 2, only 1 student is a man. Here, only the questionnaires of five people are being considered, but their gender was an important factor to be considered when choosing the data to be analyzed. Therefore, these numbers are a good reflection of the class as a whole. In L2 there are very few male students.

It was also important to know more about the students' age and for how many years they have been studying in the regular school.

Graph 2: Students' age
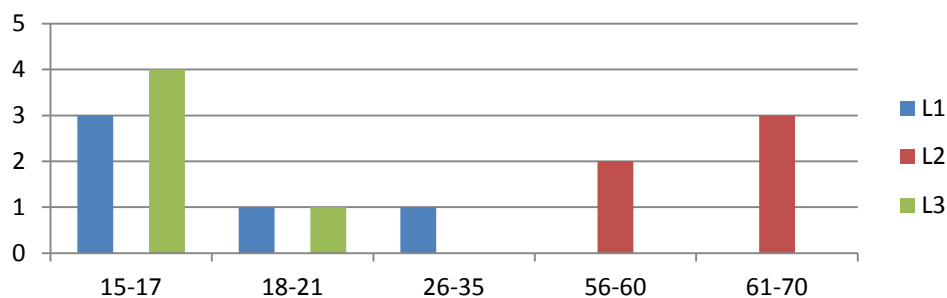
Graph 2 is important to demonstrate what the profile of each place is like. In L1, three out of five students are between 15 and 17 years old, thus, this classroom is basically composed of young learners. The same happens with L3 where 4 students (out of 5) belong to this same age group and only 1 student is between 18 and 21 years old. On the other hand, in L2, students are between 56 and 70 years old. Of the five people who were interviewed none of them are less than 56 years old. However, this does not mean that there are no younger

students in L3, but the great majority of them are, in fact, older (as the data presents). Actually, there are no students between 15 and 17 years old in L3.

Graph 3: For how long have the students been studying
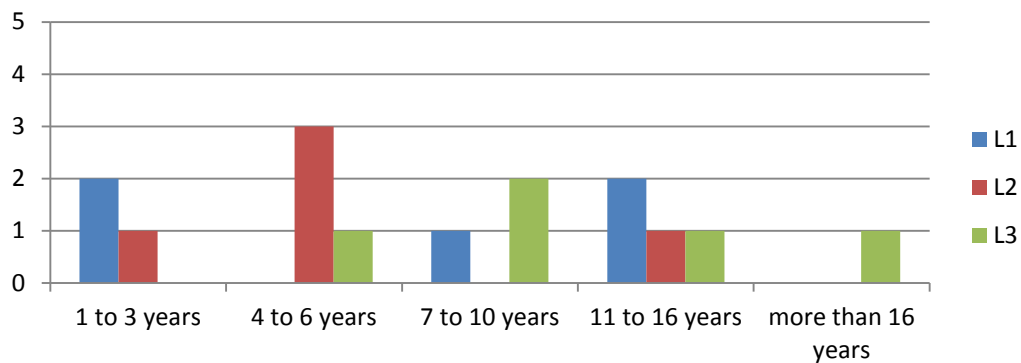
The period of time they've been studying in regular schools will also probably be a reflection of their ages. Older people in EJA usually studied for a very short time when they were young and had to stop studying or, sometimes, they have never studied before. Therefore, in L2, students have been studying for less time: 1 of them has only studied for 1 to 3 years and 3 of them have studied for between 4 and 6 years. Those who have studied for the maximum of 3 years are the ones for whom EJA is their first contact with the school context. Only 1 student from L2 has studied for more than 11 years. Therefore 4 out of 5, or 80% of the students who were interviewed, have studied for 6 years or less.
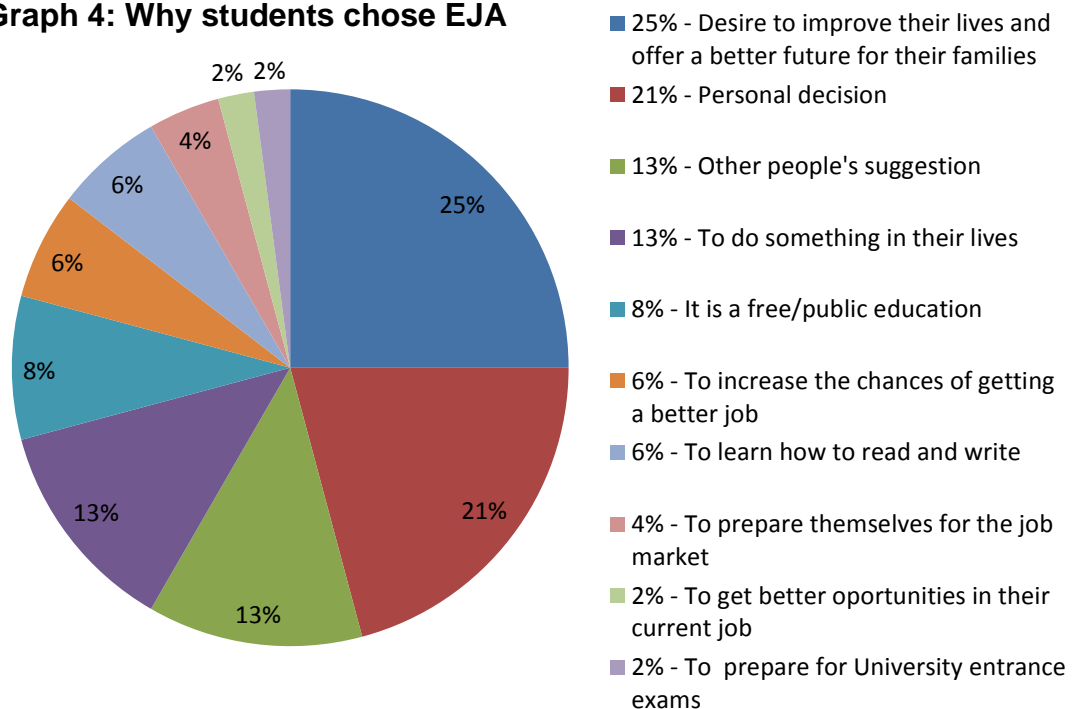
The reality in L1 is a little different from the one presented in L2. In L1, 2 students have studied for 11-16 years and another 2 for 1-3 years. Only one student has studied for 7-10 years. While in L2 80% of the people have studied for less than 6 years, in L1 only 40% of students belong to this same time average. The other 60% studied for more than 7 years. This data may represent the hypothesis that younger people in EJA have more 'studying time' when compared to the older ones. The numbers from L3 also helps to support this argumentation since the only student (from all 15 respondents) who has studied for more than 16 years belongs to this location. And, as Graph 2 presents, L3 is composed by students between 15 and 21 years old. Although the graphs do not make it clear, this student is the one from L3 who is between 18-21 years old. Another important statistic is that none of the respondents from L3 has studied for less than 4 years and only 1 of them has studied for 4-6

years, a very different reality when compared to L2. The other 3 people from L3 are divided as follows: 2 students from 7 to 10 years and 1 from 11 to 16.

Hence, Graph 3 shows that, in general, students from L2 have a shorter schooling period. The majority of them have studied from 4 to 6 years. Although they are older (see Graph 2), many of them started studying for the first time in EJA. So, as they are now coursing the second segment, the only time they studied was during the 3 years of the first segment – in EJA. On the other hand, students from L1 present more diverse data since there are two students with less than 3 years of schooling and another two with more than 11. In this location they are basically young, but it does not change the fact that some of them are also attending school for the first time in their lives. Some of these students who studied for 11-16 years have failed school many times, so for this reason their schooltime is longer. As a whole, L3 is the location that presented the longest average of schooling time which leads us back to the hypothesis that, in EJA, younger learners have been attending school for many years due to different reasons.

Next, students had to explain the reason why they decided to start their studies again in the EJA format:

Graph 4: Why students chose EJA

- 25% - Desire to improve their lives and offer a better future for their families
- 21% - Personal decision
- 13% - Other people's suggestion
- 13% - To do something in their lives
- 8% - It is a free/public education
- 6% - To increase the chances of getting a better job
- 6% - To learn how to read and write
- 4% - To prepare themselves for the job market
- 2% - To get better oportunities in their current job
- 2% - To prepare for University entrance exams

Graph 4 was not divided according to students' answers in each place. It is a general view of the reasons given by all three groups because the answers were very similar. The data shows that 25% of them enrolled in this course with the 'desire to improve their lives and offer a better future for their families'. Almost the same percentage of students (21%) affirmed that they came to EJA influenced by their own will. On the other hand, only 2% of the students intend to use the course 'to get prepared for the University entrance exams' and another 2% 'to get better opportunities in their current job'. Another important statistic is that 6% of these students had the intention to learn how to read and write, and, although the graph does not specify this information, these 6% are people from *L2,* who are all over 56 years old.

6.2 ENGLISH CLASSES

The questions presented in this section are about students' thoughts concerning the English language. The graphs basically follow the same structure as the previous ones: the data of each location is going to be shown initially before presenting a few graphs where the data from all three groups was gathered together. The first question being illustrated is whether students like English or not.
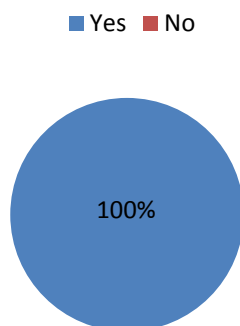
Graph 5: Do students like English?
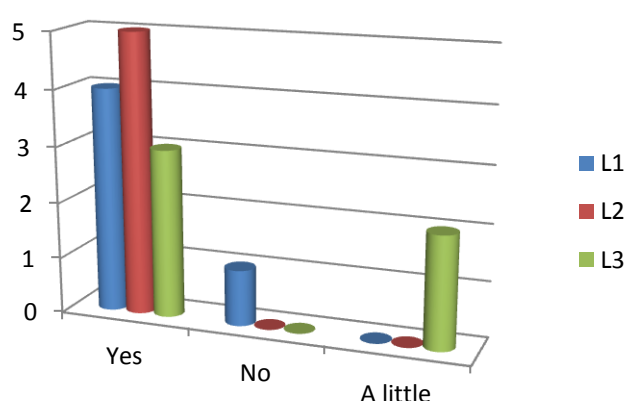
These can be considered positive results since almost all students affirmed that they like English. In L1 only one person declared that they did not like the language while in L2 all students answered 'yes'. On the other hand, L3 is more balanced: 3 students said 'yes' and 2 said 'a little'. This data may change what many teachers usually think about students. We tend to imagine that learners in public and regular schools do not enjoy learning a foreign

language, but, as the graph shows, some of them do. If we consider the total number of students who were interviewed (15 people), 80% of them answered 'yes', which is a very large percentage.

Another point presented in Graph 5 is that the only respondents who affirmed that they did not like English or liked it only a little belong to L1 or L3, locations where the majority of students are young people (15 -35 years old). The oldest students all declared that they liked English. However, although the majority of the students declared that they liked English, it was also necessary to know if they think that learning English is important and why. This information is represented in the following graphs:

Graph 6:

Is it important to know English?

Graph 7:

Why?
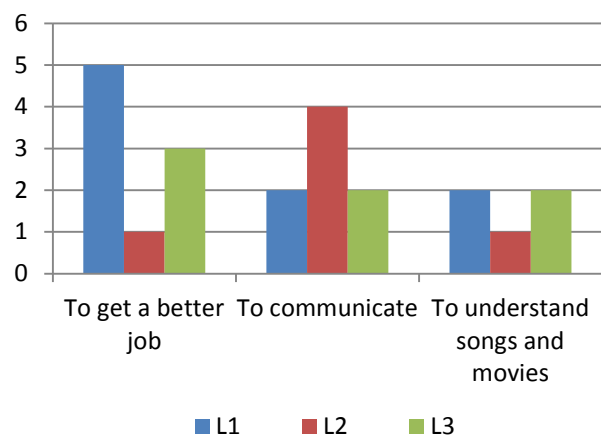
These graphs were organized together because they represent related ideas. Graph 7 is the explanation about why students think English is important. Even students who affirmed that they did not like English, or only liked it a little, still agree that it is important. All fifteen students who were interviewed (100%) answered 'yes' to the question "Do you think it is important to know English?". On the other hand, when they were asked why it is important, the answers were more mixed. In this question they were free to choose more than one option.

The most chosen option was 'To get better job opportunities': all five students from L1 and three students from L3 selected this option. But, it was only selected by one student from L2. The majority of respondents in L2 believe that studying English is important 'To communicate' while only 2 from L1 and another 2 from L3 share this same opinion. The

numbers from L1 and L3 are also the same in the third option: 2 respondents from each place think that English is important 'to understand songs and movies'.

The numbers presented in Graph 7 can be a reflection of students' ages. If we look back at Graph 2, we can observe that the students from L1and L3 are younger than the ones from L2. Hence, maybe the most chosen option by L1 (100%) and L2 (60%) was 'To get better job opportunities' because young people are more concerned about finding a good job. On the other hand, since most people in L2 are older and retired, they do not show much interest in using the language to work, they want to interact, therefore, 80% of them chose 'to communicate'.

The numbers representing the option 'to understand songs and movies' also indicate this difference of interest for different age groups. This alternative was selected by 40% of young students from both locations 1 and 2 while only 20% of students over 56 years old (L3) voted for this option, showing that younger people are more likely to enjoy studying if it includes music and movies.

The next graph will help us analyze what students like about English classes:

Graph 8: What students like about English classes

|	L1	L2	L3
The way the subject is taught	3	-	1
Speaking English	3	3	2
Activities with songs	-	1	1
Writing and translating words	-	1	-
The class dynamic	1	-	-

Graph 8 represents an open question, so students were free to answer whatever they liked about English classes. The idea of formulating this question as open was to avoid directly influencing the students as to the positive aspects of the English classes. So, the objective was to discover the students' point of view. However, the answers were very similar among students from all 3 locations. They all said that what they enjoyed more was the moment when they talk in English. One student from Place 3 did not answer this question. Only one person pointed out the dynamic of classes as something he likes.

Another interesting piece of data is that one respondent from L2 declared that they enjoyed writing and translating words in the classes. Although this is not a large number, it is interesting because students from L2 are still learning how to read and write in their mother tongue, so it is good that one of them also shows interest in learning to use the writing ability in the second language. The answer 'song activities' was only mentioned by 2 students (1 from L2 and 1 from L3) which is a little surprising since a great number of respondents (40% - L1 and 40% - L3) said (see Graph 7) that English is important to understand songs and movies. Thus, it was expected that more students would point out movies or songs as something they like having during the class.

The apparently conflicting answers concerning the use of songs and movies (in Graphs 7 and 8) offer a good opportunity to analyze the contrast between why students think learning English is important and what they really enjoy during the classes. Since in Graph 7 40% of the younger students agreed on the importance of English to understand music and movies, we would expect this option to be mentioned by the majority of them in Graph 8. However, that is not what happened. This fact might be connected with the methodology that is being used in class. Knowing that learners enjoy songs is not necessarily useful for the teacher if he does not also know what kind of music they enjoy listening to. As mentioned previously (see Graph 2), the students' profiles in each location are really diverse. Hence, one song that works with L1 will not automatically be a good option for L2 students. Furthermore, it is not only the type of music that is important but also how this music is used as a learning tool. The song activities must be adapted according to the characteristics and limitations of each location. The activities also need to present a certain variety. It is not going to be attractive to students if every time a song is being used the activity is to 'fill in the gaps', for example. Therefore, the respondents' answers stimulate us to start thinking about many other details concerning the classroom and teachers practicum.

In question 8 respondents had the opportunity to write about anything they enjoyed in the class. But, in the next question the objective was to identify what they would like to learn in class. This was a multiple choice question and it presents some similarities when compared to Graph 8, as we can observe below:

Graph 9: What ability would students like to learn in the classes
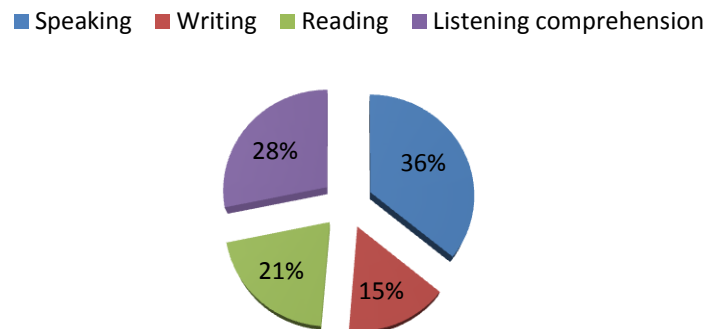
Since all fifteen respondents gave very similar answers to this question, Graph 9 represents the data as a whole (all 15 students). In this question they could also check more than one option. The objective was to identify what ability or abilities they like and are interested in, therefore, they were allowed to mark more than one. The data shows that the great majority of students (36%) would like to learn how to speak/talk in English but only 15% of them have any interest in learning to write. The options 'reading' and 'comprehension' had similar numbers (21% and 28% respectively) but the higher numbers both refer to oral communication which reflects their answers presented in Graph 8 where 8 out of 16 answers (50%) affirmed that they enjoyed speaking English.

Although students had very positive answers in the previous questions, the next graph shows that they might not be very sure that they are capable of learning English:

Graph 10: Do students think that by the end of the school year they will be able to understand/use English?
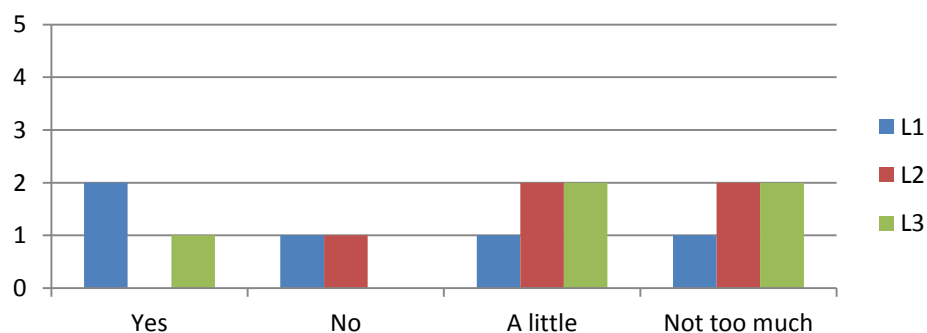
This last graph is not as positive as the one represented in Graph 5 where 80% of the learners affirmed that they like English. Here, only 20% of them believe that by the end of the School year they will have a good level of the language. As Graph 10 illustrates, this 20% is divided as follows: two students from L1 and one student from L3. None of the students from L2 chose 'yes'.The option 'no' was chosen only by one student from L1 and one student from L3. The other two options – a little and not too much – had equal numbers: one respondent from L1, two from L2 and two from L3.

As a whole, students chose the answers that represent very low expectations concerning the learning of English. If we consider all three locations, out of 15 students only 3 showed positive expectations related to their learning process. The other 12 respondents were divided between the alternatives 'no', 'a little' and 'not too much', which represents 80% of the total number of answers. Another important statistic is that all students from L2, who are older (see Graph 2) showed negative expectations. This data is important to make teachers think about the reason why these students are so negative about their own capacity of learning a foreign language since learner's personal motivation can directly affect their own success or failure.

7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data presented in this paper can be used to support and also to contrast some of the theories proposed for EJA. Students' answers and opinions can be used as a tool to understand whether theories are really being applied successfully and produce positive results inside EJA classrooms. As described in the '*Proposta curricular para a educação de Jovens e adultos: segundo segmento do ensino fundamental'* (2002) and the *'Proposta de implementação da modalidade EJA no sistema municipal de educação de Vitória'* (2008), young adult and adult education is formed by different types of students. An EJA class is hardly ever going to be composed exclusively by people that share the same level of education, reality or even age group. It is an extremely heterogeneous context.

In Graph 1 (see section 6) it was observed that the number of men and women in L1 and L3 are balanced, but, in L2, out of 5 students only 1 is a man. In the Graph that represents the students' age (Graph 2), it could be seen that people in L2 are mainly older students. Combining the information from these two graphs supports McCaffery (2007, p10) who claims that "people most likely to be less literate are women, older people, people in rural

areas", since, in this case, in L2 students are older people and mostly female. They are all over 50 years old and at the time they were young and at the 'appropriate' schooling age, society was different. The massive presence of older women studying at L2 can be connected to the fact that some decades ago, it was not common for women be allowed to attend centres of learning.

In the past, women were more like to stay at home, learning how to cook, clean the house and take care of the family. Therefore, many of these women are today enrolling in EJA because in the past they did not have the chance to study, some were even prohibited from going to school. However, according to UNESCO (2006, cited in McCAFFERY, 2007, p.22) "the percentage of women who are literate has risen by only one percent since 1990. The low level of literacy among women is due to the fact that fewer girls than boys attend school". Different from women, men needed to study to get a job for a living, so they were more likely to attend schools in order to achieve a better future. Therefore, it is common to have a gender difference in EJA classes composed of older students. It is also a circumstance that teachers must keep in mind. Although these women are now having the opportunity to study, that does not change the fact that many of them still deal with housework, prepare meals for the family and take care of their grandchildren, for example. So, these factors need to be taken into consideration while preparing a lesson, because the class must be adapted to their reality.

More important information is presented in graph 2: the respondents' age. The graph considers each of three locations individually, giving each of them a specific age characteristic: L1 and L3 have more young learners while L2 has a great number of adults. This information does not, of course, represent these locations as a whole since in L1, for example, there are also older students. However, even though it seems to be the case that each location has a very homogenous group, we need to first consider how this specific school is organized. Differently from any other school in Vitória, this institution is divided between different locations around the city. Therefore, it is common that older students, for example, are going to be grouped together in the same place. Hence, considering that all 15 students belong to the same school, the numbers indeed show age diversity: 60% of them are under 21 and 40% are from 26 to 70 years old.

Therefore, the way that English is going to be taught for these students cannot be the same. It is necessary to highlight the fact that although the locations are different, the teacher is the same. Thus, it would be easier for the teacher to use the same activity in all 3 locations, but,

an activity that works with adults can be boring for teenagers. Adults and young adults have different learning characteristics and objectives. The content must be adapted according to the learners own knowledge, reality and limitations. If the teacher does not consider these aspects, he is going to automatically exclude students from the process of constructing knowledge: students are going to become only receivers and they need to be producers as well. This necessity of adapting content to students' age leads us to the following analysis that makes a comparison between why students think it is important to learn English and what they like about English classes.

Although in Graph 7 five students (two from L1, one from L2, two from L3) affirmed that they believe that English is important to understand songs and music, in the next question (see Graph 8) only one student from L2 and one from L3 pointed out that what they like about the classes are activities with songs. A brief discussion after the graph already pointed out that the methodology used in class may be the problem here. It was expected that more young students would declare that they enjoy music during the classes because this age group tend to like working with material such as songs, movies, TV shows, and so on. However, as teachers, we need to question ourselves about some things related to the use of songs: How are they being used? What kind of music is being used? Are student's own opinions and preferences being taken into consideration?

The number of older students who mentioned the use of songs was also very small: only one student in Graph 7 and one in Graph 8. This difference in interests is also a consequence of their ages. According to Harmer (2007, p. 84) adult learners "can engage with abstract thought. This suggests that we do not have to rely exclusively on activities such as games and songs – though it may be appropriate for some students." On the other hand, younger learners

> *[...] possuem uma diversidade de conhecimentos sobre seu meio e utilizam diferentes formas de expressão que devem ser consideradas na escola: a partir de manifestações culturais (musical, teatral etc.) expressam suas opiniões de modo crítico, na maior parte das vezes, falando de suas dificuldades, de seus valores, suas perspectivas de futuro, do desemprego, da miséria, da corrupção, da poluição.*
> (BRASIL, 2002, p.93)

Their ages and the methodology that is being used also interfere in students' motivation. According to the last Graph, 80% of the 15 respondents feel very negative about their success in learning English by the end of the school period. Gardner and Lambert (1972, cited in ENGIN, 2009, p.1035) argued that "second language learners' feelings about a foreign

language and its cultural values and living styles (attitudes) and their individual reasons for learning the language (motivation) are related to overall learning success and achievement with learning that foreign language." Therefore, if the student does not like the language, he is going to have more difficulties learning it. Also, if someone feels insecure or does not receive the right motivation, the learning process will be less successful.

What also calls our attention in this data is that none of the students from L2, who are older, chose the positive alternative. This might be related to the fact that they still believe in the idea that because of their age they are not capable of learning a foreign language. They do not feel confident and sometimes their past schooling experiences can have a negative effect on the learning process. Harmer (2007, p.85) claims that

> As teachers of adults we should recognize the need to minimize the bad effects of past learning experiences. We can diminish the fear of failure by offering activities which are achievable and by paying special attention to the level of challenge presented by exercises. We need to listen to students' concerns, too, and, in many cases, modify what we do to suit their learning tastes.

As a whole, what this data shows us is that there are a lot of things that still need to be done to improve the learning of English in EJA, and teachers play a significant role in this changing process. As English teachers, we need to rethink our teaching methodology and strategies and reflect whether we are considering the specificities of EJA groups while working with them. Our job, therefore, "must be to provoke student engagement with material which is relevant and involving. At the same time, we need to do what we can to bolster our students' self-esteem, and be conscious, always, of their need for identity." (HARMER, 2007, p. 84)

8. FINAL THOUGHTS

The role and importance of EJA in Brazil has been changing and expanding throughout its history. While in the past adult learners were ignored by the school, nowadays these students have become the subject of many different kinds of research. The implementation of laws for EJA and the creation of the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para Educação de Jovens e Adultos* are a significant achievement for the educational system. However, there are still a lot of problems and challenges that need to be faced concerning the EJA context. As this paper has shown, the ideas and guidelines proposed by EJA official documents are based on theoretical ideas that discuss the importance of knowing the students' reality and the necessity of adapting the content and methodology. The problem is that what happens inside classrooms is very different.

One of the problems is whether teachers are in fact prepared to deal with EJA students or not. Many teachers are not aware that working with EJA demands a new methodology, approach and behavior. As Cavalcanti (1999, cited in MULIK, 2011) pointed out, the majority of schools still use children's methodology with adult learners. In fact, we can observe that this tends to happen even more in the teaching of a second language so what we see in adult classes is a childish way of teaching English. The *Proposta de implementação da modalidade EJA no sistema municipal da educação de Vitória, volume 2* (2008), emphasizes the importance of working with foreign languages in EJA contexts. According to this document, the teaching/learning of a foreign language promotes the insertion of students in the job market, helps them to be socially active, promotes critical thinking and also increases their comprehension of the world. However, these objectives are not going to be achieved until schools, teachers and students change some of the mistaken beliefs involving EJA.

Although some people claim that adults do not want to learn a foreign language, the data showed that there are EJA students who do want to learn English, and they even like the language. Furthermore, they are capable of learning – it is not an ability which belongs exclusively to children only. However, the data also showed us the necessity of working on these students' motivation and fears because they tend to feel very insecure about learning a foreign language (HARMER, 2007). The school in which this research took place has a good environment: teachers and students treat each other in a respectful way and the teachers, in general, always try to create a safe environment in the classroom. But, even with these advantages, students still demonstrated their insecurity to take risks during the learning

process. This led us to think more about the ways we can help these adult learners to feel safer and, as a consequence, have a more productive and satisfactory learning experience.

As a whole, we can conclude that although there has been an improvement in the way the Brazilian educational system deals with EJA, there are some changes that still need to be made. And, these changes are mainly related to teachers' and students' views about EJA and also the way schools deal with learners from this context. It is important to have in mind that the knowledge students bring with them should be valued and must be used in class. Because of their social reality, age, story and previous experiences with school, EJA learners already possess an enormous diversity of knowledge and thoughts that can enrich the learning process. Hence, as Paulo Freire (1996, p.13, our translation) pointed out, "teaching is not about the transfer of knowledge; teaching is about creating possibilities for its production or its construction"

9. REFERENCES

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