

ARE HUMAN RIGHTS THE RIGHTS WE HAVE? ENEM's essay and Venezuelan students in Brazil

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Abstract: In the last years, due to a serious humanitarian crisis, over seven million Venezuelans have left their country, and many are moving to Brazil as their migration destination. For Venezuelan families, education represents an opportunity for integration and inclusion in the host society. However, Venezuelan students in highschool face several obstacles in preparing to take the ENEM, a national exam of access to higher education in Brazil. Based on literature about the ENEM and migrants in Brazil, as well as on ethnographic research conducted in two public schools in the state of Paraíba, this article describes the difficulties and challenges that the ENEM, specifically its essay section, imposes on Venezuelan students. The results indicate that they face significant challenges related to Portuguese language and institutional barriers. In addition, ENEM's essay is perceived as the biggest challenge, which results from their lack of socio-cultural repertoire on Brazil. It makes the production of a dissertative-argumentative text even more difficult, as it demands reflection on Brazilian socio-cultural themes and a proposal of social intervention that respects human rights.

Keywords: Intercultural Education, Student Writing, Evaluation Methods, Education for Diversity.

OS DIREITOS HUMANOS SÃO OS DIREITOS QUE TEMOS? A redação do ENEM e os/as estudantes venezuelanos no Brasil

Resumo: Nos últimos anos, devido a uma grave crise humanitária, mais de sete milhões de venezuelanos/as deixaram seu país e muitos/as estão se deslocando para o Brasil como destino migratório. Para as famílias venezuelanas a educação representa uma oportunidade de integração e inclusão na sociedade receptora. Contudo, os/as estudantes venezuelanos/as matriculados/as no ensino médio enfrentam diversos obstáculos para se preparar e realizar o ENEM, um exame nacional de acesso à educação superior no Brasil. Baseado em literatura sobre o ENEM e migrantes no Brasil, bem como em uma pesquisa etnográfica conduzida em duas escolas públicas na Paraíba, este trabalho descreve as dificuldades e desafios que o ENEM, especificamente a seção de redação, impõe aos/as estudantes venezuelanos/as. Os resultados indicam que eles e elas enfrentam desafios significativos com relação à língua portuguesa e a barreiras institucionais. Além disso, a redação do ENEM é percebida como o maior desses desafios, decorrente da falta de repertório sociocultural sobre o Brasil,

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o que dificulta ainda mais a produção de um texto dissertativo-argumentativo que exige reflexão sobre temas socioculturais brasileiros e uma proposta de intervenção social que respeite os direitos humanos.

Palavras-chave: Educação intercultural, Produção de textos pelo aluno, Métodos de avaliação, Educação para a Diversidade.

¿LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS SON LOS DERECHOS QUE TENEMOS?

La redacción del ENEM y los estudiantes venezolanos en Brasil

Resumen: En los últimos años, debido a una grave crisis humanitaria, más de siete millones de venezolanos/as han dejado su país y muchos/as se están desplazando hacia Brasil como destino migratorio. Para las familias venezolanas, la educación representa una oportunidad de integración e inclusión en la sociedad anfitriona. Sin embargo, los/as estudiantes venezolanos/as matriculados/as en la secundaria enfrentan diversos obstáculos para prepararse y rendir el ENEM, un examen nacional de acceso a la educación superior en Brasil. Basado en literatura sobre el ENEM y migrantes en Brasil, así como en una investigación etnográfica realizada en dos escuelas públicas en el estado de Paraíba, este trabajo describe las dificultades y desafíos que el ENEM, específicamente la sección de redacción, impone a los/as alumnos/as venezolanos/as. Los resultados indican que ellos y ellas enfrentan desafíos significativos con relación al idioma portugués y a barreras institucionales. Además, la redacción del ENEM es percibida como el mayor de estos desafíos, debido a la falta de repertorio sociocultural sobre Brasil, lo que dificulta aún más la producción de un texto argumentativo que exige reflexión sobre temas socioculturales brasileños y una propuesta de intervención social que respete los derechos humanos.

Palabras clave: Educación intercultural, Producción de textos por el alumno, Métodos de evaluación, Educación para la Diversidad.

Introduction

In late 2022, Brazil - UNICEF website³ published the results of surveys conducted by U-Report⁴ and R4V⁵, focusing on education within the Venezuelan migrant population living in Brazil. Among the data collected in these inquiries, two elements stand out: three out of every four refugees and migrants from Venezuela don't know of the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (ENEM) - National Highschool Exam; however, nine out of every ten interviewees expressed their desire to attend a university, most of which are public and free.

³ Available on: <https://www.unicef.org/brazil/comunicados-de-imprensa/apesar-do-desejo-de-cursar-universidade-3-em-cada-4-refugiados-e-migrantes-da-venezuela-ouvidos-em-enquete-nao-conhecem-o-enem>. Access on 08/29/2023.

⁴ A tool of information and social participation focused on young people, created by UNICEF in 2011, and present in 90 countries today. Available on: <https://ureport.in/>. Access on 08/29/2023.

⁵ Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela R4V – a mechanism of articulation between agencies of the United Nations system and civil society. Available on: <https://www.r4v.info/>. Access on 08/29/2023.

Although it's possible to observe that the migrants consider higher education an opportunity for social mobility, there is a lack of knowledge of the ways and procedures to achieve it, with the National Highschool Exam (ENEM) is the main access to public universities, and many private institutions in Brazil. Azevedo and Lima's (2023) recent research, which analyses the demands of migrants' associations for the development of national policies in São Paulo, highlights that the preparation for the ENEM and other entrance exams (organized by the universities) has been widely discussed and proposed in the last years. Thus, it can be inferred that groups of migrants are setting this agenda and questioning Brazilian public authorities.

It's worth noting that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights marked the beginning of the international formalization of the right to education as a universal human right. In the context of migrating populations, several national and international normative devices establish that the states must grant these individuals the same treatment as they grant their native citizens. From this perspective, it's critical to see the right to linguistic education as a fundamental part of the discussions about education for migrants. This is due to the fact that "linguistic human rights and the right to education are strongly connected as the populations that don't have their linguistic human rights acknowledged may not be able to enjoy other rights, such as the previously mentioned right for education" (Friedrich; Melo-Pfeifer; Ruano, 2021, p. 7). Thus, linguistic rights comprehend the right to learn the host country's language and use it in the acquisition of knowledge in the educational and cultural environment; however, institutionalized barriers are commonly observed that stop this right from being fully exercised (Ibid.).

When they enter the Brazilian educational system, migrant students have to acquire new curricular content, much of which is deeply rooted in Brazilian reality and culture. This is especially noticeable in subjects such as History, Arts, and Geography of Brazil, from which numerous questions of the ENEM are framed. Additionally, in the case of Venezuelan students, whose native language is Spanish, they are challenged to learn in a new language – Portuguese. It influences their performance in a significant way in one of the most challenging sections of the exam, even for Brazilian students: the essay test.

Students are required to construct a dissertative-argumentative text grounded in a

theme suggested via motivating texts. According to Bakhtin (2003), who proposes that written discursive genres are not isolated entities but are shaped and transformed in a continuous dialog with other texts and contexts, it's possible to infer that ENEM's essay adds complexity for foreign students. It is so because it requires not only a deep command of the standard norm of the Portuguese language, but also an experiential repertoire and an understanding of the nuances and particularities of the Brazilian socio-cultural, political, and economic context. This underscores the intrinsically dialogical and historically situated nature of the test.

In this context, this article, stemming from doctoral research in education carried out at the Federal University of Paraíba - UFPB (the acronym in Portuguese), is based on the premise that exams and tests are not isolated events, as they constitute powerful tools, inserted in social, political, and educational contexts, capable of shaping the evaluated individuals' background and behaviors (Shohamy, 2001). Aiming to deepen the understanding of these issues and to identify the difficulties and obstacles faced by Venezuelan students concerning the ENEM, we ask the question: How do Venezuelan migrant students living in Brazil perceive the ENEM's essay?

In view of the above, this text is organized as follows: We present a brief literature review about the ENEM in the context of the migrant presence in Brazilian schools. Then, we give a description of the ENEM, of the research methodology and of the participants of the study. Next, we discuss the outcomes of our fieldwork with Venezuelan highschool students in public schools in Paraíba. Lastly, we make final considerations, summarizing the main topics and suggesting future studies.

Recent studies on an emergent theme

To better comprehend the experiences, perceptions, and views migrant students in Brazilian schools have of the ENEM, the subsequent contributions of recent studies stand out. They were collected from the Theses & Dissertations Catalog of CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) and from the Google Scholar platform by the following combination of terms: "Migrants and the ENEM" and "Refugees and the ENEM". We have identified an abstract of a study presented in an event, three articles, a book chapter, a master's dissertation, and a doctoral thesis, covering the period from 2019 to 2023.

Oliveira, Cavalcanti and Costa (2020) conducted an exploratory and descriptive study about the access of immigrants to different educational levels in Brazil, using as a source of data the School and the Higher Education Censuses, administered by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira – INEP (the acronym in Portuguese). It consists of a valuable analytical effort for researchers in the field of migration and education, because it resorts to quantitative data to examine the impact of the migrant presence in educational institutions, including individuals with temporary and bordering residence, refugees, and refuge applicants, at the various levels and stages of education, such as childhood education, elementary school, highschool, technical courses, adults and young adults education (EJA), and higher education. Moreover, it provides information on the participation of foreign students in the ENEM.

The authors are associated with the International Migration Observatory (OBMigra), an agency resulting from a partnership between the Ministry of Labor of Brazil, through the National Immigration Council, and the University of Brasília, with the objective of expanding knowledge of the international migration flows in Brazil. Thus, by means of theoretical as well as empirical studies, the OBMigra aims to identify strategies to improve social innovation and public policies related to international migrations (Brazil, 2019).

The article indicated an accelerated increase in enrollments by migrants in all stages of basic education, mainly as of 2017, driven by the increase in migratory flows, especially from Venezuela and Haiti. An example is the significant increase of 130,4% in enrollments of foreign highschool students from 2010 to 2019 (Oliveira; Cavalcanti; Costa, 2020). It is worth highlighting that Venezuelan nationality concentrates the higher number of immigrants in the three stages of basic education.

Concerning the ENEM, the authors conduct a quantitative analysis of the number of foreign students taking the exam. However, they highlight a methodological difficulty related to the lack of the “nationality” variable in INEP’s database, which prevents a more detailed and disaggregated cross-country analysis. In addition, they indicate a growing tendency for migrants to take the ENEM from 2013 to 2016, followed by a decline from 2016 to 2019, which, as the authors argue, requires a deeper investigation to provide insights about the factors involved in this variation. The data also reveal an equitable participation of men (52%)

and women (48%) and indicate that most immigrants who took the ENEM in 2019 were younger than 25 years old (68%), while approximately one third was 25 or older (32%).

As for the presence of migrant students in Brazilian universities, a significant increase was also recorded, of 30% from 2010 to 2018. However, researchers observed the absence of Haitians and Venezuelans among the ten most present nationalities in Brazilian higher education. Therefore, they indicate that student mobility is prevailing, as a result of international cooperation agreements, institutional collaborations, and bilateral accords, at the expense of the access to the university by migrants and refugees living in the country, emphasizing the importance of policies targeting these particular groups (Oliveira; Cavalcanti; Costa, 2020).

Lastly, the researchers emphasize the importance of mixed approaches, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques for a comprehensive analysis of the field of migration and education, “in order to be able to resort to theoretical-methodological tools that allow the interpretation of different nuances of the access to public services by the immigrant and refugee population” (Ibid., p. 232).

Desirée Oliveira’s contribution stands out, through a doctoral thesis, an article, and the chapter of a book, all discussing the ENEM in relation to migrants in Brazil. Oliveira’s article explores the perspective of three volunteer teachers participating in the Pro-Immigrants project at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG, the acronym in Portuguese), which aims to prepare refugees and other migrants in vulnerable conditions who wish to take the ENEM to apply for admission in higher education (Oliveira, 2019a). The author explains that the project adopts the perspective of Portuguese as the host language (PLAc, the acronym in Portuguese), an innovative approach in the field of Portuguese as a foreign language teaching, because it promotes a culture of participative teaching, which values the migrants’ identity and promotes citizenship and intercultural dialog.

The above-mentioned teachers taught three Haitian students history, languages, and chemistry during the year of 2017. They were interviewed individually about their experience in the Pro-Immigrants project, how they conducted their lessons, what challenges they and their students faced, how they handled these challenges and how language and culture affected the lessons. They evaluated the experience positively in general, highlighting the

migrant students' motivation and dedication to learn and participate in the lessons.

However, the teachers faced the challenge of dealing with the students' tiredness, as they worked during the day and attended the classes in the evening. Besides, they mentioned the differences between the Brazilian and the Haitian educational systems, which had a significant impact on the teaching and learning processes. Another difficulty they mentioned was vocabulary, since the ENEM is written in the formal register of the Portuguese language and requires a good command of both the language and the specific vocabulary of each field of knowledge. In view of these challenges, the teachers had to adapt their methodology and implement various didactics strategies – such as the creation of a glossary of unknown terms, the adaptation of the questions to a less formal register, the promotion of debates in the classroom about Haiti's reality – with the objective of ensuring that the immigrant students comprehend ENEM's structure, and the questions' wording and alternatives.

Therefore, Oliveira (2019a) raises questions on the adequacy of the ENEM as an instrument of selection among refugees and immigrants for admission to higher education institutions, suggesting the need for specific selective processes to include this public. The researcher also emphasizes the importance of the intercultural ties in this formative experience, highlighting that the students tend to respond positively to the interaction between their original language and culture and the host language and culture.

The Pro-Immigrants program was also the setting of the same author's doctoral thesis in Applied Linguistic defended at UFMG (Oliveira, 2019b). The research is theoretically based on socio-discursive interactionism and on literature about PLAc and aims mainly to investigate the preparation of three Haitian immigrant for the composition of ENEM's essay.

Using the action research methodology, Oliveira, the project's essay instructor, created a didactic sequence composed of seven modules, available at the work's appendix, with the objective of practicing essay writing skills in Portuguese; concomitantly, she conducted didactic activities approaching grammar and register aspects of the Portuguese language, such as syntax, verbal morphology, orthography, and collocations, among others. She interviewed students to understand their specific needs and analyzed their narratives and lesson transcriptions in her thesis (Oliveira, 2019b).

The author addresses the concept of language capacity, which comprehends the

necessary skills and processes to produce texts in contexts of interaction, according to the principles of socio-discursive interactionism. In her analysis of the Haitian students' textual productions, Oliveira (2019b) directs her attention specifically to two language capacities: the meaning-oriented and the linguistic-discursive ones, related to connection, via the use of textual resources and organizers, such as conjunctions, adverbs, noun phrases and preposition groups, which guarantee cohesion and organization of discourse.

She also emphasizes that the capacity of meaning involves skills that enable the weaving of meaning about social practices, taking into account ideological, historical, economic and socio-cultural contexts, through the use of representations and/ or knowledge of social practices related to diverse thematic content. The linguistic-discursive capacity, on the other hand, contributes to the production of a cohesive text, involving time structure, voice management, modalization and adequate use of lexical items. Both capacities are considered essential to strengthen arguing in texts produced by migrant students (Oliveira, 2019b).

Through the comparative analysis of three textual productions of each student (initial, intermediate and final), Oliveira's (2019b) research reveals that the preparation of Haitian immigrants for the ENEM's essay production has improved significantly due to the didactic sequence, which enabled the development of the meaning-oriented and the linguistics-discursive capacities, strengthening their writing and arguing skills. By the end of the seventh module, the students presented a more consistent development of ideas and built arguments more clearly and deeply, showing their assimilation of the dissertative-argumentative genre of the ENEM's essay.

However, the author stresses that, although they showed significant progress in academic writing, the students still did not feel familiarized with Brazil's cultural aspects, which are essential to ENEM's essay. Thus, she acknowledges ENEM's limitations as a criterion of selection of immigrants to higher education, due to the diversity of complex themes to be approached in its essay, many of which are centered around the country's reality, requiring knowledge of these topics in order to express and ground opinions and arguments effectively.

In a segment derived from previously mentioned thesis, Oliveira (2021) explores the concept of meaning-related capacity with the objective of analyzing the arguing in texts

produced in class, as part of the preparation for ENEM's essay. The importance of the didactic sequence is emphasized as an instrument to broaden the knowledge of the Portuguese language, elaborating new meanings and addressing different themes of the ENEM's essay. Likewise, the author stresses that the teaching of the PLAc should comprehend the teaching and learning of the language for specific purposes, such as the preparation for exams, including the ENEM.

Ferreira *et al.*'s (2022) article addresses the Pro-Immigrants project, highlighting its institutionalization at UFMG. The authors mention that from 2020 on, the original course was officially established as an extension project at the university, gaining the support of the Dean's Office for Extension Activities and the Linguistics Department, which turned into its physical headquarter. It stimulated significantly the access of immigrants, refugees, displaced persons and residents with a humanitarian visa. The "*Cursinho Popular Pró-Imigrantes*" (Pro-Immigrants Popular Preparatory Course), as they called the project, became part of UFMG's Network of Popular Preparatory Courses and started its activity in 2020 during the Emergency Remote Teaching, making use of virtual resources and tools because of the pandemic.

In this article, the researchers at UFMG, including Luciana Ferreira, who is a professor at the Post-Graduation Program in Linguistic Studies, as well as the coordinator of the Pro-Immigrants project, resort to the literature in applied linguistics to analyze the account of Haitian student of the Pro-Immigrants course. The authors share the student's PLAc beliefs and learning experiences, as well as his preparation for the ENEM and his later admission to the university. They argue that his writing capacity improved considerably after he started at the prep course, where he received specialized training for the ENEM's essay. They also stress that the student believes that a monolingual approach would be beneficial to the learning of the target language, expressing the need to "erase" this mother tongue (Creole) to improve his Portuguese. Besides, the student's statement highlights the importance of education in seizing promising opportunities in Brazilian society, and he mentions his desire to graduate as a civil engineer in order to return to Haiti (Ferreira *et al.*, 2022).

The recent master's degree dissertation of one of the authors of Ferreira *et al.*'s (2022) article, defended at the Post-Graduation Program in Linguistic Studies at UFMG (Melo, 2023)

and advised by professor Luciana Ferreira, investigates a migrant Asian student's preparation for the ENEM. He arrived in Brazil after a journey through Africa. Just like in the previous research, data collecting takes place in the setting of the *Pró-Imigrantes* preparatory course at UFMG, where Melo was a languages instructor. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, audio recording of classes and field journal.

Based on sociological, anthropological and of applied linguistics studies, and grounded in Oliveira and Ferreira's research, Melo (2023) analyzes how concepts such as motivation, investment, community and imagined identity influence the improvement of the Portuguese standard variety of the participant, especially in the context of ENEM's essay. The author observes that, although the student acknowledged the difficulties in mastering the dissertative-argumentative style, he demonstrated significant dedication, participation and interest during the classes. Therefore, she argues that the access to Portuguese was critical for the student's identity purposes, as well as for achieving the symbolic resources he desired, and thus integrating himself into the imagined community to which he aspired to belong to.

For the student, taking the ENEM and being admitted to a Brazilian university represented not only a better integration into society but also a means to conquer a "Brazilian identity". He devoted time and effort to his studies, as he understood that the command of formal Portuguese writing was essential to accomplish his objective of being seen and recognized as a "Brazilian" who has access to higher education at a federal university. The dissertation also underlines the importance of incorporating the critical multiculturalism perspective into the pedagogical practices, as it acknowledges the diversity of identities of the individuals and their material and symbolic interests. It implies avoiding reducing, stereotyped views on cultural differences and promoting a reflection about cultural diversity in the context of migration (Melo, 2023).

Finally, Campos and Catarina's (2022) work is an overview presented at a research seminar on migration, which took place in August 2022 at the Federal University of Fronteira Sul. The research aimed to analyze the difficulties faced by immigrant adolescents as they took the ENEM and other entrance exams, identifying solutions to facilitate their access to higher education, like specific preparatory courses for immigrants. However, detailed information about the research is not available.

The works described above represent significant contributions for the recent studies on education for migrants in Brazil and, specifically, their preparation for the ENEM, as they have been carried out in the last five years. Literature on the subject is still incipient, considering Brazil's dimensions and the multiplicity of migration flows in its territory. It is worth noting Shohamy's observations, when she states that in academic literature "test takers are often kept silent; their personal experiences are not heard or shared" (2001, p. 8).

Desirée Oliveira can be considered a pioneer in this discussion, because her detailed descriptions of the challenges faced by Haitian students doing the ENEM's essays, and the educational and didactic proposals to support them in this process have been inspiring new investigations. On the other hand, UFMG, through the work of researchers and professors connected to the Pró-Imigrantes project, demonstrates a productive, relevant engagement in this discussion. Such studies provide important considerations about the needs and demands of the migrants concerning the ENEM, as well as pedagogic strategies and practices that can contribute to a more effective and potentially inclusive preparation, focused on interculturality or on the critical multiculturalism.

It is relevant to emphasize that the participants in the study we analyze here are young adults, who completed highschool in their countries of origin and who already entered the Brazilian labor market. Thus, until this moment, literature on migrants and the ENEM do not include specific studies with adolescents currently attending Brazilian highschool. The inclusion of this age range in studies could provide valuable insights into social and educational situations migrants are faced with, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise for young migrants during the process of preparation for and participation in the admission process.

Furthermore, despite the growing significance of migrant presence in the Brazilian educational system, as demonstrated by Oliveira, Cavalcanti and Costa (2020), there is still a gap concerning the experiences of young migrants taking the ENEM, particularly the Venezuelan population, which constitutes the most important migration flow in Brazil today.

We stress the need to expand our understanding in this domain and to consider the particularities of the students' educational background. In this sense, we believe that our research can contribute to it by bringing, in an empirical way from the school context, the

voices and perceptions of migrant adolescents from Venezuela about the ENEM, enabling a deeper understanding of their challenges and realities.

ENEM - Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio (National Highschool Exam)

On the website of the Ministry of Education of Brazil⁶, they inform that since 2009 the ENEM has been used for the admission to higher education via the Sisu (*Sistema de Seleção Unificada* - Unified Selection System) and the ProUni (*Programa Universidade para Todos* - University for All Program), which offers scholarship to higher education institutions in the private sector. This exam – among others of assessment of Brazilian education – is developed and administered by INEP and intends to assess the competencies and skills acquired by students during the highschool period, according to the curricular guidelines in effect.

The ENEM contains 180 multiple-choice questions in four areas of knowledge: languages, codes, and their technologies; human sciences and their technologies; natural sciences and their technologies; and mathematics and its technologies, in addition to an essay. The essay test requires that the students produce a prose text, dissertative-argumentative, about a political, social, scientific or cultural subject. For this purpose, motivating texts are presented to thematically contextualize the essay's proposal and stimulate the applicant to think about the question. Besides defending an argument by mobilizing knowledge acquired during the highschool period, the student should elaborate a proposal of social intervention for the situation-problem formulated, respecting the principles of human rights (Brazil, 2022).

As mentioned above, the essay test of the ENEM explores themes related to Brazilian society, requiring from the applicant a sociocultural repertoire about its issues, realities and phenomena. For instance, the essay themes of the last three years were: challenges for the appreciation of traditional communities and peoples in Brazil, in 2022; invisibility and civil registry: guarantee of access to citizenship in Brazil, in 2021; the stigma associated to mental diseases in Brazilian society, in 2020.

The text elaborated by the applicant is evaluated by two teachers independently, and they will take into consideration five competencies to attribute the mark (from 0 to 200 points

⁶ Available on: <https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/avaliacao-e-exames-educacionais/enem>. Accessed on 08/29/2023.

for each competency), according to Table 1.

Table 1 – Competencies assessed in the ENEM’s essay

Competency 1	Demonstrate command of the Portuguese formal written modality.
Competency 2	Comprehend the proposal of the essay and apply concepts from various areas of knowledge to develop the theme, within the structural limits of the dissertative-argumentative prose text.
Competency 3	Select, relate, organize and interpret information, facts, opinions and arguments while defending a point of view.
Competency 4	Demonstrate knowledge of the necessary linguistic mechanisms to build the argumentation.
Competency 5	Elaborate a proposal of intervention for the problem addressed, respecting human rights.

Source: Brazil, 2022, p. 7.

In Competency 1 it is evident the need of proficiency in the formal Portuguese register, which contemplates “the knowledge of the writing conventions, among which are the rules of orthography and graphic accentuation set by the Orthographic Agreement” (Brazil, 2022, p. 11). The syntactic structure and the deviations are evaluated in the essay, so, the student should pay attention to the aspects described in Table 2.

Table 2 – Deviations evaluated for Competency 1 of the ENEM’s essay

Writing conventions	accentuation, orthography, use of hyphen, use of uppercase and lowercase letters and syllabic separation (translineation);
Grammar	verb and noun collocations, verb and noun agreement, verb tenses and modes, punctuation, syntactic parallelism, use of pronouns and crasis;
Choice of register	adequacy to the formal written modality, that is, absence of the use of informal register and/or of reality marks;
Vocabulary choice:	use of precise vocabulary, which means the selected words are used in their correct sense and appropriate to the context.

Source: Brazil, 2020, p. 12.

Oliveira (2019b) notes that the notion of competency is intrinsic to the ENEM but questions its pertinence. She argues that this notion is linked to innatists and universalists principles, which neglect socio-historical influences in human life. From the theoretical socio-interactionist perspective, the researcher explains that the essay test is elaborated only to be evaluated and approved, disregarding the social situation of text production, not taking into consideration the reading audience nor the producers intentions.

In this context, when conforming to the rules and social formal pre-constructs in the realm of governmental evaluative instances, the individual find that the possibilities of

interlocution, signification and dialogism are limited. In a counterpoint to the technicist concept of competency, the researcher opts to address the concept of capacity, more precisely the capacity for language, which would represent the social and historical nature of language, allowing the learner to produce a genre in situations of interaction. This way, the capacity for language favors not only having the knowledge of the formal structure of the language, but also acting and transforming different social circumstances.

Methodology and participants in the research

This research emerges from a Doctorate in Education, part of the line of research of Cultural Studies of Education of the Post-graduation Program at the Federal University of Paraíba (PPGE/UFPB)⁷. Its methodological character is descriptive and ethnographic, with the purpose of collecting, exploring and comprehending the significations, conceptions, representations and points of view related to the events and experiences of the group investigated (André, 2012; Dauster, 2004; Puig; Lafon; Alcaraz, 2009), in this specific case, Venezuelan refugee students living in the state of Paraíba, in the Brazilian Northeastern.

The fieldwork, conducted from March to December 2022, was developed in two public schools of the state, and included weekly visits to the institutions, conversations with employees, students and teachers, as well as mock exams of the ENEM's essays and classes of PLAc for the migrants, after the schools' hours. The research had the formal authorization of the Ethics Committee of UFPB, and the students' parents allowed their participation by signing a Term of Free and Informed Consentment (*Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido*). Thus, the collected statements in the schools resulted from a sufficiently extensive ethnographic work, where trust was established with the interlocutors, who offered a valuable perspective of their experiences and perceptions concerning the test. Besides, the interviews and the PLAc lesson were conducted in Spanish, the students' mother tongue.

For this article, the focus is on the analysis of the significations attributed to the ENEM's essay by a specific subgroup of participants of the research, composed of two students, presented as follows. It is worth stressing that one of the co-authors of this article, Spanish speaker from Colombia, was these two students' teacher, in the period from 2018 to

⁷ The research received financial support of *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (CAPES), Ministry of Education, Brazil.

2021, at a state school in Paraíba, which means that the collecting and analysis of data are also crossed by the researcher-teacher's personal experience, following the auto-ethnography approach (Ellis; Bochner, 2000). So, they integrate observations, annotations in the field notebook and impressions about interpersonal relationships in and outside the classroom. The resulting statements from these meetings were transcribed and translated according to the Portuguese formal standard orthography and, for this article, translated into English.

Fernando

Fernando arrived in Brazil in 2018, with his sister, mother and father, during the first big Venezuelan emigration movement. When he left Venezuela, he was in the second year of a five-year high school program, according to his country's curricular classification. In Brazil, he faced difficulties to be able to enroll in a public school in Paraíba, as they were maltreated, according to him and his mother. Also, the institutions demanded translated and attested documents. However, with the mediation of one of this text co-authors, who was a teacher at a state technical school at the time, they were able to enroll him at the first year of highschool and he completed the two following school years, the third one attended virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fernando was 15 during the investigation. He was born in Maturín, capital of the state of Monagas, in Northeastern Venezuela.

Sara

Sara was 16 when the research was conducted. She was born in Valencia, capital of the state of Carabobo, and concluded the third year of the highschool in Venezuela, two years short of completing the cycle. In October 2019, with her mother and her younger sister, she arrived in Brazil, following her father, who had been working in Paraíba's rural area. Initially, Sara attended the same all-day technical school as Fernando, where she finished the ninth year of primary school and the first and second years of highschool, this last one virtually due to the pandemic. Later, she decided to attend the third year, which is the final year according to the Brazilian curricular classification, at another state school in the morning period.

Beyond language: ENEM's essay, the school and society

In general, we observe that the Venezuelan adolescents feel insecure when preparing for the ENEM and think that the school does not offer adequate support to inform them or guide them about the test, its characteristics, importance, and relevance for the future. For example, it was only in the second year of high school (after one year studying in Brazil) that Fernando learned, through chats with classroom mates that the ENEM was a test that could enable the access to the university. In Sara's specific case, the new school where she attended the third year of high school did not give any assistance in the process of applying for the exam. One of the co-authors of this work assisted her in the procedure.

Concerning the essay, the research participants reveal a lack of confidence and training to develop autonomy and command of the textual dissertative-argumentative genre. Data collected from fieldwork leads to the inference that such difficulties are intrinsically related to its process of adaptation to the Brazilian educational system and to the linguistic practices of the school culture. Our analysis identifies the linguistic barrier as a relevant obstacle for these young migrants, who find themselves challenged to carry out academic tests in a language that is not their native one. Sara's statement clearly depicts this situation:

D: Have you ever been bullied here at school?
S: No, the only one that— it was not bullying. It was the previous Portuguese teacher. (...) Because she assigned a task, so I put her the question that, I mean, telling her I'm Venezuelan, how do I do it, I mean, what she could say to me.
D: You mean, help out?
S: Yes. She didn't suggest how to do it. But the one thing she said to me was: "It's not my problem", that is, "I am teaching you in Portuguese, you have to do it in Portuguese". And I was like ((the student's eyes widen)), because I had recently arrived in a country I did not know, nor the language, so I didn't know what to do. In the end, I know the pandemic started and we didn't do the work, but I'd say it was unfair. (...) If she had guided me, "you can look it up here", or anything like that. "I can help you", but she didn't do it.
D: I imagine this situation caused you stress, right?
S: Yeah, and I, how, what am I going to do now? So, I asked the students, my classmates. I told them, I mean, how can I do it. Because I was new and all that. They told me I could Google, that I could translate, and since I was new, I went to Google. And I would write it down exactly what was there, but now that time passed, I realized that Google translation is not always right. (...) so I had this difficulty. This happened and left a mark, I mean, I don't feel that it was correct, this way of addressing someone. (*Interview with Sara, 05/09/2022*).

The student refers to a difficult experience, which generated discomfort and a feeling

of helplessness and injustice. The account above dates back to February 2019, only 4 months after her arrival in Brazil, and a few weeks before the beginning of the pandemic, when the student was doing the first year of highschool at the first school she attended in the new country.

At this critical moment of adapting to the new educational environment, the negative with the Portuguese language teacher had a significant impact on Sara's adaptation process, since, as she acknowledges, it was something that "left a mark" and which she associates directly with situations of discrimination in Brazil. It's important to underline that the Portuguese language subject is fundamental – and the most challenging one, according to our ethnographic observations – for the school journey of Venezuelan students, being extremely relevant for the learning of the official language of the host society. Moreover, the language serves as a medium for understanding local sociocultural processes, dynamics, and phenomena.

In her new school, Sara attended the third year of high school and received more support from Portuguese teacher, who showed a patient attitude and engaging in correcting the student's mistakes. Despite this, Sara still faced challenges in that subject, mainly when it came to writing.

S: The only subject with low marks is Portuguese (...) it's the subject I have more difficulty in. Because the teacher assigns many essays. So, at least when I read a text, some ideas come up. (...) But then in the essay you have to put everything in order, like you said, introduction, then development, with your opinion, then the conclusion. So, sometimes I start with an idea and repeat that idea again below, you know? (*Interview with Sara, 05/16/2022*).

During the classes, it was noted that the Venezuelan students' writing presents deficiencies concerning noun and verb agreement, the use of masculine and feminine genders, false cognates and grammar questions, such as the use of crasis – which does not exist in Spanish. In addition, the lack of connectives of textual cohesion is notable. We also identified a wrong association between the conjunction "e" (and) and the verb "ser" (to be) in the third person singular "é" (is). However, it's worth noting that native students also make these errors. As for reading in Portuguese, both Venezuelan students show more confidence, but accuse difficulties related to objective, formal language in the ENEM wordings. This is indicated in Fernando's statement, a few days after taking the exam.

F: The first questions were easy, but as it advanced, it was hard for me to understand the context of the questions because I would get lost around the words I didn't know. I got nervous because I didn't understand them and it stressed me a lot. I had difficulty in the part of history and art. I thought I kind of knew it, but I really didn't know anything. (*Conversation with Fernando, 01/29/2021*).

It's important to note that Fernando stood out at school for his diligence, dedication and exemplary behavior and good academic performance. Given this, the realization that he self-assessed mistakenly as able enough – "I thought I kind of knew it" – may have surprised him, leading him to infer that should have prepared better concerning history and art content. His statement also reflects a difficulty in comprehending vocabulary and themes for which he did not have a background in his country of origin, such as Brazil's historical events, culture, heritage, and artistic movements.

Fernando's statement reveals one of the main challenges faced by Venezuelan students: limited knowledge of the context around the formulated situation-problem in the ENEM's essay, an adversity also faced by Sara. During one of the mock exams she took, which addressed the "Democratization of the access to movie theaters in Brazil" (ENEM's essay proposal in 2019), it was evident that, as she felt insecure to write with her own words, she ended up writing literal copies of parts of the motivating texts – something that is also common among Brazilian students. As she was questioned about that, she stated:

S: *Yes* ((she smiles shyly)), I have to read, analyze and do it with my own words, and the truth is that it became too difficult for me. Because I don't have much knowledge of what it means to "democratize the cinema" here. But I could not develop much, like, address correctly, use words, how can I say, correct words, like more advanced. (*Interview with Sara, 07/01/2022*).

Sara had never been to the movies, not in Venezuela, nor in Brazil. The essay's proposal became more distant and complex due to the lack of a reference plan, affective memory or sociocultural repertoire on the theme, making it difficult for her to produce arguments. Both students stated not knowing how to use the "correct words" and not having knowledge of the themes in the ENEM's essay. It was demonstrated when various subjects of the Brazilian reality were approached, present in the essay test in other years, such as religious intolerance in Brazil, reduction of inequalities in Brazilian regions, among others.

It should be stressed that the ENEM's essay test asks the student to formulate a

proposal of social intervention that respects human rights. Indeed, as seen in Table 1, this is one of the competencies assessed. Thus, according to the ENEM's applicant manual, the proposal is an "(...) occasion for you to demonstrate **your readiness to exercise citizenship and act in reality in consonance with human rights** (...)" (Brazil, 2022, p. 21; authors' highlight). Ironically, ethnographic data collected with Sara and Fernando confirm that the concept of "human rights" is elusive and not fully understood by Venezuelan adolescents. When asked if he knew the meaning of the term, Fernando answered: *I don't know much. Are human rights the rights we have?*

Fernando and Sara report that they had difficulties enrolling in the Brazilian school. Even though they were refugee solicitors at the time, the institutions demanded supporting documents of their education in Venezuela, equivalence of grades between the educational systems, as well as translations and registers (which they did not have). This went against active legal norms that ensure the universal access to basic education, offering it equally to all residents in Brazil without discriminating based on origin or nationality (Brazil, 1988; 1990; 1996; 2017; 2020). Disrespecting the right to the access to education for migrants, hindering their insertion in public schools, and consequently their human rights, not only obstructs the integration and reception process, but also compromises the full exercise of citizenship, which is precisely the grounding subject of the ENEM's essay.

It's important to note that the students' difficulty in understanding the context and issues of the ENEM's essay is not exclusive of the community of Venezuelan migrants, as shown by Oliveira (2019b) in her work with students of Haitian origin. For example, one of her students' statement, *"I can't speak anything because I don't know anything about Indian"* (Ibid., p. 178), arguing that she had never seen an indigenous person, illustrates the difficulty in taking a stand and arguing about subjects that migrants have no direct knowledge of. This situation becomes even more challenging – and paradoxical – when we consider the migrant students' lack of knowledge of the human rights theme, which is central in the international discussion about migration and refuge, as highlighted in the introduction to this article, besides being an essential aspect for the elaboration of a proposal of intervention in the situation-problem presented in the ENEM's essay.

The ENEM's essay topics address sociocultural aspects of Brazil, such as health,

education, inequality, violence, rights, among others. Based on this fact and considering that the competencies evaluated in the essay test prioritize the skills in the formal register of Portuguese, we agree with Oliveira (2019b, p.75) that it is a test created "essentially for native Portuguese speakers", which places migrants in evident disadvantage, since they are evaluated by the same criteria as the Brazilian participants. It is expected that the essays be somehow standardized or aligned with the experiences and beliefs, issues and debates that prevail in the Brazilian context, respecting the homogenic criterion of the Portuguese norm. Such standardization presupposes a bias that can affect the students' performance when they have different linguistic and cultural profiles (Altakhaineh; Melo-Pfeifer, 2022).

Therefore, we consider that it is essential to promote a comprehensive debate on the theme, involving the organizations of the civil society of the migrants themselves, representatives of the educational system and public policymakers (Azevedo; Lima, 2023). In this endeavor, it is essential to give voice and enable experiences and perspectives of the migrant students who are going to high school and take the ENEM annually, allowing them to offer a critical view on the test and to question its uses, results, methods and social effects (Shohamy, 2001). It is then fundamental to contemplate the inclusion of refugees and migrants in situations of vulnerability in the discussion about the democratization of higher education.

Such a discussion should mobilize a reflection about the ENEM as one of the mechanisms of access to the institutions of higher education in Brazil, especially for migrant students. In this context, it is worth highlighting the implementation of special entrance tests of some universities to cater for refugees, forced migrants and humanitarian visa bearers. These initiatives represent crucial milestones and are in accordance with the need to create "exclusive evaluation models, which consider the particularities of the public in question, contrasting with the existing exams" (Ruano; Lopes, 2019, p. 99).

The study conducted by Rocha, Azevedo and Mendes (2022) provides a complete panorama of the selection processes of 14 universities associated to the Sérgio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair. The researchers emphasize the need to promote both a more inclusive access and the permanence of these students in the universities, always underlining the obstacles that are present in this route. Within this setting, we defend that, to consolidate

pillars of equality and justice in the educational context, it is vital to advocate for a policy of positive discrimination (Gluz, 2010). This strategy should be deeply discussed, incorporating social, cultural and linguistic dimensions into the evaluation criteria of ENEM. Such policies, conceived as instruments of leveling to support students in disadvantageous situations, seek to acknowledge and value migrant students, taking specific characteristics into consideration, such as gender, age, ethnicity, language and race.

In the everyday life of educational institutions, it is fundamental to develop meetings and activities that facilitate integration, socialization and the sharing of experiences between Brazilian and migrant students. We believe that an intercultural approach can assist students in building new knowledge about Brazil and in the valorization of their identities in the school environment. With this perspective, the teachers of Portuguese language and of foreign languages can have an emancipating and transforming role. The presence of native speakers of Spanish in the school system provides valuable opportunities for intercultural and plurilingual encounters. Therefore, such dynamics would result in mutual benefit, facilitating their process of adaptation and Portuguese learning, while the Brazilians would also have the opportunity to learn Spanish and become familiar with elements of the Hispanic culture (Sanchez, 2020).

Finally, we corroborate empirically that the ENEM does not request the specification of the applicant's foreign nationality at the moment of registration, which Oliveira, Cavalcanti and Costa in 2020 and Oliveira in 2019 have already pointed out. This lack of information about the candidates' origins hinders an accurate analysis of the performance of different groups of migrants on the test, considering mother tongues, and educational, cultural and social background. We emphasize the importance of this set of data for the development of distinctive educational strategies and actions, focused on the improvement of these groups' performance in the exam.

Until the moment of the writing of this article, Fernando and Sara had not enrolled in the university yet, as their grades in the ENEM did not reach the "cutoff", that is, the minimum necessary grade for the admission in their desired courses. Both students have been working at temporary jobs in the service sector (diners, pizza places and restaurants), but maintain their dream of majoring in Nursing and Design, respectively. We point out that

foreign students in Brazilian higher education institutions, in most cases, come from international programs and agreements, which means refugee and migrant students in vulnerable positions have not had access to the same opportunities (Oliveira; Cavalcanti; Costa, 2020). In this sense, Fernando and Sara's situation can be representative of thousands of other migrant students.

Final considerations

As we take note of an evident lack of literature empirically exploring the perceptions and views of migrant students on the ENEM, our intention is to contribute to a research field that is still consolidating and has the potential to promote an education that is sensitive to the linguistic, social and cultural specificities of migrant students in Brazil. Without meticulous research, it becomes challenging to comprehend integrally the obstacles they face concerning the knowledge of the exam's structure. Therefore, robust data and consistent analysis can contribute to the creation of educational policies and strategies that respond effectively to the gap in the knowledge of the subject. We therefore acknowledge the fundamental role of further studies on public, academic policies in deepening our comprehension of school experiences and of the needs and strategies for the preparation of migrants who will take the exams, not only among Venezuelans but also within the migrant community in Brazil.

This article analyzes how two migrant students from Venezuela perceive the ENEM's essay, having attended Brazilian public schools. We stress the heuristic value of enabling the actors themselves to formulate their perspectives on the exam in question. We believe that the ethnographic approximations can provide critical support data for the formulation of more effective, inclusive educational policies and practices. In the case of the Venezuelan population, we noticed that there are still gaps to be filled concerning the impacts of the migratory process on education, including questions related to curricular adaptation, Portuguese language learning, reception policies, socio-educational integration and performance in exams, such as the ENEM.

Field data reveal an institutional limitation of the public schools researched when it comes to making the ENEM accessible and comprehensible to the refugee students from Venezuela. Although Fernando and Sara themselves do not report being victims of bullying or explicit xenophobia, it is possible to state that they face institutional discrimination (Gomolla;

Radke, 2009), which is manifested through a structure that does not offer distinctive, contextualized opportunities and spaces for the improvement of their skills accessed in the test, specifically the essay, which they consider the most complicated part of the exam. Likewise, we believe that lack of information on and training for the ENEM among migrant students can hinder their performance and prevent them from being admitted to the university. So, we understand that exams impose agendas, ideologies and knowledge, and can perpetrate power relations (Shohamy, 2001).

As there is an increase in cultural diversity in Brazilian schools, it becomes vital for managing and pedagogical policies and practices of the educational system to contemplate the multiplicity of identities, differences and needs of the student body. Alternatives are necessary that consider these students' linguistic e cultural diversity, as well as their specific needs, to guarantee opportunity equality and full exercise of human rights in the educational sphere. In addition, the educational system should take on an active role in the promotion of education as a human right for all students, whether they are migrants or Brazilian, in order to strengthen equality and inclusion, and to respect the fundamental rights of all people.

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