Emergency remote teaching in the pandemic: progress or setback?

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of basic education teachers with emergency remote teaching during the pandemic. This is a descriptive research, conducted through focus groups with ten teachers from the State of Rio Grande do Norte. Based on content analysis, categories of responses were identified for the initial perceptions of this context, as well as the period of remote teaching and the period of return to presential teaching.

Keywords: Emergency remote teaching; Basic education; Pandemic

Ensino remoto emergencial na pandemia: avanço ou retrocesso?

Resumo: Este estudo tem como objetivo compreender como foi a experiência de professores da educação básica com o ensino remoto emergencial na pandemia. Trata-se de uma pesquisa descritiva, realizada por meio de grupos focais, com dez professores do Estado do Rio Grande do

Norte. Com base na análise de conteúdo, identificaram-se categorias de respostas para as percepções iniciais desse contexto, bem como do período de ensino remoto e do período de retorno ao ensino presencial.

Palavras-chave: Ensino remoto emergencial; Educação básica; Pandemia

Enseñanza remota de emergencia en la pandemia: ¿avance o retroceso?

Resumen: Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender la experiencia de los profesores de educación básica con la enseñanza remota de emergencia durante la pandemia. Se trata de una investigación descriptiva, hecha en grupos focales, con diez profesores del Estado de Rio Grande do Norte. Con base en el análisis de contenido, se identificaron categorías de respuestas para las percepciones iniciales de este contexto, así como el período de enseñanza remota y el período de retorno a la enseñanza presencial.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza remota de emergencia; Educación básica; Pandemia

1 INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (OMS) classified COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern on January 20, 2020, and as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (AQUINO *et al*., 2020). In this context, social isolation was necessary and, as a consequence, there were implications in several social spheres, both in work practices, family relationships, and education.

Specifically, in the field of education, presential classes have were suspended, and the need to implement Emergency Remote Teaching (ERE) has emerged. Unlike experiences that are planned from the beginning of each academic year or semester and designed to be online, ERE is a temporary change in teaching, an alternative in crisis circumstances such as a pandemic (HODGES *et al*., 2020).

Thus, digital technologies have acquired a new meaning in education, and teachers have had to adapt to this new form of teaching, using different methodologies from those already applied in the traditional classroom. In fact, the use of technologies and new digital teaching tools is causing a revolution in the formative processes of teaching and learning (BELLONI, 2022).

Therefore, this article aims to understand what was the experience of basic education teachers with ERE during the pandemic. Given the likelihood of other pandemics (AARESTRUP; BONTEN; KOOPMANS, 2021) or even the possibility of adopting remote teaching without it being an emergency (SOUZA; MIRANDA, 2020), such a study can contribute to improving its implementation process.

To this end, this article is divided into four sections. The first develops the theoretical foundation of the study, with a focus on discussing the concepts that anchor ERE in basic education, as well as the challenges and the use of technology in the teaching-learning process. The second brings a methodological design, and the third, the results and discussions, which in continuity give rise to the fourth topic, the final considerations of the research in question.

2 DEVELOPMENT

2.1 ERE in basic education at national level

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to promote social distancing and to stop the

transmission of the COVID-19 virus, education began to have a new teaching approach, analogous to the currently known Distance Teaching (EaD), the Emergency Remote (AQUINO *et al*., 2020). The ERE is a teaching or instructional modality adopted on an exceptional basis, which presupposes the geographical distance between teachers and students, with the use of non-face-to-face pedagogical activities (MOREIRA; SCHLEMMER, 2020). Thus, remote teaching was an alternative to ensure the objectives of basic education and a way to ensure that students did not skip a year of schooling.

In Brazil, the Ministry of Education issued Ordinance 343, dated March 17, 2020, which "provides for the replacement of presential classes with digital media classes while the pandemic situation of the new coronavirus - COVID-19 - lasts" (BRASIL, 2020a). As a result, the routine of educational professionals had to adapt to a new teaching model.

It is important to note that the Brazilian teaching method during the pandemic, although inspired by the forms of an EaD, is very different from it, especially in terms of methodological and structural differences (HODGES *et al*., 2020). In light of this, the classroom has become virtual, replacing the physical space of the traditionally constituted school, and has transcended its walls and entered the homes of many families through the Virtual Learning Environment (AVA). The AVA is a virtual space where teachers interact and accompany students during this model of the learning process.

In this sense, teachers had to adopt new teaching strategies and methodologies to adapt to the new and plan their lessons, especially using digital technological resources. Moreira and Schlemmer (2020) explain that ERE is a content-centered process and communication is mainly two-way, one-to-many, where the teacher conducts a video lesson or expository lesson through web conferencing systems. The authors also understand remote teaching as a process of transposition of the presential reality to the digital one, using the methodologies, contents, and pedagogical practices typical of the presential educational universe. These elements, according to them, are implied by the urgency of reframing educational and training actions to promote quality education. In other words, some adjustments were necessary in the educational context and in the management of education, in which social commitment began to have an even more specific appearance and a real and meaningful partnership between family and school.

2.2 Challenges in remote education and technology use

Because of the objective of guaranteeing school attendance for students in basic education, which is considered essential, the use of non-face-to-face educational activities has been exceptionally authorized during the period of health restrictions. The Opinion of the National Education Council and the Plenary Council No. 9, from June 8, 2020, signaled that these activities could or could not be mediated by Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDICs) since they could not be implemented and/or operationalized in the entire Brazilian scenario, for whatever reasons (BRASIL, 2020b).

The implementation and/or operationalization of TDICs was challenging, especially for public schools. This is because the presence of technologies in these schools is still a reality far below what it should be to guarantee the advancement of Brazilian education. Given this scenario, there were numerous challenges: technological support for students to monitor remote activities, standardization of actions and procedures, as well as teacher training (RODRIGUES, 2020). Therefore, the educational scenario has changed in a very drastic way, creating a context of uncertainty and insecurity for teachers, students, and schools.

Initially, there were many difficulties and challenges of remote teaching in Brazil, such as access to technology, emotional impact between teachers and students, and difficulties of students from more distant areas, among others. All of these difficulties and challenges were a constant concern for school administrators, for the quality of teaching/learning, in addition to the need to adapt to a new routine (MORALES, 2020).

Moreover, Arruda (2020) highlights that the pandemic has developed a complexity in the performance of teaching work, since there are implications when transforming the living room, bedroom, or kitchen into a classroom, considering that these spaces are shared by their families and, therefore, bring other demands that weaken the emotional structure of this professional.

Meanwhile, the school as a whole, and especially the teacher, who was on the front line, virtually in the life of each student, began to have a more direct approach also with the students' families through digital tools. This approach led to a greater demand for the teacher's work.

To this list, we can add the lack of technological support, the lack of qualification of the teachers in the use of technologies, the lack of appropriate actions and planning for the remote class, and the psychological damage. Thus, all these difficulties and challenges faced by many during this period consequently reduce the guarantee of quality education for students (RODRIGUES, 2020).

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

According to the methodological parameters of authors such as Gil (2021), the present work qualifies as a case study, with an exploratory and descriptive purpose, and a qualitative approach, since it starts from the analysis of a specific reality, from the perspective of the subjects. The research was carried out through group interviews, in the focal modality (MINAYO; COSTA, 2018). The subjects of this study were teachers from basic education in the State of Rio Grande do Norte.

The qualitative approach is based on the understanding and interpretation of social and human phenomena, emphasizing the perspective of the subjects involved. In this study, this means that we sought to understand the reality of teachers in the State of Rio Grande do Norte, exploring their perceptions, experiences, and opinions about basic education. The research was conducted through focus group interviews. This type of interview involves bringing together a group of participants to discuss and reflect together on the topic under study. This approach allows for greater interaction between participants, allowing for the discussion of different perspectives and the exchange of ideas (MINAYO; COSTA, 2018).

The invitation to participate in the interviews was posted in groups of state teachers on Facebook and WhatsApp; it contained a link to a Google Forms so that those who accepted could inform their telephone and e-mail contact, which Regional Directorate of Education and Culture (Direc) they were assigned to; choose, among the options of days and times, their meeting; as well as read and sign the Term of Free and Informed Consent (TCLE). The information about the location of the Direc was requested to form the groups in each meeting with teachers from different locations.

A total of 18 teachers responded to the form. However, after analyzing the availability of these teachers, only 10 participated. Therefore, it was decided to divide the teachers into two focus groups in March 2022. Three teachers actively participated in the first meeting and seven in the second. The other teachers either did not have the same availability as at least two other teachers or missed the scheduled meeting for various reasons. Each focus group was attended by three researchers, one as moderator and the other two as assistants. The meetings were held using the Google Meet video conferencing platform.

A semi-structured interview script with open-ended questions was used. At each meeting, the

following initial question was asked: What was your experience of teaching remotely (at the beginning and during) and of returning to the classroom? Depending on the answers, new questions were added to elicit details about difficulties encountered, guidance and support received, society's perception of teaching during the pandemic, work routine during the pandemic, feelings about ERE, and mental health. At each meeting, approximately 10 questions were discussed based on the initial question. The meetings lasted about an hour and a half each.

With the permission of the interviewees, the two meetings with the interviewees were recorded to preserve the accuracy of their words at the time of transcription. After the meetings and in possession of the recording, the interviews were transcribed into text documents. Then the reports were read and the material was organized for interpretive analysis, which is necessary to understand the world of meanings, representations, and perceptions (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006).

Data analysis was based on the principles of content analysis proposed by Bardin (1979). Following this suggestion, the teachers' responses were grouped into relevant categories, as detailed in the Results and Discussions section, so that they could be properly analyzed.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the main results of the focus group interviews with teachers who worked in basic education during the pandemic. All participants were permanent public servants of the State of Rio Grande do Norte, seven women and two men, aged between 25 and 57, who had been teaching for more than three years.

The categories of each teacher's responses to the questions discussed will be explored in this section throughout the text in three moments of analysis: the beginning of the remote teaching, during the remote teaching, and the return to the presential teaching. That is, each period will be divided into thematic categories to address the main points discussed by the respondents.

4.1 Initial perceptions of the teaching context in the pandemic

In terms of the initial preparation for remote teaching, four categories were identified: the challenge of reinventing oneself, lack of mastery of technology, feelings of abandonment, and inadequate equipment for both teachers and students.

4.1.1 The challenge of reinventing oneself

In a time of uncertainty, when public agencies did not have plans and guidelines to guide education professionals, teachers felt "aimless". According to Hodges *et al.* (2020), the EaD model was used as a parameter at the time, a model that was difficult to operationalize effectively during the pandemic period because many methodologies and structures were different from those used in schools.

For interviewee 3, one of the most difficult aspects of this moment was the need to adapt. He confessed that he felt insecure in front of the cell phone camera and distant from the students. He also cited as a challenge the difficulty of finding ways to present contents that were both educational and attractive to the children, as well as trying to make them feel closer to each other and the school. A similar feeling was expressed by interviewee 5 when she stated that she had to rediscover herself in the profession:

> The word I would choose would be "rediscover," because in this whole process we had to rediscover ourselves as teachers [...]. We found different ways to make education flow. So, for me, that period was a lot of rediscovering. Of how I could teach, of different ways of teaching. [...] I managed to rediscover myself as a teacher, as a professional (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 5' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

Teachers working in the field of presential teaching experienced a moment of anxiety at the beginning of the pandemic because everything was new. In contrast to EaD, where methods were already known and well structured, ERE was developed and structured in a hurry, without time for testing due to the critical moment experienced (MOREIRA; SCHLEMMER, 2020). Therefore, there was naturally a certain strangeness on the part of teachers who were not used to this new model.

In this sense, interviewee 7 pointed out that her biggest difficulty was doubting how to prepare for teaching, what teaching would be like in this new model, and above all, whether her students would be able to perform well in such a context. Similarly, interviewee 9 commented that she thought: "My God, am I getting (the content) right from a distance? It is very different from a classroom [...]" (verbal report, our translation). For interviewee 10, the search for improvement by teachers was constant; however, due to the lack of government support, the field of education was severely affected by the pandemic. In her words:

> It is as if the teacher should be born ready. You have to reinvent yourself all the time. Of course, we are always trying to improve our work, but everyone was surprised. [...] but we have to understand that in this pandemic because everyone was experimenting, the field of

education was the most affected in this sense in terms of experimentation. Because it made the teachers reinvent themselves, trying to teach their classes, but in the end, they did not know how to deal with the problem of the students (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 10' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

4.1.2 Lack of mastery of technology

According to Morales (2020), teachers had many challenges, but one of the most impactful was essentially those related to technological means. The sudden change in routine and technological barriers were additional stressors for a professional class that already has a high-stress load historically. For interviewee 10, the use of technology was an additional pressure above and beyond the normal, as she had no previous knowledge of distance learning.

Interviewee 1 recalled that most of the teachers in the state network come from generations that are not familiar with the use of new technologies. In general, they know the basics of computer science and information systems. He also emphasized that many of them have been in the classroom for more than 15 years, are used to presential teaching, and use only the most basic social media daily.

According to Arruda (2020), the pandemic added a great deal of complexity to teaching, as the teacher had to adapt his living room from "day to night" to transform it into a classroom, with no time to prepare. Interviewee 5 reported that when she recorded her first video, due to her lack of experience, she spent about 24 hours without sleep trying to complete it. The same difficulty was felt by interviewee 6, who said that she was not good with technology.

These comments show how teachers in the RN state network had to find ways around technological barriers. The lack of preparation and practice, as well as the urgent need to adapt to forms of teaching for digital platforms, created additional pressure that these professionals had to deal with at a time that was already very stressful for everyone in general due to the context of the pandemic crisis.

4.1.3 The feeling of abandonment

For many teachers, the difficulties experienced at the beginning of the pandemic created a sense of abandonment. In a sense, the delayed response of the authorities and the inconsistencies in information, combined with the lack of planning and pedagogical coordination, left teachers without direction. As interviewee 3 pointed out: "So we were still, a good few days, more than a month without any kind of information. [...] Because it was said that the teacher should keep the student in

educational activities, but it was not said how and by what means [...]" (verbal report, our translation).

In addition to the lack of direction, teachers had to deal with the lack of material and financial resources and the lack of technological support (RODRIGUES, 2020). There was a sense of lack of control, and the school board also suffered from a lack of guidelines and direction that should have come from higher authorities. With this focus, interviewee 2 commented:

> We received no training. [...] I felt a certain abandonment, a certain neglect. And this neglect not only in terms of supplies for us to work from home but neglect even in terms of more information, support, training, and a handout to help, was not given. I felt like I was in a situation of neglect. And that made it very difficult. [...] because it was a situation where we were left to our own devices, right? [The school was as lost as we were. (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 2' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).

From the reports presented, it could be seen that there was a mismatch between the school units and the state and federal education agencies that were supposed to be guiding the schools. As a result, there was a lack of standardization in the actions of teachers who, feeling abandoned, began to seek their ways of dealing with adversity. Interviewee 3 recalled that, in addition to the lack of financial and psychological support, the school where he works suffered greatly from a lack of information, and that the management often learned about some problems from the teachers themselves, through the "*Rádio WhatsApp*".

4.1.4 The lack of adequate work equipment

For EaD to be effective, a good structure of technological equipment is needed on both sides of the process: sender (teacher) and receiver (student). The process is content-centered and communication is bidirectional (MOREIRA; SCHLEMMER, 2020). However, at the beginning of the pandemic, with the establishment of ERE, the lack of adequate equipment for this type of teaching on both sides was observed. As interviewee 1 reported:

> The (teachers) who had cell phones did not have the settings or the ability, they were not modern cell phones that could meet the needs of remote teaching. They were phones that had limited storage, low-quality cameras, and they crashed. [...] And the students were the same. Since they are teachers (from schools) in peripheral areas, then the students are very lacking in this kind of material (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 1' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).

Interviewee 3 emphasized that many teachers at his school did not even have a computer and

had to do all the activities on their cell phones. Interviewee 3 said that she had to buy a new computer because her old one could not meet the demands of the classes. She also commented that the school did not provide financial support for teachers who needed to acquire new technological resources.

While teachers had to learn new methods of remote teaching and prepare for virtual classes, they still faced obstacles due to the lack of adequate working materials. Old computers and mobile phones with little storage space were some of the problems reported, and when they decided to buy new equipment, they had to pay for it out of their own resources, without help from the schools or the government. As interviewee 10 mentioned: "Many colleagues reported the breakdown of computers, laptops and had to buy new equipment to be able to conduct these classes" (verbal report, our translation).

Interviewee 4 mentioned that it was difficult for students' parents to get a cell phone that could be used for classes, because the only cell phone they had was not at home, since their parents went to work during the day. The same problem was reported by interviewee 9. According to her, many children used the mobile phones of uncles, cousins, or other relatives. In addition, according to interviewee 8, it was common for there to be only one mobile phone in a house, and this one device had to be shared with two or three children.

4.2 Teachers' perceptions of the remote teaching period

This topic deals with the perceptions of teachers regarding the remote teaching period during the pandemic. The comments of the interviewees were divided into five points of analysis: excessive working hours; impaired contact with the students; demands from parents and students, school management, and the state and lack of psychological support; lack of recognition; inadequate working environment and increased psychological stress and mental disorders.

4.2.1 Lack of routine and excessive working hours

According to Morales (2020), one of the main challenges of distance learning in Brazil is the difficulty of establishing a routine to be followed by the educational professional. In the context of ERE, what was often observed was the lack of establishing a specific working time, teachers began to work at home, that is, to live at work. In this sense, most of the teachers interviewed reported difficulties in maintaining a pre-defined routine because the students themselves and their families

did not respect the working hours that were established; as the following comments show.

> [...] we had to be teachers 24 hours (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 1' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).
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> First of all, we lost our privacy and peace. [...] They (students) were talking (on WhatsApp) at 11 p.m. on a Sunday, 2 a.m. [...] In the pandemic, work slept, woke up next to us while we slept, sent messages and charged, and did not give feedback. It was very difficult to have no time to start and no time to finish (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 2' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).
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> So we sent the activities, I sent them at 8 a.m., and at noon someone sent them (return of the activity) and at 10 p.m. as well. So this issue of organizing the schedule was not possible (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 3' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).
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> There was no way to have a routine because you are at home without structure, so you have this schedule that the schools say "You have to send activity from this time here and stay online". And the rest of the time I was online to answer questions, to receive the activities, and to give feedback at the same time. (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 4' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
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> It is very difficult to establish a routine. I think there is no way a teacher can have a routine. Unless you have a cell phone just for work. If we don't do it that way, I think it's complicated because it's all the time, if you look at your cell phone, there are messages from the groups for you to answer (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 10' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

Remote teachers worked from home 24 hours a day. According to the interviewees, it became difficult to control the working time; many teachers felt obliged to respond to all the messages they received. Routine control was practically non-existent, and demands from students' parents and school managers were made without much discretion and without assessing whether the teacher was on time or not.

This lack of a pre-established routine caused even more stress to the professionals, who seemed to have their demands piled up and felt they had to solve everything on time, regardless of whether they were within their working hours or not. On the contrary, in order to feel good, teachers needed to have a specific time for work and rest, and leisure, since the lack of this division can cause problems in health and well-being (MORALES, 2020).

4.2.2 The difficulty of contacting students

Another issue highlighted by teachers was the difficulty in keeping in touch with students. One of the most frequently cited factors was communication problems due to the lack of technological resources such as computers and mobile phones. In addition, teachers mentioned the

difficulty they had in keeping an adequate number of students in class.

Interviewee 3 commented that during this period there was a kind of "impersonalization" of relationships with students; he said he did not even see some of his students. Interviewee 4 said that in many of her classes of 28 students, only 18 participated; but the return of the activities was sent in by only five or six, which made it difficult to make an individual diagnosis of each one. The problem of small numbers of students was also mentioned by other interviewees:

> What I had the most difficulty with was students' participation. Some students did not participate (in the online class) one day to at least have that experience with the others (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 5' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
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> [...] I was also a little frustrated because they did not participate. [...] Then I was a little sad because I did all this, I prepared myself, and in the end, one or two children came (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 6' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
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> [...] there was one week when I taught five students in a class of 40 (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 8' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
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> I would prepare a lesson and one or two students would come in. This made us very discouraged (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 9' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

In this sense, interviewee 10 added that she felt very distressed during this period. According to her, the teacher needed to be close to the students to understand their doubts and needs. She also said that she missed more human contact, being able to hug and talk directly with her students. In her words: "Because our profession is a very contact profession for us. The student gets close to us, they have this need to be close to the teacher" (verbal report, our translation).

4.2.3 Demands and lack of psychological support

The abrupt changes in teaching methods and the sad reality of losing friends and family due to the COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on teachers' lives. The adaptation in the form of teaching and the need to transform one's home into a classroom, which caused the teacher to share his family space with his work, resulted in a greater fragility of the emotional structure of these professionals (ARRUDA, 2020).

It is difficult to separate one's personal and professional life, and this separation becomes even more difficult when it is necessary to separate one's leisure and rest from one's work. During the ERE period, teachers not only had to adapt their homes to their work, but they also had to get used to the daily and frequent demands that came from different sources. As interviewee 5 said:

[...] management demanding, DIREC demanding. [...] this issue of WhatsApp groups with students began, and remote teaching began, with this demand to give results, and we had no input, we had nothing, we just had lots of students charging WhatsApp, [...]. And when we dared not answer during the weekend, when we answered, my God in heaven! We couldn't dare not to answer right away, because there would be seven stones in our hands and ten dogs on our backs. (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 5' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

Interviewee 10 commented that teachers were also asked to develop "show" lessons: "There were parents who complained that the teacher did not give a class that 'held' the student. 'My child does not want to go to class because the class is not cool', 'the teacher does not know how to keep the attention'" (verbal reports, our translation). Thus, at the same time that they were required by the school to keep records of student control and performance in the information systems, and answer questions and requests from parents and students, they also had to be true artists to turn their classes into shows.

According to Morales (2020), there were several challenges that teachers had to face, and perhaps one of the most difficult was the difficulty of separating the personal from the professional and meeting all the demands of the school, parents, and students, which they received daily and without a set time. It can't be denied, therefore, that these professionals, under so many stressors, should have an effective reinforcement that could strengthen emotional control (ARRUDA, 2020).

However, it was noted that there was a lack of support from schools and the government to meet this need for teachers. According to interviewee 3, his school did not provide psychological support for teachers, which he felt should have been an issue for the authorities to address. Interviewee 10 added that throughout the pandemic period, the support she had was among her colleagues; in times of difficulty, one teacher helped the other. "But if it wasn't for us helping each other, from the State and from the Department of Education, there was nothing, no support, nothing, absolutely nothing" (verbal report, our translation).

4.2.4 Lack of professional acknowledgement

The teachers interviewed brought to the discussion the issue of lack of acknowledgment, which is still very present, not only from the point of view of the valorization/precarization of teaching work but also because of the negative view that many people still have of public servants in general. Interviewee 2, for example, said that her family members criticized her when they saw her working on the computer: "Ah! She spends the day doing nothing in front of the computer" (verbal

report, our translation).

This distorted view of society ends up weakening the pride that teachers have in their profession and expresses a negative image of the importance of teachers in the development of the country. Respondent 4 added: "And we have been called tramps several times, saying that teachers do not want to work. [...] We also heard that we earn money to do nothing at home" (verbal report, our translation).

In addition to the problems of coping with the various changes brought about by the pandemic crisis, teachers also had to deal with the social stigmas that were already present, but which became even more pronounced during the period of remote work. As interviewee 5 said: "There are few, very few, who appreciate it. [...] unfortunately, the vast majority, even in person, even at a time that is considered normal, they already had that thought. If we get sick one day, it's the biggest mess, they start saying things to us" (verbal report, our translation).
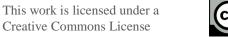
It is difficult to cope with the many uncertainties of an era that has brought many challenges to educational professionals without the support of society itself, which has often had a negative view of the work of teachers. The lack of professional acknowledgment can cause teachers to lose interest in teaching as they become increasingly discouraged with the profession. In this sense, interviewee 3 commented that this negative view makes people lose interest in becoming a teacher:

> Because people value education, but not the teacher, the professional educator, is not valued, no. [...] Do you think that a young person in our situation would want to go to a four-year university, to suffer reprisals from society, from governments, from educational institutions that also reprimand teachers, seeing how the media treats the teacher? Because there are times when the media depends on the information vehicle, it puts the teacher up there. But depending on the moment when the Teacher is struggling, it puts the Teacher down. As we have seen in this period, now that we have had the strike, how much the media put the teacher as a bum, selfish, and only thinking about money. [...] So it is much less attractive for young people. Some students say 'I want to be a streamer', 'I want to be a digital influencer', and 'but teacher, I don't want that' (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 3' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).

4.2.5 Inadequate working environment and increased psychological burden

In addition to the problems of organizing the work routine, teachers also suffered from the lack of an adequate structure that would allow them to concentrate better. Many did not have adequate space and ended up suffering from interruptions from family members and/or the noise of the environment (MORALES, 2020).

Interviewee 2 reported that it was not easy to maintain concentration because someone

would always come into the room to ask for something or hear a noise that took her focus away from the activities. "It seems that the remote work was not taken very seriously. [...] One very stressful thing was that. This issue of not having a quiet environment to work in, and that also made it a lot more complicated" (verbal report, our translation).

Interviewee 4 said that she had a lot of problems with noise and that this fact was very difficult to deal with while working remotely because everything she heard made her lose concentration. Interviewee 6 commented that the most complicated thing was trying to reconcile the different roles she had to play at home; because at the same time as being a teacher, she was also a mother, a housewife, and so on. So it was often difficult to separate each role during the working day.

Given this overload, interviewee 1 concluded that teachers were more susceptible to mental illness because there was a higher level of stress during this period. Interviewee 2 commented that she had experienced some moments of crisis because she had already felt the emotional impact at the beginning of the pandemic, and after starting to work remotely, the various demands that accumulated created an even greater stress load. For Interviewee 3, what caused him greater anxiety was the fact that there was no separation between personal and professional life. According to him, "It was as if I was at work 24 hours a day; I slept at work and woke up at work" (verbal report, our translation).

4.3 Teachers' perceptions of the return of presential teaching

This topic deals with teachers' perceptions regarding the moment of return to the classroom. The statements of the interviewees were divided into four categories: compulsory admission of students, regression of education and school dropouts felt in the pandemic, professional preparation, and not counting working time.

4.3.1 Compulsory approval of students in the state network

Teachers made some considerations about the measure for public schools to compulsorily accept all students in 2020, and to carry out more lenient assessments in 2021. In these two years, the most serious period of the pandemic, students relied on this measure to avoid large-scale failure and, consequently, the possible discouragement of students if they failed.

However, in the assessment of interviewee 2, this decision was negative, as many students

who did not participate or participated very little were approved, as well as those who made more effort. She made the following comment:

> After two years, I felt I could take my diploma and tear it up, because what use was it to have taught, to have charged? If the student who did nothing would be approved, would be promoted like the student who did everything, what use was my work, my sleepless nights, the loss of my privacy, the loss of my mental health, what use was it? (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 2' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).

According to Interviewee 3, he was aware that many students who were compulsorily approved during the pandemic years were advancing a grade without having developed the necessary knowledge. To him, the right thing would be for the student to repeat the year and learn the necessary content. Interviewee 3 also commented that many of his students also recognized that they had learned very little and would like to repeat the year.

Teachers generally expressed a sense of frustration, as if their efforts to overcome all the difficulties of the new distance learning model had not paid off. They also recognized that there was some dissatisfaction on the part of the students themselves, who at the end of the school year saw their colleagues who did not attend classes pass, as well as those who tried harder. This feeling can be seen in the comments of respondents 4, 5, 7, and 8:

> It's very complicated [...] the order was that we only failed those children who never really attended any class. That is, if the child attended at least one class, we had to approve it. But the rest, who did not show up at all, were considered failures. It was not a failure, it was an abandonment (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 4' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
>
> It's a feeling of defeat. [...] The two schools where I work had the obligation to approve students, and now we are there with the pineapple in our hands, [...]. It is very difficult when we get an order like this, [...] [...] it is hard to see how the authorities treat students as if they were just another number (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 5' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
>
> [...] we had to accept, but knowing that this student would not be able to go on to the next year. [...] it is very difficult to accept a student who is not able to go to the next year (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 7' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).
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> There was an order, yes. It was even an ordinance. [...] Our average class size here is 40 students, where you had 25 students who participated in the video, who gave feedback on the handout, and the physical material. [...] Then the teacher is going to approve that student in that way, and the regulation is the law, and we were outraged about it. [...] And the order came from the Secretariat: "You have to pass the student. Then it was frustrating (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 8' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

Interviewee 10 shared the same thoughts as the other colleagues. For her, the biggest

frustration was to know that all the pressure she received throughout the year from managers, parents, and students was meaningless because, in the end, all students were approved, even those who did not attend classes. She felt that she had lost a lot of energy trying to meet all the requirements, but it was just "wasted energy in vain" (verbal report, our translation).

4.3.2 The regression of education and school dropout during the pandemic

As a result of this compulsory measure, teachers commented that in the following year, they felt a kind of regression, since many students did not know basic knowledge that they should have learned in the previous year. Therefore, it was very difficult to level all the students who were in the same class, but who did not have the same knowledge of the content covered in class. As interviewee 4 mentioned:

> And now you have to chase those two years that were lost, those children that were lost. For example, a 5th grade class that started during the pandemic was in the 2nd grade. And then they lost the 3rd and 4th grades, and now we are in the 5th grade. So what do we have to do? Alphabetize. So the order there in the school was: "All the classes that have been lost and that we are having difficulties with, so we will have two semesters to alphabetize these children. [...] So the class that I work with in the morning in the 1st grade, I do the same activities in the afternoon for the 5th grade class. And amazingly, they have a lot of trouble, a lot, a lot. Basic questions, like the name itself, like a sum of simple numbers. It is very complicated (Interview given by 'Interviewee 4' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

For interviewee 3, before the pandemic education in Brazil was moving at a slow pace, it seems that during the pandemic "education went back to the bottom and will require many collective efforts to crawl back" (verbal report, our translation). According to interviewee 4, it is necessary to repair the damage, because students already had certain limitations and learning difficulties, and with the pandemic, these difficulties were exacerbated.

This regression reflects that, according to interviewee 3, even with the return of presential classes in 2022, there was an increase in the number of dropouts; as these students, who did not feel prepared, ended up giving up to continue studying. Interviewee 10 pointed out that the number of students who dropped out during this period was large; for her, the next challenge will be to find strategies to get these students to return to study and become interested in education.

4.3.3 Professional preparation

Teachers interviewed felt that when they returned to the classroom, they felt more confident

and able to take on new challenges. They commented that teachers never stop learning, so the pandemic was another opportunity for them to learn and develop new skills.

Interviewee 2 said that she feels much more prepared now, given the challenges experienced in the pandemic. According to her:

> I think I have progressed considerably as a professional because I have had to deal with completely different difficulties. I had to approach my students differently, to see their reality differently. I had to create more to get closer to them. It was difficult, but as a professional, there was an advance (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 2' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).

Similarly, interviewee 3 commented that he feels much better now, that he is better able to develop teaching materials and thus expand the learning opportunities for his students. In this sense, interviewee 5 reported that she was able to take some positive points from the pandemic and remote teaching, such as the ability to reinvent herself, by reflecting on her performance as a teacher upon her return to presential teaching.

4.3.4 Non-counting of length of service

Finally, teachers brought up another dissatisfaction with the way they were being treated by the education sector, this time citing the problem of not counting service time. Teachers reported that they were very unhappy with the news that time spent on duty during the pandemic would not be counted as working time, because it was not possible to confirm the hours worked by each professional. In their words:

> I was happy with my life, I thought my probationary period would end next month, and I vowed that I would finish my probationary period. I almost cried when he told me that the remote teaching time would not be counted (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 2' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).
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> It's the icing on the cake to say you didn't work, and if you did work, you didn't do anything more than your obligation. You will not get any benefit for it, you have already received the salary ready (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 3' on: 03/22/2023, our translation).
>
> In addition to all this, [...] we still lost service time. Because we will not get some things for that period, we will have to wait a while to get everything. So it's another loss that we had (Interview granted by 'Interviewee 5' on: 03/23/2023, our translation).

The same sense of loss and dissatisfaction is felt by interviewee 10. According to her, "this measure puts the teacher's work in the pandemic in check, as if he had not worked" (verbal report,

our translation). In the end, she said that she hoped that this decision would be unconstitutional and that her time would be counted because, from her point of view, teachers were the ones who worked the most in the context of the pandemic crisis.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study focused on the reports of ten basic education teachers in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, who shared their experiences during the ERE at the beginning of the pandemic, during the period of remote teaching, and during the return to the classroom. The analysis of these teachers' perceptions revealed four main categories related to the initial moment: the challenge of reinventing oneself in the face of the circumstances, the lack of mastery of technology, the feeling of abandonment, and the inadequacy of equipment for both teachers and students.

Concerning the remote teaching period, teachers' perceptions included excessive working hours, compromised contact with students, demands from parents, students, school management, and the state, lack of psychological support, lack of recognition, inadequate working environment, and increased psychological stress and mental disorders. The identification of excessive working hours reveals the intensification of professional demands during this period, with teachers facing a more intense and prolonged workload, often exceeding regular working hours. Such problems can lead to exhaustion and burnout among professionals, with negative effects on their physical and mental health.

Regarding the return to the classroom, the teachers' perceptions highlighted the compulsory consent of the students, the regression of education and the dropout experienced during the pandemic, the need for professional preparation, and the lack of counting of working time. The regression of education and school dropouts experienced during the pandemic are issues that deserve attention. The interruption of regular classes and the transition to remote teaching may have led to learning losses and affected student engagement. Teachers' accounts of these challenges help to understand the impact of the pandemic on education and to identify recovery and support measures for students.

These perceptions raise questions about remote teaching, especially in a context of social inequality, where education is not always considered a priority. The results of this study can contribute to the discussion on the adoption and implementation of this teaching method in Brazilian

reality. In addition, they reinforce the need for investment in teacher training and technology, as well as the importance of actions aimed at promoting the mental health of these professionals.

Therefore, the results of this study provide a solid foundation for understanding the barriers teachers face while teaching remotely and upon returning from the classroom. By reflecting on these perceptions, one can work together to develop effective strategies that meet the needs of teachers and students and ensure quality, inclusive, and equitable education. Only through collective efforts and adequate investments will it be possible to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic and build a better future for education.

For future research, it is suggested to conduct longitudinal studies that follow teachers over time, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of changes in their perceptions and challenges throughout the pandemic and the process of returning to face-to-face teaching. In addition, it is considered important to examine the perspectives of students and parents to gain a more complete understanding of the impact of remote teaching and the return to presential teaching on different parts of the educational community.

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