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Original Article

Entrepreneurial education and pedagogical practices: a study on the life project of students in Santana do Ipanema/AL

Educação empreendedora e práticas pedagógicas: um estudo sobre o projeto de vida dos estudantes em Santana do Ipanema/AL

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine whether the implementation of the Life Project curriculum component in public schools in Alagoas has effectively achieved its goals, particularly given the social vulnerabilities faced by students. The central objective is to understand how high school students perceive Entrepreneurial Education (EE) in relation to the development of their life projects.

Methodology: A qualitative, exploratory, and interpretative case study was conducted in two public high schools in Alagoas. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with third-year students and recent graduates. The data were analyzed using content analysis, guided by the frameworks of the BNCC (2018) and RECAL (2023).

Results: The findings revealed that Entrepreneurial Education, though present in official curriculum documents, is scarcely addressed in Life Project classes. Students reported predominantly lecture-based instruction and a lack of practical entrepreneurial activities. Nevertheless, they recognized the value of entrepreneurship for future planning, financial management, and the development of autonomy. The study also identified limited youth protagonism, misalignment with the BNCC's structuring principles, and a lack of clear pedagogical guidelines.

Originality/Value: This article contributes to the literature by exploring the connection between Entrepreneurial Education and critical pedagogy within the Life Project component in public schools in the hinterland of Alagoas. Its originality lies in its territorialized examination of Brazil's New High School model, highlighting how entrepreneurship can empower student agency and life planning. The research contributes to the development of more equitable educational policies rooted in real-world school practices and Freirean critical theory.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial education; Life project; High school; Pedagogical methodologies

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo busca analisar se a implementação do componente curricular Projeto de Vida em escolas públicas de Alagoas tem alcançado seus propósitos, especialmente diante das vulnerabilidades sociais enfrentadas pelos estudantes. O objetivo central é compreender como os alunos do ensino médio percebem a Educação Empreendedora (EE) na construção de seus projetos de vida.
Metodologia: A pesquisa adotou abordagem qualitativa, com caráter exploratório e interpretativista, por meio de estudo de caso em duas escolas públicas de Alagoas. Os dados foram obtidos por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com estudantes do 3º ano e egressos. A análise de conteúdo foi utilizada, com base na BNCC (2018) e no RECAL (2023).
Resultados: Os resultados indicam que, embora a Educação Empreendedora esteja prevista nos documentos oficiais, ela é pouco trabalhada nas aulas de Projeto de Vida. Os estudantes relataram o uso de metodologias expositivas e a ausência de práticas empreendedoras. Ainda assim, reconhecem o valor do empreendedorismo para o planejamento do futuro, a gestão financeira e o desenvolvimento da autonomia. Identificou-se também a ausência de protagonismo juvenil, o desalinhamento com os eixos da BNCC e a falta de diretrizes pedagógicas claras.
Originalidade/Valor: O estudo se destaca por explorar a relação entre Educação Empreendedora e pedagogia crítica no componente Projeto de Vida em escolas públicas do sertão de Alagoas. Sua originalidade está na análise territorializada do Novo Ensino Médio, evidenciando o potencial do empreendedorismo para fortalecer o protagonismo estudantil e contribuir para políticas educacionais mais justas e contextualizadas.

Palavras-chave: Educação empreendedora; Projeto de vida; Ensino médio; Metodologias pedagógicas

1 INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) has been widely studied due to its relevance for promoting entrepreneurial culture, contributing both to economic and social growth and to the development of the competencies individuals need to participate effectively in society (Machado, Lenzi, & Manthey, 2017). Therefore, EE is recognized for its adoption of innovative approaches, aligning with the demands of an ever-evolving educational environment (Saes & Marcovitch, 2020). However, EE still faces significant challenges related to the implementation of effective pedagogical methodologies and the need to overcome educational difficulties (Fayolle, 2018). These challenges highlight the need for more structured studies and practices to optimize its application (Gabrielsson et al., 2020), as well as for entrepreneurship educators whose teaching is strengthened by their self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and personal values (Brush; Wraee & Nikou, 2024).

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Silva and Pratus (2017) analyze Entrepreneurship Education from two methodological perspectives: active and passive. The interaction between these approaches is seen as an important avenue for future research in the area because it may contribute to a more comprehensive education for entrepreneurs. Active learning methodologies, such as games, simulations, and the development of business plans, are crucial for promoting practical competencies (Isabelle, 2020; Thanasi-Boçe, 2020; Mykolenko et al., 2022). On the other hand, passive methodologies, such as lectures, seminars, and traditional classroom instruction, continue to play a relevant role in entrepreneurial education (Heaton, Lewin, & Teece, 2020; Thompson & Illes, 2021).

In the current higher education landscape, active learning methodologies have stood out for their effectiveness in entrepreneurship education, incorporating practices in which students play a central role in their own learning (Saes & Marcovitch, 2020). Activities such as games and simulations make teaching more engaging and develop essential competencies for students' personal development (Isabelle, 2020; Thanasi-Boçe, 2020; Zulfiqar et al., 2021; Huang, Silitonga, & Wu, 2022). New teaching practices, such as arts-based reflective activities, also promote a contemporary, sophisticated, and comprehensive approach to entrepreneurship education, in which resilience becomes a priority (Ávila & Davel, 2024). Approaches that integrate creativity and collaboration demonstrate the effectiveness of active pedagogies in developing entrepreneurial skills and supporting students' future professional projects (Lackéus, 2020; Bell et al., 2020; Lynch et al., 2021).

Thompson and Illes (2021) highlight the importance of activities such as pitch presentations and the use of technologies in the educational process, showing that learning is influenced by social interactions and collaborative practices. Pittaway et al. (2020) associate entrepreneurship education with innovative approaches and advocate creating dynamic classroom spaces where students can develop ideas, experiment, and learn collaboratively. Lynch et al. (2021) argue that the use of active learning methodologies in entrepreneurship education, such as implementing the design

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thinking process in the classroom, helps students develop skills such as empathy, teamwork, and resilience in the face of uncertainty.

This study is based on the understanding that entrepreneurship education has the potential to stimulate critical thinking while promoting personal and professional development (Albuquerque, Ferreira, & Brites, 2016; Dias & Mariano, 2017; Lackéus, 2018). In addition, this research assumes that entrepreneurship education can be implemented through both active and passive methodologies (Silva & Pratus, 2017), expanding opportunities for student engagement and learning within the educational context. Moreover, teaching entrepreneurship requires adapting experiential learning to the field, aligning with teaching methodologies that foster students' professional and critical development (Agapito et al., 2024).

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (1987) argues that the teaching and learning process should occur through dialogue with students, taking into account their experiences and sociocultural contexts. This pedagogical approach supports the construction of knowledge through reflection on reality, promoting the development of critical consciousness. In this sense, Freire (1987) emphasizes the concept of praxis, understood as the articulation between theory and practice, and criticizes educational models that dissociate these elements, resulting in teaching decontextualized and disconnected from students' lived realities.

In a study conducted by Klein and Arantes (2016), the authors highlight the relevance of school experiences throughout secondary education to shaping students' aspirations. The results show the different ways students perceive the school's contribution to their professional future, ranging from preparation for the labor market to social development and the development of a sense of responsibility. Thus, the research reinforces the importance of educational practices in strengthening young people's life projects, suggesting that schools strengthen their alignment with students' expectations to better guide them in their future trajectories.

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In secondary education, Entrepreneurship Education gained prominence with the revision of the national curriculum guidelines by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) in 2017 through Law No. 13.415/17. This reform introduced the formative itineraries, a flexible component of the curriculum that complements the mandatory subjects established by the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC). These itineraries are guided by four structuring axes, one of which is entrepreneurship, with the aim of developing students' autonomy, creativity, and practical skills for life and the labor market (Brasil, 2018). This reform sought to respond to the demands of contemporary society by promoting among students "a culture favorable to the development of attitudes, capacities and values that promote entrepreneurship (creativity, innovation, organization, planning, responsibility, leadership, collaboration, vision of the future, risk-taking, resilience and scientific curiosity, among others)" (BNCC, 2018, p. 466). These competencies are essential for students' personal development, civic participation, social inclusion, and employability, as well as for the development of their life projects (BNCC, 2018).

In the Brazilian state of Alagoas, the Curriculum Framework of Alagoas (RECAL) is the guiding document for teaching and learning in public schools across the state. It is based on legislation such as the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN), and the BNCC.

In the context of the secondary education reform, which included an increase in instructional hours, RECAL (2023) emphasizes that students' holistic development depends primarily on the pedagogical practices adopted in the classroom, rather than solely on the expansion of instructional time. The priority should be the quality of instruction and the methodologies employed to ensure meaningful learning. Thus, RECAL states that "there is a concern that pedagogical practices aimed at student retention and learning be effective and stimulate subjectivity in its various dimensions, with a focus on the life project and student agency (protagonism)" (RECAL, 2023, p. 22). Therefore, the development of the Life Project emerges as an essential element

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of the school environment, as it allows students to reflect on their choices and make decisions that affect all dimensions of their lives, including personal, academic, and professional aspects (Santos & Gontijo, 2020).

The entrepreneurship structuring axis emphasizes students' ability to apply knowledge from different areas to create and develop projects, whether personal or connected to their Life Project (BNCC, 2018; RECAL, 2023). From this perspective, Entrepreneurship Education is no longer restricted to preparing students for the labor market; instead, it serves as a tool for developing autonomy, creativity, responsibility, and problem-solving skills, thereby fostering students' holistic development and supporting the construction of more intentional and well-planned life trajectories (Vieira & Caetano, 2024; Costa, Andrade, & Nascimento, 2025). By promoting the development of "skills related to self-knowledge, entrepreneurship and life project" (RECAL, 2023, p. 296), the entrepreneurship structuring axis provides students with the opportunity to develop their Life Project. To achieve this, it is essential to cultivate skills such as civic participation, social inclusion, resilience, and collaboration (BNCC, 2018). The development of these skills is directly related to Entrepreneurship Education, one of its objectives is to strengthen youth protagonism (Menezes, Mariano, & Cunha, 2024). In addition, EE shares important principles with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, particularly regarding the promotion of student autonomy and transformative education (Freire, 1987; Dolabela, 2003). Recent studies indicate that the integration of the Life Project and Entrepreneurship Education into the school curriculum has been strengthened by the BNCC and by the New Secondary Education reforms, particularly through the greater emphasis on student agency and the development of more autonomous educational trajectories. However, Vieira and Caetano (2024) warn that this convergence may also reflect an excessively neoliberal rationality centered on individual responsibility and the logic of the "entrepreneur of oneself". They argue that this tendency requires critical pedagogical mediation to ensure that Entrepreneurship Education fulfills an emancipatory rather than merely market-oriented function.

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In the context of the Secondary Education reform, which expanded instructional hours through Law No. 13.415/17, known as the New Secondary Education, the Life Project component has become an essential element of the curriculum. This development underscores the importance of pedagogical practices that promote meaningful learning, foster youth protagonism, and strengthen the development of students' life projects (BNCC, 2018; RECAL, 2023). Recent studies highlight that the Life Project component should enable students to reflect on their interests, dreams, feelings, self-knowledge, and social and professional aspirations, thereby fostering their autonomy and encouraging them to become active participants in the educational process (Costa, Andrade, & Nascimento, 2025). Carvalho and Portilho (2025) show that pedagogical practices focused on digital entrepreneurship, through video production and group work, promoted greater student engagement, protagonism, and stronger connections between school content and students' lived experiences, thereby strengthening meaningful learning and future planning. Thus, this study argues that active learning methodologies play a central role in effective pedagogical practice (Silva & Pratus, 2017), aligning with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (1987), which emphasizes the articulation of theory and practice through the concept of praxis. In addition, recent research shows that active learning methodologies within the Life Project component promote students' active participation, stimulate critical reflection and autonomy, besides encouraging the development of solutions to real-world problems, thereby strengthening more meaningful and contextualized Entrepreneurship Education practices (Costa, Andrade, & Nascimento, 2025).

Given the need for further research on effective pedagogical practices in entrepreneurship education (Gabrielsson et al., 2020), particularly at the secondary education level, the objective of this article is to identify and describe the pedagogical practices used in Entrepreneurship Education in public schools in Alagoas to support the development of students' life projects, drawing on Freirean critical pedagogy. To this end, a case study was conducted in two schools located in the municipality

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of Santana do Ipanema, Brazil. The research involved interviewing teachers and coordinators responsible for the Life Project curricular component, focusing on their approaches to entrepreneurship education, the promotion of youth protagonism, and the development of students' life projects.

The study offers relevant contributions by enabling the participating schools to critically reflect on the Entrepreneurship Education practices adopted in Alagoas, particularly within the Life Project curricular component. For other schools, the findings can serve as a starting point for rethinking how Entrepreneurship Education is integrated into the curriculum, highlighting the importance of active learning methodologies grounded in students' lived experiences and designed to foster youth protagonism.

2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND THE NEW SECONDARY EDUCATION: THE FOCUS ON THE LIFE PROJECT

With the reform of secondary education through Law No. 13.415/17, known as the New Secondary Education, the Life Project component has become an essential element of the curriculum. The incorporation of entrepreneurship into the New Secondary Education is not merely a pedagogical strategy but also part of a broader curricular framework aimed at developing entrepreneurial competencies and fostering autonomous individuals who take responsibility for their own life trajectories. Lopes (2025) argues that the presence of entrepreneurship in the Life Project component is directly related to the incorporation of an entrepreneurial logic in the BNCC and the New Secondary Education, often associated with individual responsibility and the construction of the so-called "entrepreneur of oneself". This, the author argues, requires critical pedagogical mediation to avoid reducing education to a market-oriented perspective. This reform seeks to expand students' choices and integrate personal and professional development into the curriculum while promoting youth protagonism and preparing students for future challenges (BNCC, 2018). According to the BNCC (2018), the Life Project is what "students aspire to, envision,

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and continually redefine throughout their educational trajectory—a process that accompanies the development of their identity(ies) within contexts shaped by culture and by social demands that may either promote or constrain their aspirations" (BNCC, 2018, p. 472).

However, Franzi (2020) emphasizes the importance of developing students' Life Projects, arguing that they are intrinsically linked to values education, which plays a fundamental role in young people's development. Despite its importance, however, there is a risk that this pedagogical approach may be constrained by the influence of neoliberal ideals and market interests, which permeate the implementation of the secondary education reform.

Before the 2017 secondary education reform, Klein and Arantes (2016) found that schools already contributed to the development of students' life projects and that the "great majority of students, therefore, establishes a positive relationship between the school and life projects" (Klein; Arantes, 2016, p.144). In this context, the conception of the Life Project promoted by schools, as identified by Klein and Arantes (2016), aligns with the BNCC's (2018) objective of promoting students' personal and professional development through the engagement with their Life Projects.

According to the BNCC (2018), basic education is intended to provide students with essential learning experiences that support the development of key competencies. The document establishes ten general competencies that guide the pedagogical process and ensure students' rights to learning and development. The BNCC (2018) defines a competency as the ability to mobilize knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to face everyday challenges, exercise citizenship, and participate in the world of work. Skills, in turn, refer to specific abilities – whether practical, cognitive, or socioemotional – that contribute to the development of competencies by enabling the effective application of knowledge in different situations.

Among the ten general competencies established by the BNCC to promote students' learning and development throughout basic education, the sixth is particularly relevant to the Life Project.

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> To value the diversity of knowledge and cultural experiences and to appropriate knowledge and experiences that enable them to understand the relationships inherent to the world of work and to make choices aligned with the exercise of citizenship and their life project, with freedom, autonomy, critical awareness, and responsibility. (BNCC, 2018, p.8)

The BNCC (2018) highlights that the purpose of secondary education in the contemporary context, particularly in light of technological advances, is to address young people's expectations regarding their education and the development of their Life Projects. Accordingly, following the secondary education reform, the BNCC (2018) states that schools should organize their pedagogical practices to support this process, promoting the holistic development of young people and supporting the development of their Life Projects.

Thus, the Life Project has become a central element of the Brazilian New Secondary Education (BNCC, 2018) and is closely connected to Entrepreneurship Education, which seeks to ensure that students develop the skills needed to strengthen their protagonism and autonomy, enabling them to make more informed and intentional decisions about their personal and professional futures (Menezes et al., 2024).

3 ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

As discussed by Silva and Pratus (2017), Entrepreneurship Education can be analyzed from two methodological perspectives: active and passive. In this context, it is important to investigate which teaching methodologies are most effective in promoting meaningful learning among students. However, the literature on methodological approaches to entrepreneurship education remains limited, highlighting the need for further research in this area (Gabrielsson et al., 2020).

A search of the Web of Science database in 2024 using the term "entrepreneurship education methodologies" identified 3,256 studies. However, after filtering the results using the terms "active and passive methodologies" in EE, only 36 studies remained. Among these studies, none focused on the Brazilian context, underscoring the need

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for further research on this topic within Brazilian education. Understanding the cultural context of institutions and their local settings is essential for adapting teaching methodologies that effectively support student learning (Bezanilla et al., 2020; Lyu, Shepherd & Lee, 2021).

The analysis of teaching methodologies in academic studies demonstrates both the effectiveness and the increasing adoption of active learning methodologies in Entrepreneurship Education, highlighting their relevance for promoting meaningful student learning. Silva et al. (2024) argue that one of the major challenges in the learning environment is transforming the institutionalized culture, in which the teacher is viewed as the primary source of knowledge while students assume a passive role. To overcome this barrier, it is essential to recognize that learning is an adaptive and continuous process, in which active learning methodologies encourage students to adopt a more reflective and participatory approach (Silva et al., 2024).

However, passive methodologies, such as lectures delivered by entrepreneurs, continue to be a complementary strategy within the teaching process, as the practical experience shared with students provides a realistic perspective on the market and the challenges of entrepreneurship (Frunzaru & Cismaru, 2018; Heaton, Lewin & Teece, 2020; Mukesh, Pillai & Mamman, 2020; Rodriguez & Lieber, 2020; Thompson & Illes, 2021).

Active learning methodologies, such as challenge-based programs (Colombelli et al., 2022) and simulation games (Huang, Silitonga & Wu, 2022), have proven to be effective strategies for stimulating students' interest in entrepreneurship (Burnette et al., 2019). These methodologies contribute to the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy by encouraging learning through experimentation and practical problem-solving. In addition, they promote greater student engagement by making the educational process more dynamic and interactive, thereby facilitating the application of entrepreneurship to real contexts.

The use of methodologies such as gamification and simulations has proven to be an effective approach in entrepreneurship education (Isabelle, 2020; Thanasi-Boçe, 2020).

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These instructional strategies can be even more impactful at the secondary education level, as students at this stage of development tend to engage more readily in dynamic and interactive activities, facilitating the assimilation of concepts and the development of entrepreneurial skills, such as creativity, responsibility, and critical awareness, which are essential to the development of students' Life Projects (BNCC, 2018).

Design thinking is an approach centered on problem-solving through creativity and innovation. In the educational context, this methodology has emerged as an effective tool for fostering critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, thereby contributing to the development of more autonomous and innovative students (Santos & Souza, 2023). Similarly, practical methodological approaches that encourage reflection in Entrepreneurship Education, such as design thinking, contribute to the development of entrepreneurial skills and support students in developing their Life Projects (BNCC, 2018; Pratomo, Siswandari & Wardani, 2021).

Thus, the literature indicates that active learning methodologies are effective in entrepreneurship education. However, it is equally important to establish institutional policies and school practices that foster entrepreneurship in the classroom (Bezanilla et al., 2020; Lyu, Shepherd & Lee, 2021). These findings suggest that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends both on institutional planning and on adapting pedagogical practices to local contexts.

4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES: RELEVANCE FOR THE LIFE PROJECT

With its emphasis on student agency and the development of students' Life Projects, the New Secondary Education (BNCC, 2018) positions entrepreneurship as a key structuring axis because it is the one most closely associated with the development of students' Life Projects (Menezes et al., 2024). However, it is essential to adopt pedagogical approaches that take into account the specific characteristics of

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the local context, thereby ensuring student engagement and the effectiveness of the educational process (Franzi, 2020).

An important consideration for teachers' pedagogical practice, particularly in the Life Project component and its relationship with entrepreneurship in the New Secondary Education, is the significant pedagogical responsibility placed on schools and educators. Many teachers face difficulties teaching subjects outside their areas of expertise, making it challenging to address these topics effectively and appropriately (Bernardes & Voigt, 2022).

Bernardes and Voigt (2022) question whether there is a true "guarantee of learning that could develop student agency" and argue that teaching should ensure not only the acquisition of knowledge but also opportunities for experiences that reflect students' interests, thereby promoting their autonomy and the development of their Life Projects. However, the Curriculum Framework of Alagoas (RECAL, 2023) states that "there is a concern that pedagogical practices aimed at retention and learning be effective and stimulate subjectivity in its various dimensions, with a focus on the Life Project and student agency" (RECAL, 2023, p.22). The document further emphasizes that schools and teachers "need to break with a network of reflections and practices that reinforce failure and increase inequalities among human subjects" (RECAL, 2023, p.22).

According to RECAL (2023), the Life Project consists of a structured pedagogical process designed to help students develop the competencies needed to plan for the future while acting in the present with autonomy and responsibility, with the aim of achieving personal and professional fulfillment. However, despite allocating 80 instructional hours per year to this curricular component in secondary education, the document does not clearly specify the methodologies that should be used to achieve these pedagogical objectives, which may pose challenges for the implementation of these educational practices.

The entrepreneurship structuring axis in the New Secondary Education is closely linked to the development of the Life Project, as it seeks to strengthen key skills, such as self-knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity (RECAL, 2023). In this context, entrepreneurship not only fosters youth protagonism, but also prepares students

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to face academic and professional challenges, promoting a more intentional and autonomous approach to their future choices.

Although RECAL (2023) acknowledges that "traditional pedagogies still predominate, with proposals that go against what is intended" (RECAL, 2023, p. 18) by the secondary education reform, the document emphasizes the need for active learning methodologies to develop "a new individual capable of forming their own decisions" (RECAL, 2023, p. 147). However, despite this recommendation, it does not provide concrete methodological guidelines for entrepreneurship education or for the development of students' Life Projects. Against this backdrop, it becomes even more important to investigate pedagogical practices in entrepreneurship education that effectively support the development of students' Life Projects during secondary education.

5 ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND FREIREAN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (1987) offers an important contribution to Entrepreneurship Education because of its transformative potential. Freire (1987) advocates a liberating form of education that goes beyond the simple transmission of content and is based on dialogue between teachers and students, grounded in learners' lived experiences. For Freire (1987), education is a political act that must be linked to freedom and to the development of critically conscious individuals capable of reflecting on the world. Thus, critical pedagogy seeks to foster social and political consciousness, an essential foundation for building a more just and participatory society. In this sense, Entrepreneurship Education should be grounded in this Freirean perspective (1987) by promoting social well-being.

According to Dolabela (2003), entrepreneurship can be taught and developed in the school environment. This perspective not only fosters an entrepreneurial mindset but also prepares students to navigate different social and professional realities,

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helping them pursue their dreams and Life Projects. Dolabela's (2003) pedagogical proposal emphasizes principles such as innovation, autonomy, and sustainability, which should be cultivated from the early years of schooling.

In recent years, Entrepreneurship Education has gained prominence in educational debates (Barros et al., 2024), particularly following the implementation of the New Secondary Education (BNCC, 2018). However, there is still considerable scope for further discussion of how critical pedagogy can contribute to ensuring that Entrepreneurship Education goes beyond market logic and promotes students' development (Walmsley & Wraae, 2022). Advancing this discussion requires reflection on pedagogical practices that take into account students' dreams, needs, and lived contexts.

Thus, it is important to investigate how critical pedagogy can contribute to Entrepreneurship Education by informing a pedagogical proposal that helps students develop skills, values, and attitudes needed to achieve their Life Projects, thus promoting a more humanistic, reflective, and transformative education.

6 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach to identify and describe the pedagogical practices used in Entrepreneurship Education in public schools in Alagoas to support the development of students' Life Projects, in light of Freirean critical pedagogy. A qualitative approach is well suited to investigating phenomena involving human beings and their complex social interactions (Godoy, 1996). In this study, it was used to analyze the pedagogical practices adopted by teachers of Entrepreneurship Education in public schools in the Brazilian municipality of Santana do Ipanema. Qualitative interpretivist research focuses primarily on the researcher's interpretation of the data rather than on seeking statistical generalizations or absolute numerical results (Bortoni-Ricardo, 2008), as it "seeks to understand and interpret phenomena within a given context" (Bortoni-Ricardo, 2008, p. 34). This approach enabled the

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researchers to understand the teaching methods used by teachers and their influence on the development of students' Life Projects.

Regarding the study's objectives, this research adopted an exploratory and descriptive design to describe the pedagogical practices used in Entrepreneurship Education in public schools in Alagoas to support the development of students' Life Projects across different institutions, thus providing a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The descriptive approach enabled a detailed analysis of the aspects related to the phenomenon investigated in the school environment (Neves, 1996). In addition, the study had an exploratory character, allowing the researchers to remain open to new insights throughout the investigation (Neves, 1996). This approach contributed to understanding the teaching methodologies adopted, the challenges faced by teachers, and the relationship between these practices and the development of students' Life Projects.

Accordingly, a case study design was adopted, as it allows for an in-depth investigation from multiple perspectives (Hartley, 2004). The study included both teachers responsible for teaching entrepreneurship in the Life Project curricular component and pedagogical coordinators. The case study was well suited to the objectives of the research, since, according to Farias (2018), this approach draws on participants' experiences and provides a comprehensive understanding of the practices adopted and their impacts within the educational setting under investigation.

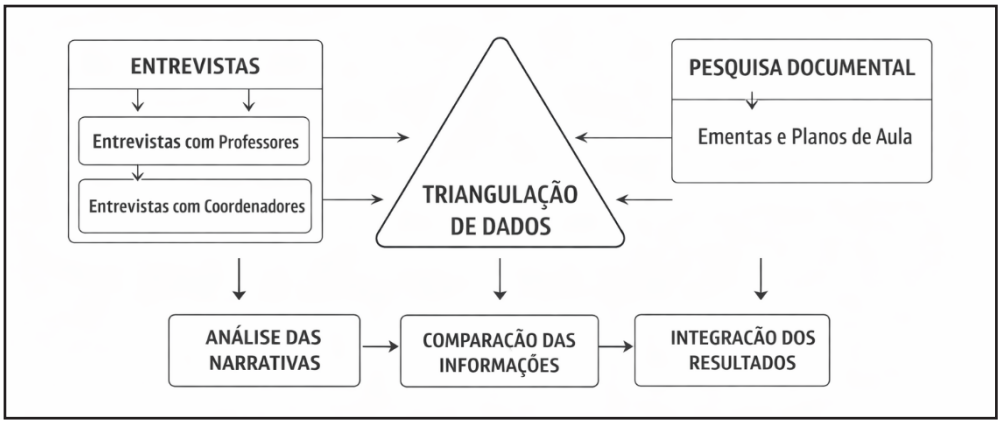
To achieve the study's objective, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in person in June 2025 at two public schools, identified in this study as School A and School B. School A has two third-year secondary education classes, whereas School B has only one. The decision to interview third-year secondary education teachers was based on the fact that this is the final year of basic education, when students are preparing to enter the labor market and are therefore more actively engaged in the development of their Life Projects.

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In School A, one pedagogical coordinator, one male teacher, and one female teacher responsible for the Life Project curricular component participated in the study, with both teachers working with third-year secondary education classes. In School B, one pedagogical coordinator and one female teacher from the same curricular component were interviewed. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide and had an average duration of approximately 20 minutes, totaling 1 hour and 31 minutes of recorded audio. All interviews were audio-recorded using a smartphone and transcribed with the aid of Atlas.ti software, which facilitated the analysis and categorization of the data.

In addition, documentary research was conducted with the pedagogical coordinators at each school to compare the information obtained from the interviews with the syllabi and lesson plans for the Life Project curricular component for the 2024 and 2025 academic years. Collecting data from multiple sources enabled data triangulation and strengthened the interpretation of the findings (Vergara, 2009), as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Research data triangulation



Source: Prepared by the author (2026)

The objective of the documentary research was to identify the teaching methodologies implemented in the classroom, as documented in the lesson plans. The lesson plans were analyzed as documents that reflect a specific pedagogical context

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(Prior, 2003), revealing both the methodological approaches adopted and teachers' perspectives regarding their implementation, thus contributing to a more in-depth understanding of the pedagogical practices developed.

According to Triviños (1987), semi-structured interviews contribute to the explanation and understanding of social phenomena. In this study, they were used to investigate the development of students' Life Projects through Entrepreneurship Education. This technique proved to be an effective strategy for data analysis and interpretation, enabling a broader and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. To this end, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and pedagogical coordinators, following a previously developed interview guide.

To ensure the confidentiality of the information, in accordance with the Free and Informed Consent Form (ICF) signed by the participants, the schools are identified by letters (A and B), while teachers and coordinators are identified only by their positions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Institutions, participant roles, and identifiers used in the study

Institution	Participant role and identifier
School A	Pedagogical Coordinator – CPA1
	Female Teacher – PA1
	Male Teacher – PA2
School B	Pedagogical Coordinator – CPB1
	Female Teacher – PB1

Source: Prepared by the author (2025)

To support the analysis process, Atlas.ti software was used to organize, interpret, and visualize qualitative data and interview transcripts (Silva Junior & Leão, 2018). In this study, the software was also used to transcribe the interviews.

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The data were analyzed using Content Analysis (Bardin, 2016). This analytical approach is "one of the most widely used in social research and in the field of education, since the data produced in this type of research are collected through interviews, questionnaires, observations, focus groups, and other techniques that seek to capture how participants understand the object of study" (Dalla Valle & Lima Ferreira, 2024, p. 7). Accordingly, a category-based content analysis was adopted because the categories emerged clearly and consistently during the analysis of the interviews, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – Categories used for the content analysis of the interviews

Objective	Analytical categories	Key References
Identify and describe the pedagogical practices used in EE in public schools in Alagoas, in light of Freirean critical pedagogy	Methodologies used in EE	Silva and Pratus (2017); Silva, Andrade and Tonelli (2024)
	Challenges faced by teachers	(BNCC, 2018; Alagoas, 2023)
	Critical Pedagogy and the Life Project	(Freire, 1987; Freire, 2006)

Source: Prepared by the author (2025)

The content analysis of the interviews identified analytical categories that helped organize, interpret, and discuss the results in a systematic and in-depth manner, contributing to the understanding of the role of Entrepreneurship Education in the construction of students' Life Projects, in light of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy.

7 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

With regard to the practices of Entrepreneurship Education in schools, a degree of misalignment was observed between the interview data and the analysis of the lesson plans. While some teachers reported that Entrepreneurship Education is addressed within the Life Project curricular component, since entrepreneurship is

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one of the structuring axes of the New Secondary Education, others stated that it can be incorporated into any subject. This inconsistency points to the absence of clear pedagogical guidelines from the state education system (RECAL, 2023). The lack of alignment among teachers reflects the absence of a unified approach to integrating the entrepreneurship axis into the pedagogical practices of the Life Project component.

It also became evident that teachers have different understandings of how to implement this curricular component pedagogically, reinforcing the absence of a formal syllabus or a standardized guiding document. This perception is illustrated by teacher PA1's response to the following question: Could you describe whether there is a syllabus for this curricular component and, if so, what content is taught?

> We receive some guidelines with dimensions that need to be developed throughout the year, but they do not constitute a syllabus, because a syllabus includes a complete set of content [...]. These are axes that, in a way, contribute to the formation of the individual, but they leave a gap in terms of having a proper syllabus. [PA1]

In addition, the interviews revealed differing perspectives regarding professional development for teachers responsible for the Life Project component, particularly with respect to the entrepreneurship structuring axis. When asked whether teachers working in this curricular component received specific training, pedagogical coordinator CPB1 stated:

> Training, no. It is really just the initial guidelines provided when the new curriculum was introduced and instructions on how the component should be implemented. That's essentially it. We work with this format of activities and projects, but there is no formal training. [CPB1].

On the other hand, teacher PB1 from the same institution stated:

> We have monthly training sessions here at the school [...] after the Life Project class, teachers meet to discuss students who require more intensive support and those with learning gaps. [PB1]

These statements reveal different understandings of what constitutes teacher training among professionals, which may compromise consistency in the

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implementation of the curricular component. Documentary analysis of the guidance booklet provided by the State Department of Education of Alagoas (Alagoas, 2024) confirmed the absence of a formal syllabus specifying mandatory content for the Life Project component. Instead, schools use a guidance booklet containing general guidelines for the development of formative axes throughout the school year.

In light of these findings, a lack of pedagogical alignment across the participating schools becomes evident, reinforcing the need for more specific guidance materials and teacher training focused on the use of appropriate pedagogical methodologies (Silva & Pratus, 2017). The absence of these elements undermines the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship axis, which, when approached critically and reflectively, can serve as a foundation for transformative and emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 1987). In this sense, the Life Project should be understood and implemented as an integrated curricular component capable of promoting youth protagonism and stimulating future planning grounded in students' own perspectives and lived realities (BNCC, 2018).

Based on the triangulation of data from interviews, lesson plans, and the guiding curricular framework, the findings were organized into three analytical categories to facilitate their presentation and discussion: (1) methodologies used in Entrepreneurship Education; (2) challenges faced by teachers; and (3) critical pedagogy and the Life Project.

7.1 Methodologies Used in Entrepreneurship Education

When asked about the pedagogical practices related to Entrepreneurship Education implemented in the school, as well as how innovative teaching methodologies are integrated into their classes, the interviewees pointed to institutional limitations that hinder the adoption of innovative practices.

Despite these constraints, all three teachers responsible for the Life Project curricular component reported that they incorporate teaching methodologies

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associated with entrepreneurship, both in regular classes and through school projects developed at their respective institutions.

> Today, I invited a former student to my Life Project class. He completed the school's technical program in Human Resources and is now specializing in marketing, so he is able to work across both fields. He came to share some of his experiences and knowledge with the class. The students engaged actively, and afterward he led an interactive activity. [PA2]

The interviews conducted with teachers from both schools revealed similar methodological approaches regarding the use of active learning methodologies in Entrepreneurship Education. However, these practices were largely limited to organizing school fairs and arranging visits to well-established entrepreneurial organizations. Little evidence was found of other active learning strategies, such as problem-based learning activities, educational games, business plan development, or local market analysis (Isabelle, 2020; Thanasi-Boçe, 2020; Mykolenko et al., 2022). Based on the interview data, it was not possible to determine whether this limitation results from characteristics of the local context or from the lack of institutional support, as none of the participants had formal training specifically related to Entrepreneurship Education.

During the interviews, teachers and coordinators were asked which teaching methodologies they considered most engaging for students. All participants identified practical activities as the most effective means of promoting student engagement and learning. According to their accounts, students show greater interest when they are directly involved in school projects, such as science fairs, robotics activities, and other initiatives that require active participation and hands-on involvement. This perception is consistent with the findings of Silva and Pratus (2017), who argue that active learning methodologies foster the development of skills such as leadership, creativity, and decision-making. This perspective is further reflected in teacher PA2's view that classroom methodologies become more engaging when they incorporate practical activities requiring active participation and hands-on involvement. As he explained:

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"They like theory, yes. But the practical side – getting hands-on – is what really works for them; that's what captures their interest." [PA2]

Another approach mentioned during the interviews was the implementation of practical workshops, in which students are encouraged to develop products or services. Examples included organizing and decorating school events to mark commemorative dates, as well as planning other school activities. These practices were identified as strategies that strengthen youth protagonism because they extend beyond the transmission of technical content in the classroom. Instead, they encourage students to take an active role in the learning process and assume greater responsibility for the construction of knowledge (Saes & Marcovitch, 2020; Silva, Andrade & Tonelli, 2024). In this regard, teacher PB1, when asked whether Entrepreneurship Education is offered as a standalone subject or integrated into other curricular components, particularly with respect to promoting student agency, stated: "Activities such as classroom decoration, crafts, and organizing school events help students develop youth protagonism." [PB1]

However, from a pedagogical perspective, it was not sufficiently clear how these activities are structured to effectively promote student agency (Saes & Marcovitch, 2020). Furthermore, no documents were found that systematically describe these activities in the lesson plans, making it difficult to assess their pedagogical purpose and their alignment with the educational objectives of the Life Project curricular component. According to the guiding document, the component is intended to provide "purposeful and structured pedagogical work whose primary objective is to develop the student's capacity to give meaning to their existence" (Alagoas, 2024, p.36).

7.2 Challenges Faced by Teachers

One of the main challenges identified in the interviews was the absence of a syllabus or pedagogical materials providing clear guidance for the Life Project curricular component, particularly with respect to the entrepreneurship structuring axis. This lack of guidance makes teaching more difficult and compromises the pedagogical

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coherence of the curricular component. This challenge is not unique to Alagoas. Studies conducted in other regions of Brazil, such as that of Fávero et al. (2024) in Rio Grande do Sul, show that teachers face similar obstacles and are often required to "work miracles" to teach the Life Project curricular component because they lack both specific training and adequate teaching materials. Even so, they are expected to adapt their pedagogical practices to meet the requirements established by the state's curricular framework, which is based on the BNCC (2018).

Although a general guiding document defines the four structuring axes—scientific investigation, creative processes, mediation and sociocultural intervention, and entrepreneurship—it does not provide practical guidance for classroom implementation. As a result, teachers are left without systematic references to support the application of methodologies aligned with the objectives of Entrepreneurship Education. Andrade, Silva, and Tonelli (2024) argue that guidance materials, such as manuals, frameworks, checklists, or sample activities, help teachers implement active learning methodologies by promoting greater autonomy and confidence in the use of these strategies. This finding is consistent with Silva and Pratus (2017), who highlight the absence of standardized pedagogical materials to guide and structure teaching practices in Entrepreneurship Education. This lack of support may hinder the implementation of effective methodologies and reduce consistency in teaching, ultimately affecting both students' learning and the comparability and evaluation of practices adopted across educational institutions.

As a result, teachers often develop their own instructional approaches based on their individual perceptions of the subject and their personal experiences. This was illustrated by teacher PA1's response when asked whether there is a syllabus for the Life Project curricular component:

> When you have a more specific curriculum, you also help teachers find appropriate materials. [...] They are no longer left wondering, "What am I going to teach now?" [...] A curriculum would perhaps open up many more possibilities for teachers to work this subject in their Life Project classes and better support their students. [PA1]

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Another issue highlighted during the interviews was the excessive emphasis on theory at the expense of practical learning, as noted by teacher PA2 when asked which teaching methodologies students find most engaging:

> As I said before, it's the practical side. I think we see too much theory in school. A lot of theory, while practice often gets left behind. For example, financial mathematics was taught here last year. One of the teachers helped some students open bank accounts. [...] They are already learning how to invest before they even leave school. [PA2]

These findings highlight the lack of systematic pedagogical materials focused on Entrepreneurship Education within the context of the Life Project curricular component, making it difficult to effectively integrate theory and practice in the school environment. As a result, the effectiveness of pedagogical practices becomes more dependent on individual teachers' initiative. In light of these findings, it is essential to develop and disseminate teaching materials specifically designed to support teachers in implementing active learning methodologies (Silva & Pratus, 2017), while also strengthening teacher professional development grounded in the integration of theory and practice. This perspective is consistent with Freire's critical pedagogy (1987), which advocates an educational practice committed to student autonomy and protagonism, enabling students to recognize themselves as active agents in the construction of knowledge and transformation of their own reality.

Another recurring challenge concerns the academic background of the teachers responsible for the curricular component. The interviews revealed that teachers came from diverse academic backgrounds—including Biology, Pedagogy, and Languages—but none had formal training directly related to entrepreneurship. This gap in teacher preparation was acknowledged by teacher PA1 when asked whether teachers receive any training related to the Life Project curricular component:

> Without a syllabus – and since one doesn't exist – we are left research materials that we can bring to our students, but we inevitably rely on what we know as teachers. My background is in Biology. If someone had a background in mathematics, for example, [...] they would probably approach entrepreneurship differently. [PA1]

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Finally, another challenge identified during the interviews concerns the availability of technological resources to support pedagogical practices. While School A has a computer laboratory, School B lacks this infrastructure. However, even in the school with access to computer facilities, no evidence emerged of teaching methodologies that incorporated technology into Entrepreneurship Education. This limitation was reflected in teacher PB1's response when asked about which pedagogical practices related to Entrepreneurship Education were used in the school:

> I think we need more resources. [...] We don't have a computer lab. We have the space for one, but it's hard to understand how a school like ours—and many other schools in the state system—still doesn't have one. [PB1]

These challenges reinforce the need for public policies coordinated by the State Department of Education (SEDUC), given that the Secondary Education Curriculum Framework, developed by SEDUC itself based on the BNCC, serves as the primary guiding document for pedagogical practices in the state system. In this context, it becomes essential to invest in ongoing teacher professional development, accompanied by the development and dissemination of teaching materials specifically designed to support teachers in implementing active learning methodologies focused on Entrepreneurship Education (Silva & Pratus, 2017; Silva, Andrade & Tonelli, 2024). Such initiatives are fundamental to ensuring the effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Education as a transformative educational approach (Freire, 1987), capable of making a meaningful contribution to the development of students' Life Projects.

7.3 Critical Pedagogy and the Life Project

During the interviews, participants were asked about the Life Project curricular component and demonstrated an understanding that it serves as a guide for students, encouraging reflection that extends beyond the school context. As teacher PA1 explained, "it is where you work on aspects beyond the school, involving the family, society, and the development of the individual for society." Similarly, pedagogical

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coordinator CPB1 emphasized that the Life Project curricular component "really provides direction for young people" in relation to their future aspirations. In addition, the interviewees recognized that the component is aligned with the structuring axes established by the BNCC (2018)—scientific investigation, creative processes, mediation and sociocultural intervention, and entrepreneurship—which are intended to develop competencies essential to students' holistic development. From this perspective, Freire's critical pedagogy places the development of critical consciousness and social transformation at its core, encouraging students to recognize their capacity to intervene in and transform the reality in which they live (Freire, 1987).

When discussing the inclusion of Entrepreneurship Education within this curricular component, all interviewees emphasized that this pedagogical approach broadens students' opportunities to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Entrepreneurship Education is understood as an educational approach that prepares students for the challenges of the contemporary world (Fayolle, 2018), while also fostering the competencies and skills needed to develop their life projects (BNCC, 2018).

Teacher PB1 emphasized the importance of education that extends beyond the traditional curriculum, stating that, for students to enter the workforce, "they need knowledge. Basic knowledge of social interaction, technical knowledge, and practical life skills, both in commerce and in the provision of personal services." This perspective is consistent with Freire's conception of education as a means of social transformation (Freire, 1987).

The importance of this educational approach was also emphasized by teacher PA2, who views Entrepreneurship Education as an alternative to the pathways traditionally associated with secondary education:

> It is fundamental. Although, culturally, we tend to think in Brazil that finishing secondary education means that college is the next—and expected—step, we also know that this is not what everyone wants or dreams of. Many students dream of becoming entrepreneurs, leaving school to start their own business by building on a talent or a particular skill they already possess. [PA2]

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Another important finding of the study concerns the value of introducing the Life Project component from the first year of secondary education, allowing students to progressively develop their understanding of how to prepare for the future. Early engagement with reflection on their personal and professional goals fosters greater maturity throughout their educational journey. When combined with active learning methodologies (Silva & Pratus, 2017), which are consistent with the principles of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1987), this process supports a more coherent and sustained development of students' Life Projects throughout secondary education.

The comments of pedagogical coordinator CPA1 reinforce this perspective by highlighting that, before being introduced to the Life Project component, many students had never been encouraged to reflect on themselves and their role in society:

> Asking students whether they actually know who they are – who they are as individuals, who they are as people belonging to different social groups – is something they had never been exposed to before encountering the Life Project curricular component. In a way, they had never been encouraged to think about it. [CPA1]

According to coordinator CPA1, when students are encouraged to understand their own reality through critical and dialogical pedagogical practices, they begin to construct knowledge that extends beyond the limits of traditional education, adopting a more active role in shaping their educational journey and future choices. This perspective is consistent with the principles of Freire's critical pedagogy (1987), which views education as a practice of freedom, aimed at the emancipation of individuals through critical reflection and transformative action:

> So, when you start using active learning methodologies, when you begin bringing students into the discussion, they come to understand that they are not merely supporting actors in society. They are the protagonists of their own lives, of their own stories, and no one can take that away from them. [CPA1]

The interviews therefore suggest that Entrepreneurship Education, when integrated into the Life Project component through pedagogical practices that connect

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theory and practice—such as science fairs, entrepreneurship events, student project presentations, practical workshops, and vocational assessments—has considerable potential to broaden students' aspirations and expectations for the future. This approach is consistent with Freire's (1987) concept of praxis, which understands critical and transformative action as a fundamental means of changing reality and fostering a genuinely emancipatory education.

8 CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to identify and describe the pedagogical practices used in Entrepreneurship Education (EE) in public schools in Alagoas to support the development of students' Life Projects, in light of Freirean critical pedagogy. The analysis of the empirical data identified important needs, including the development of specific pedagogical materials to guide teaching practices in the Life Project curricular component and the provision of ongoing professional development for teachers responsible for this component. These findings offer practical implications for teaching and educational policy by informing future revisions of the Alagoas Secondary Education Curriculum Framework and encouraging further research on the relationship between Entrepreneurship Education and critical pedagogy in the school context.

The study also revealed, through interviews and document analysis, that pedagogical practices related to Entrepreneurship Education within the Life Project component include activities such as school fairs, visits to external organizations, and practical classroom activities, including classroom decoration. These activities provide opportunities for student agency and were perceived as more engaging and effective than traditional classroom approaches. In this sense, they can be understood as active learning methodologies because they promote meaningful learning.

Although the study highlighted the absence of a structured pedagogical framework for the Life Project component – reflected in the lack of a formal syllabus

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and ongoing professional development – it also showed that teachers largely rely on their own experiences and individual interpretations when planning their classes. As a result, classroom practices often retain a traditional instructional approach. Even so, teachers expressed an interest in adopting active learning methodologies and recognized the importance of Entrepreneurship Education for students' civic and professional development.

Given the limited professional preparation related to Entrepreneurship Education within the Life Project component, the implementation of pedagogical practices that foster student autonomy and critical thinking remains a challenge. Teacher professional development should therefore be continuous, critical, and dialogical, enabling educators to act as facilitators of learning and agents of social transformation. In this context, Entrepreneurship Education, when grounded in active learning methodologies, promotes student agency and supports dialogical, constructivist learning, contributing to the development of the competencies and skills needed for students to develop their Life Projects.

In this context, the study proposes revising the pedagogical framework of the Life Project curricular component. To support the effective implementation of Entrepreneurship Education, the Curriculum Framework should be updated to include clearly defined syllabi, examples of teaching methodologies, and a practical guide to support classroom activities, ensuring the effective implementation of the entrepreneurship structuring axis, alongside the other structuring axes. Furthermore, the State Department of Education should prioritize assigning teachers with appropriate training and experience related to these structuring axes, while also providing ongoing professional development to promote a shared understanding of Entrepreneurship Education within the Life Project component.

The findings suggest that revising the pedagogical framework could strengthen the contribution of Entrepreneurship Education to the development of students' Life Projects in a critical, dialogical, and emancipatory manner. Future research could

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expand this investigation by including a larger number of schools across different Brazilian states and considering a broader range of social and cultural contexts. Overall, this study concludes that integrating Entrepreneurship Education with Freirean critical pedagogy has considerable potential to transform schools into spaces that foster students' personal, social, and professional development while strengthening the development of their Life Projects.

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1. Definition of research problem	√	
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√	√
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)		
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√	
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√
6. Data collection	√	
7. Statistical analysis	√	√
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√	√
10. Manuscript writing	√	√
11. Other (please specify)		

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