

**DOSSIER**

*The sociology of family-school relationships: social reconfigurations and new analytical and methodological perspectives*

**Family-school relationships in new family configurations: the role of grandmother's caregivers in their grandchildren's schooling*****As relações família-escola nas novas configurações familiares: o protagonismo das avós cuidadoras na escolarização dos netos***

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**ABSTRACT**

Nowadays, we have witnessed countless families in which grandparents are called upon to be exclusive caregivers of their grandchildren, offering them, in addition to their affective, financial and emotional support, assistance in the schooling process. This study aimed to understand which were the main strategies and efforts of grandparents that influenced their grandchildren's educational longevity until they joined university. The theoretical framework was based on discussions in the field of Sociology of Education and Intergenerational Relations, revealing the gap in research on the educational longevity of individuals from lower-income backgrounds raised by their grandparents. The research followed a qualitative approach and was mainly based on semi-structured interviews with four university students and their respective caregiver grandmothers, all belonging to these lower-income backgrounds. The results showed that, despite their low level of education, grandmothers were fundamental in maintaining domestic moral order and exerted a positive influence on the schooling process. They were involved in tasks such as time management, monitoring notebooks and report cards, attending school meetings and encouraging reading. We concluded that the grandmothers participating in the research were fundamental to the academic longevity of young university students, acting as a source of emotional and financial support and also creating a network of surveillance and care, which positively interfered in the schooling of their granddaughters.

**Keywords:** Educational Longevity. Relationship Between Grandparents and Grandchildren. Guardian Grandparents. Higher Education.

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## RESUMO

Temos presenciado, nos dias atuais, inúmeras famílias em que avós são chamados a serem cuidadores exclusivos dos netos, quando lhes oferecem, além da contribuição afetiva, financeira e emocional, auxílio no processo de escolarização. Este estudo buscou compreender quais foram as principais estratégias e mobilizações de avós que influenciaram a longevidade escolar de seus netos até o ingresso na universidade. O referencial teórico pautou-se nas discussões do campo da Sociologia da Educação e das Relações Intergeracionais, e revelou uma lacuna de investigações sobre longevidade escolar de indivíduos de camadas populares criados pelos avós. A metodologia de pesquisa, de cunho qualitativo, ancorou-se, principalmente, em entrevistas semiestruturadas com quatro universitárias e suas avós cuidadoras, pertencentes aos meios populares. Os resultados mostram que, mesmo com baixa escolaridade, as avós foram fundamentais na manutenção da ordem moral doméstica e exerceram influência positiva no processo de escolarização. Elas atuaram, por exemplo, no controle do tempo, no acompanhamento dos cadernos e boletins escolares, e também compareceram às reuniões escolares e incentivaram a leitura. Concluímos que as avós participantes da pesquisa foram fundamentais para a longevidade escolar das jovens universitárias, pois atuavam como fonte de apoio afetivo e financeiro e também na criação de uma rede de vigilância e cuidado, que interferiu positivamente na escolarização das netas.

**Palavras-chave:** Longevidade Escolar. Relação entre Avós e Netos. Avós Guardiões. Ensino Superior.

## Introductory Notes

The history of Brazilian society is marked by profound social inequality, which reflects in the schooling of children, young people, adults, and the elderly across different regions. For individuals from lower-income backgrounds, remaining in school until entering higher education is the result of a hard educational process<sup>1</sup> that demands significant effort from both the family and the student to overcome obstacles imposed by economic scarcity and low levels of cultural capital within the family (Bourdieu, 2010).

It is important to highlight that, according to Bourdieu (2010), the cultural capital includes the set of resources skills and dispositions related to the dominant culture, which determines whether different forms of knowledge are deemed worthy of legitimacy or not<sup>2</sup>. However, the cultural capital itself influences, but does not ensure success in educational journeys. By analyzing the differences in school performance among children from lower-income backgrounds, Lahire (1997) shows that there are internal family dynamics that can explain variations in academic achievement, including efforts to overcome educational, economic, social, and cultural disadvantages.

Such family dynamics are diverse and influenced by social class, historical context, and environment. The more effective participation of women in the labor market and public spaces since the 1970s (Guedes; Alves, 2004) increased the need to have other people helping with childcare,

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion on the educational longevity of students from lower-income backgrounds has become, since the 1990s, a focus of research in the Sociology of Education, both in Brazil and abroad (Lahire, 1997; Viana, 2014; Portes, 2014; Almeida, 2014). Amid the significant educational inequality in Brazil, educational longevity has often been analyzed as reaching high school. In this article, however, we consider educational longevity to mean entry into higher education (Viana, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in its embodied state, in its objectified state, and in its institutionalized state. For further understanding on these forms, see Bourdieu (2010).

especially among the poorest ones. Grandparents stand out in this role, providing emotional and affectionate support during moments of crisis or family difficulties. Elderly individuals have also contributed to the economic support of many families, who depend on their retired members for survival (Bragato *et al.*, 2023; Rabinovich; Bastos, 2019; Camarano, 2020).

Using inquiries about the educational trajectories of children and young people from lower-income backgrounds who were cared for by socializing agents other than their parents, the research<sup>3</sup> presented here aimed to understand the main strategies and efforts of caregiving grandparents that influenced the educational longevity and entry of their young grandchildren into public higher education.

The literature review, conducted using national and international databases, highlighted the scarcity of research on the educational trajectories and efforts of students from lower-income backgrounds who were raised and/or cared for by their grandparents, as demonstrated in the section on methodological procedures. Thus, the research that originated this article provided relevant contributions to the field of education by addressing a topic that is rarely studied, yet prompts sociological, pedagogical, and historical reflections on family and educational longevity in lower-income communities.

## **Family Educational Practices: The Schooling of Children and Young People in Lower-Income Communities**

In Brazil, investigations into the family-school relationship gained greater visibility since the 1970s, what suggests a renewal in research focused on understanding family educational practices within lower-income communities. Students from lower-income backgrounds are understood as individuals from families with limited levels of education, low income, and who have occupations that require little technical qualification (Souza, 2014; Viana, 2014), in other words, individuals who are distanced from the inherited forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) described by Bourdieu (2010).

Throughout their lives, students from lower-income backgrounds and their families face several challenges, such as exclusion and social discrimination. Regarding prejudice against families that have different structures from the nuclear or two-parent model, Romanelli (2003) highlights that poorer families tend to be labeled as disorganized and “dysfunctional.” According to the author, this interpretation, rooted in an ethnocentric and classist perspective, uses middle-class family models as the standard and considers families outside the conventional model as negligent and minimally involved in their children’s schooling.

Regarding this involvement, based on Bourdieu’s writings (2010; 2008) on dispositions and strategies of educational investment according to social class, Nogueira and Nogueira (2002) state

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<sup>3</sup> This article is part of the results from the thesis entitled “*Unlikely*” Educational Trajectories: The Educational Longevity of University Students from Lower-Income Backgrounds Raised or Cared for by Their Grandparents, defended at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP), with the support of the Minas Gerais State Research Support Foundation (FAPEMIG).

that lower-income classes tend to make relatively low investments in their children's education system, since the chances of success are limited due to the insufficient economic and cultural resources available to support good academic performance. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1992) studies also demonstrate a perspective of cultural reproduction within the capitalist school, meaning that "the authors' initial research, conducted in the 1960s, [...] states that students' social origins define their educational opportunities and determine their lifestyles and occupations" (Carvalho *et al.*, 2003, p. 18).

However, not all students from lower-income backgrounds are doomed to failure. Many achieve good academic performance and complete their basic education. Others go on to university. Concerning academic success in lower-income communities, we consider it important to understand the diverse forms of socialization related to living conditions, social relationships, and the history of these groups (Thin, 2006), including aspects of family educational engagement, as described by Viana (2007). According to the author, inspired by Lahire (1997), Van-Zanten and Duru-Bellat (2011), and Portes (2014), educational attitudes aimed at practical interventions (systematic monitoring of school activities, choice of educational institutions and academic journeys, supervision and guidance in tutoring and homework, attendance at pedagogical meetings and school councils, among others) may provide moral and emotional support to children and young people throughout their educational journeys and contribute to their academic success and educational longevity.

In this context, considering that individuals' practices are connected to the dispositions internalized throughout their journeys, we recognize that there are internal family dynamics able to explain variations in academic achievement, including efforts to overcome educational, economic, social, and cultural disadvantages (Lahire, 1997). This way, the diversity of contexts experienced by these individuals has an impact on the schooling process in different ways (Lahire, 2002; 2004).

The results of the research conducted by Lahire's (1997) in the 1990s demonstrate that sociological indicators such as social origin, social environment, and social group, in many cases considered determinants of academic success or failure, are elements that influence academic trajectories, but do not define them, as families within the same social environment have distinct configurations. Thus, according to the author, many families with low cultural and economic capital positively influence their children's schooling by adopting educational practices that create dispositions for behaviors valued by the school (Nogueira, 2013). This way,

[...] Some families, despite their low cultural capital, indirectly promote their children's schooling by creating an orderly environment where respect for authority (including teachers) prevails, clear obligations are established (such as completing school assignments), structured schedules are maintained for several activities (including study time), and friendships are monitored, among other factors. These families, even if not entirely intentional or fully conscious of it, end up preparing their children to meet certain expectations associated with being a student, such as discipline, good behavior, respect for rules, perseverance, and careful presentation of schoolwork (Nogueira, 2013, p. 9).

There are also families from lower-income backgrounds who overemphasize the importance of their children's education and make it a priority through pedagogical control, which can take more or less rigorous and systematic forms. Among them, Lahire (1997) emphasizes continuous family

involvement in school, assistance with homework, encouragement of extracurricular activities, and demand for strong academic results, among others.

Regarding educational practices in lower-income communities, it is also relevant to highlight the presence of several individuals who contribute to the socialization and schooling process of children and young people, such as uncles, grandparents, neighbors, and cousins. This collaboration plays an important role in child and adolescent care, as well as in academic support, participation in school meetings, and management of study and leisure time.

Although, in Brazil, there is little recognition of grandparents as family members who add value to the family and act as primary supporters in their grandchildren's schooling (whether they care for or raise them), several studies have demonstrated that their support can be extended into their grandchildren's later years, what significantly contributes to educational longevity (Carvalho, 2023; Freitas, 2023; Rosa *et al.*, 2022; Cardoso, 2011; Dias *et al.*, 2010; Coutrim *et al.*, 2007). This is what the research presented in this article demonstrates, as can be seen below.

## Grandparents and Their Role in Contemporary Families

With the increase in life expectancy, generations have had the opportunity to live together for a longer time. Besides transmitting life experiences, intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren often reveal a wish of compensating for what they were unable to provide for their own children and/or what their children are unable to offer their grandchildren. The results of Coutrim's (2007) study on elderly informal workers demonstrate that when parents are unable to afford educational opportunities, leisure, or essential goods and food for children and adolescents in the family, grandparents try to fulfill these needs.

Grandparents, who are called guardians or caregivers (the primary individuals responsible for the children and young people under their care), also play an active role in their grandchildren's schooling, developing both direct and indirect educational strategies and using several tactics that contribute to the educational process. At this point, it is important to clarify that, according to Bourdieu (2010) and Lahire (1997), educational strategies are understood as several practices and techniques aimed at achieving academic success (discipline, good behavior, respect to rules, supervision of school activities, and monitoring study schedules). Besides domestic moral order, some families use forms of authority over their children, as schools are places governed by rules of discipline. In this regard, Lahire (1997) says that while some families exert authority through supervision and punishment, others adopt dialogue.

To better understand the role of caregiving grandparents, we also believe it is essential to add the concept of tactic into the discussion on educational strategies and to differentiate the two of them: according to Certeau (2012), strategy is the assessment of power relations, which becomes possible when an individual outlines a planned course of action. A tactic operates by exploiting a gap: "it operates step by step, move by move. It takes advantage of 'occasions' and depends on them, without a foundation for accumulating benefits, expanding properties and predicting exits" (Certeau, 2012, p. 94-95).

According to Certeau (2012), tactics involve taking advantage of opportunities without extensive planning. Strategies, on the other hand, require prior organization and structured planning. Thus, when it comes to families from lower-income backgrounds, they may, in some cases, be unaware of the specific pathways that lead their children to educational longevity, but they also seek opportunities that emerge along the way to achieve this goal.

The research by Coutrim *et al.* (2007) demonstrates that grandparents make an effort to contribute to their grandchildren's educational process, even though they do not always act strategically. The same can be observed in studies highlighting the recurring involvement of other caregivers who assist children in their daily tasks, such as uncles and aunts, neighbors, and older cousins (Mainetti; Wanderbroocke, 2013; Azambuja; Rabinovich, 2013; Osório; Neto; Souza, 2018).

The role of grandparents as full-time caregivers for their grandchildren is not limited to Brazil. Analyzing literature published between 2000 and 2022 on the role of grandparents in their grandchildren's lives and education in Latin American countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and Chile, Freitas (2023) concluded that grandparents with low levels of education are unable to directly assist their grandchildren with school tasks, but seek help from others. This highlights the significant value of the effort made by older individuals in their grandchildren's schooling.

These educational strategies and tactics developed by grandparents are not limited to school-aged grandchildren or collaboration in pedagogical activities, as demonstrated in a study conducted by Dias and Silva (2003) with 100 university students, averaging 21 years old, enrolled in various programs at the Catholic University of Pernambuco (UNICAP) and the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). The results revealed that, in addition to emotional support, grandchildren relied on their grandparents' financial assistance. As mentioned earlier, although the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren significantly impacts the lives of children and young people, the studies by Dias and Silva (2003) and Carvalho (2023) remain rare examples of research discussing the role of guardian grandparents in the lives of adult grandchildren.

The research presented in this article adds further elements to the discussion on grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's lives, but before presenting the results, we find it important to explain the research steps that led us to these findings.

## Methodological Procedures

This qualitative study was conducted at the State University of Minas Gerais (UEMG – Campus Divinópolis), the only public university in the central-west region of Minas Gerais<sup>4</sup> that offers a variety of undergraduate programs. The choice of this institution was based on its prestige and strong reputation, as it currently holds a significant position as a leading public university in the state<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The region also has the Federal University of São João del-Rei (UFSJ), Campus Dona Lindu, which offers only four undergraduate programs: Medicine, Nursing, Biochemistry, and Pharmacy.

<sup>5</sup> Ethical principles were upheld, and the research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under Opinion N. 33071520.0.0000.5150.



The systematic search for foundational literature on the theme was conducted across several academic platforms. The literature review was carried out using the Capes Theses and Dissertations Database, the Capes Journals Portal, and the Scielo platform. Google Scholar was used as an additional resource to find studies unavailable on the previously mentioned platforms. As descriptors, we used the terms “intergenerational relationships” and “grandparents and grandchildren”; “grandparenting”; “grandchildren raised by grandparents”; “intergenerational relations”; “grandparents and their grandchildren’s schooling.” When applying filters for the broad field of Human Sciences and the field of Education, we identified 42 studies, but 13 were discarded because they predated the Sucupira Platform and were unavailable in other databases.

After carefully selecting and reading the texts, an online questionnaire was administered to all first-semester students across the 17 programs offered at UEMG (Campus Divinópolis). The questionnaire included closed-ended questions on socioeconomic background, educational journey in Basic Education, and relationships with caregiving grandparents. We believe that the challenges brought by the atypical period of remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic had impact on the study. However, we obtained a representative number of responses through this data collection instrument, applied between July and August 2020. Out of 720 questionnaires sent, we received 279 responses.

As selection criteria for the interviews, we defined the following: having been cared for or raised by grandparents (either full-time or for more than eight hours per day); having a per capita income of up to three minimum wages; enrollment in a high- or low-prestige university program, considering the level of competition at the higher education institution; and living with caregiving grandparents<sup>6</sup>. We chose to diversify the sample by selecting young people enrolled in both high-prestige and low-prestige programs, aiming to identify subtle or more pronounced differences in the cultural capital of grandparents and the educational practices they adopted, which influenced their grandchildren’s educational longevity.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four female students and their grandmothers, considering aspects of their family and educational journeys. The interviews were carried out via Teams platform, which was used for remote learning at UEMG, and lasted from 40 minutes to one hour. It was not our intention to limit the study to female students, but no male students or grandfathers volunteered to provide their testimonies. We emphasize that listening to the testimonies of the students and their caregiving grandmothers allowed us to expand the analysis of the educational practices developed within this relationship, when discussing intergenerational relationships in the educational process within family arrangements in which grandparents are the primary providers.

During the interviews, which were conducted virtually due to social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, all the grandmothers required the presence of their granddaughters: the students had to assist them with camera positioning, accessing the virtual platform, and repeating

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<sup>6</sup> Since the interviews were conducted online, some university students reported that it would not be possible to interview their grandparents because they lived in another city and lacked technical support to participate in a remote interview.

and/or explaining questions that the grandmothers did not understand. However, the students did not intervene in the interviews; they merely observed the testimonies without expressing any disagreement with what their grandmothers stated.

After transcribing and reading the recorded testimonies, the final stage of the research involved processing the material and triangulating the sources based on content analysis (Bardin, 1977) and oriented by the following categories: intergenerational relationships between grandmothers and granddaughters, educational practices that enabled educational longevity, and grandmother-granddaughter coexistence throughout life.

## Research Participants

From the 279 questionnaires completed by the research participants, we verified that 26 students reported having been raised or cared for by their grandparents for more than eight hours per day. Considering the selection criteria, four students were chosen for interviews and the testimonies revealed that in three family configurations, there were well-defined strategies to ensure that the granddaughters reached university and, in one of the families, life's opportunities and coincidences guided the student along her path. We present, below, the students and their grandmothers who participated in the interviews.

**Table 1:** General Data on Interviewed Students and Grandmothers<sup>7</sup>

Student	Age	Course	Grandmother	Age	Care Duration in Childhood	Occupation	Grandmother's Education
Clarissa	22	Public Management	Mrs. Marlena	67	Part-time	Housewife	4th grade (5th year)
Ana	22	Chemistry	Mrs. Leila	71	Full-time	Retired Teacher	High School (Teacher Training Program)
Clara	19	Psychology	Mrs. Maria	60	Part-time	Housekeeper	3rd grade (4th year)
Mariana	20	Psychology	Mrs. Belinha	66	Full-time	Housewife	5th grade (6th year)

**Source:** Carvalho (2023).

Regarding the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the students and their educational trajectories, among the four cases analyzed, Ana can be classified as middle class, given her access to certain cultural resources from childhood (such as a computer, a collection of children's books, extracurricular courses, a grandmother who was an elementary school teacher, and attendance at a private school). The other three university students belong to lower-income backgrounds, and their educational paths are similar in some aspects.

Clara, despite having a family income characteristic of lower-income backgrounds, had the opportunity to complete almost her entire Basic Education in a public school without needing to work (during her third year of high school, she engaged in informal work on weekends). Regarding

<sup>7</sup> The names of the interviewees are fictitious.



her preparation for the National High School Exam (Enem), she stated that she chose a virtual preparatory course, because it was more affordable, as her godmother paid for the tuition fees.

The former night-school Pedagogy student, Clarissa, was working as a community health agent at the time of the study. She was enrolled in a Public Management program at a private university through Distance Education (DE), and her decision to change both her course and institution was influenced by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of in-person classes, as commuting from work to the university had become financially unfeasible for her. Like Clara, she attended a public school throughout Basic Education. Among the challenges she faced in her educational journey, Clarissa reported that the teaching materials were of poor quality, and she often had to reuse notebooks from one school year to the next.

Our fourth interviewee, Mariana, a Psychology student, like Clara, balanced studies and work during her third year of high school, when she worked as a private tutor. Her situation closely resembles Ana's, who attended private school until the 9th grade. Mariana studied in a private institution until her second year of high school, with tuition paid by her grandfather. However, after his passing and due to the high cost of private school tuition, she and her grandmother decided to transfer to a public school.

## **Educational Practices That Enabled Educational Longevity in Lower-Income Communities**

In Clara's case, a Psychology student, her grandmother, a central figure in her educational journey, had completed up to the former 4th grade of primary school, now equivalent to the 5th year and, at the time of the interview, worked as a housekeeper. Clara attended public school throughout her entire Basic Education, and her grandmother, Maria, actively participated in school meetings and other events organized by the school, and also encouraged her granddaughter's reading habits since she was a child.

Nevertheless, other educational investments can also be observed: her grandmother covered the costs of school trips and extracurricular activities that could contribute to her granddaughter's cultural capital and, during high school, paid for private tutors when necessary. Regarding domestic moral order, the student mentioned that her aunt, who had a degree in Pedagogy, helped her with school assignments, while her grandmother monitored her study schedule during childhood. However, she emphasized that she was disciplined and kept a daily commitment to her schoolwork.

Regarding time management and schoolwork supervision, Lahire (1997) argues that the construction of an organized family environment, with well-defined rules of coexistence and responsibility, as well as the establishment of study schedules, tend to be reflected in students' attitudes that help them excel in school, since these practices contribute to academic performance, even among students from families with low cultural and economic capital.

In addition to her grandmother, the Psychology student lived with her aunt, who played a fundamental role in her education. The importance of aunts and uncles within the family remains an understudied topic. On this subject, Silva and Rabinovich (2020) conducted research with lower-

income families living in the suburbs of Salvador, Bahia. The results showed that uncles and/or aunts play an important role in children's and young people's lives, as they provide guidance, advice, and warnings about risks and dangers of life and during critical decision-making moments.

In the case of our interviewee, her aunt, a Pedagogy graduate, helped her with schoolwork, lent her a computer for study purposes, expected good grades, and supervised her study schedule during childhood. As an elementary school teacher familiar with school culture, Clara's aunt maintained systematic control of her academic life.

Even though her grandmother, Maria, did not perceive a correlation between Clara's academic success and the family's socialization practices, the daily study organization that her granddaughter internalized during childhood, her aunt's academic support, her grandmother's encouragement for her to excel in school, and her own effort played a crucial role in her educational longevity. Thus, we observed that the grandmother used numerous well-defined tactics, not strategies, to ensure her granddaughter's access to higher education. In this process, the aunt's collaboration in her studies was essential.

Clarissa, on the other hand, had an academic journey different from Clara's. The former night-school Pedagogy student, at the time of the interview, was studying Public Management at a private university through Distance Education (DE). We observed that Clarissa did not have well-defined strategies when she initially chose to study Pedagogy at UEMG, and it is important to highlight that she is the first in her family to enter higher education. According to Teixeira and Dias (2020), first-generation students, i.e., those who are the first in their families to reach higher education, have less rigid career goals and are more open to making adjustments along the way.

It is important to point out that, regarding her Basic Education trajectory, Clarissa had support from her mother, who monitored her school activities, attended meetings and other school events, and made decisions about the educational institutions she attended. However, it was her grandmother who managed her daily study routine. Like the other grandmothers we interviewed, Clarissa's grandmother also expected good grades, checked her granddaughter's notebooks and report cards, and enforced a strict study schedule:

[...] you won't do anything. You have to do your homework first. Because when you get to school, the first thing the teacher will check is your notebook.' Then, when I saw that she was finished, I would say: 'Now you can do whatever you want, but first, you have to do your homework.' I wouldn't let her do anything else. When she got home from school, I would tell her: 'Do your homework first, and then you can play or do whatever you want. But the homework, you must do (Mrs. Marlina, Clarissa's grandmother).

Mrs. Marlina's testimony demonstrates that the student grew up in an orderly family environment (Lahire, 1997) and even had psychological support from her grandmother to continue her studies. Although she lacked financial means to invest in her granddaughter's educational journey, Marlina stated that she provided encouragement for Clarissa to reach higher education. This encouragement may have been driven by two factors: her own lack of opportunity for prolonged schooling and her desire for her granddaughter to have a different educational trajectory than her mother, who did not attend university.

Ana, 22 years old and a Chemistry student in 2020, although responding to the online questionnaire that classified her as belonging to lower-income backgrounds, did not fully fit these indicators according to Souza (2014) and Viana (2014): parents with low levels of education, low family income, and individuals occupying positions at the base of the social pyramid. However, we chose to interview Ana and her grandmother as they met other criteria defined in the study.

Unlike Clarissa and Clara's educational journeys, Ana attended a private school for eight years. From the 9th grade until the completion of high school, she studied at a state school. Throughout her schooling journey, her grandmother played a fundamental role, as Ana herself affirmed. The fact that her grandmother was a literacy teacher is relevant, as she certainly used strategies and materials to support her granddaughter's education, something that Ana herself acknowledges:

And my grandmother, because she had been a preschool teacher, helped me a lot during my literacy process, because I remember that my mother didn't have patience to help me. During that phase of writing, letter by letter [inaudible], and it's kind of the same way now with my sister. And my grandmother always had it, you know? She would sit with me, pick up a storybook, and read it with me (*Ana, Chemistry student*).

Throughout the interview, we observed that her daily study routine, along with the execution of other tasks during her childhood and adolescence, played a significant role in Ana's educational trajectory. As Lahire (2002, 2004) reminds us, academic performance is strongly linked to household organization and daily routines. In this sense, throughout life, the student internalized behavioral patterns that were not necessarily directly replicated, but that influenced her schooling and daily organization. For example, her study, play, and computer time were pre-determined by her grandparents. Moreover, they provided her with access to extracurricular activities, such as Kumon classes<sup>8</sup>.

Educational practices in Ana's academic and life trajectory were not limited to formal education. Her grandparents, together with her mother, contributed to the enhancement of the student's cultural capital: *"They used to take me to theaters, we really enjoyed going to Cirque du Soleil, Grupo Corpo ballet, it was always things like that that we did."* The opportunity her grandparents gave her to access artistic performances and other essential goods allowed her to acquire socially and academically valued cultural capital. This distinguished her from the other interviewees, as she had access to a diverse cultural heritage, which could be favorably converted into her academic performance.

Finally, our last interviewee, Mariana, was also studying Psychology. At the time of her participation in the first stage of this research, she was in the process of transferring to the Psychology program at the Federal University of São João del-Rei (UFSJ). Similar to Ana, who attended private school until the 9th grade, Mariana studied in a private institution until her second year of high school, with her tuition covered by her grandfather.

Regarding her study routine, the student informed us that she did not have a specific schedule dedicated to school assignments. Her grandfather gave her a computer, supported her participation

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<sup>8</sup> The Kumon method is designed for teaching Mathematics and the native language. It is offered by specific private schools and aims to stimulate individual learning using exclusive instructional materials.

in extracurricular courses, and helped with the purchase of school supplies and uniforms, but it was her grandmother who controlled her academic activities. When it came to school meetings, her grandfather also attended, which reveals, as Dias (2022) and Rosa *et al.* (2022) demonstrate, that grandparents can contribute not only to the transmission of knowledge but also to educational guidance.

Regarding her granddaughter's school life, Grandmother Belinha, who considers Mariana as her own daughter, emphasized that she personally chose the schools her granddaughter attended, always seeking the "best schools." She also noted that this effort in Mariana's educational trajectory came from her desire to provide opportunities that her three children never had. Besides that, other educational materials and children's storybooks were purchased by her grandparents throughout Mariana's Basic Education.

The university student's notebooks were also supervised by her grandmother, who stated that the academic monitoring of her granddaughter was more systematic, as she was no longer working and could dedicate more time to explanations. Her supervision also extended to the organization of study schedules:

I liked her to come home, have lunch, take a short break, and then start [doing her homework]. Because I think that way, she could keep up with the reasoning and everything. But it wasn't always easy... some days she would obey me, some days she wouldn't. But I respected that because, you know, everyone is different. Sometimes she was tired, and as things got more demanding, I respected her schedule. (*Mrs. Belinha, Mariana's grandmother*)

When her grandmother didn't have enough knowledge to assist Mariana with her school assignments, her cousins became the support network she relied on. Bourdieu (2010) explains that social connections are the result of strategies of social investment, meaning the pursuit of useful exchanges that contribute to an individual's economic and cultural life. Furthermore, regarding educational practices, these relationships, which the author refers to as social capital, were very important for Mariana's educational journey, because they provided the necessary support for her to acquire cultural capital, which was then converted into academic capital.

## **Some Reflections on the Relationship Between the Interviewed Students and Their Grandmothers**

A common characteristic in the intergenerational relationships between the grandmothers and granddaughters interviewed is the presence of love and gratitude. We observed that all the students recognize the importance of their grandmothers throughout their academic and personal journeys, whether through moral and ethical teachings, which are essential to human development, or through the support provided by their grandmothers during their Basic Education years. Another notable aspect of the grandmother-granddaughter relationship is the students' memories of their caregivers throughout their lives. In their testimonies, they recalled significant events that shaped their intergenerational relationships during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

It was also possible to notice that the grandmothers recognized their granddaughters' efforts throughout their educational journeys. They all emphasized that they did not have "trouble" regarding their granddaughters' schooling in Basic Education, because the students were disciplined and committed to their schoolwork. However, it is important to mention that the families themselves structured a study routine, and supervising school activities was a common practice.

We also highlight that, although entering university was not the result of a clear educational plan, the granddaughters' admission to a public university was a moment of celebration for their grandmothers. During the interviews, it was possible to notice how affectionate the grandmothers felt when asked about receiving the news of their granddaughters' acceptance into UEMG. They all smiled! Maria's testimony, Clara's grandmother, was striking: "Because we think that poor people don't stand a chance, right?"

Regarding educational strategies and tactics in lower-income communities, excluding Ana's case, as she belongs to the middle class, we infer that Mariana and Clara, with the support of their grandmothers, set a goal in their lives and pursued it: being admitted to a university. Despite facing personal and financial challenges, they experienced what we refer to as "unlikely educational journeys". Clarissa, however, used the tactics to enter a public university, yet she was unable to continue her degree after the COVID-19 pandemic ended and in-person classes resumed. Even so, there is something worth highlighting: all the women who participated in this study are currently enrolled in higher education, and their grandmothers played a central role in ensuring their educational longevity.

## Final Considerations

The central objective of this research was to understand the strategies and efforts of these grandparents, the primary educational agents of lower-income students at a public university in the central-west region of Minas Gerais, that influenced their educational longevity and entry into public higher education. We understand that lower-income families develop their own tactics and strategies for long-term schooling once they perceive university access as a possible future. However, one of the premises to be considered is the financial and/or emotional disadvantage that these individuals, with different socialization processes, experience throughout their journey.

We highlight that among the main strategies and efforts employed by caregiving grandmothers to influence their granddaughters' educational longevity, we noticed a support network that families relied on for homework assistance (uncles and cousins). Moreover, the grandmothers' financial and emotional support was essential: three out of the four university students reported that their grandmothers contributed financially to their schooling. All the students mentioned receiving emotional support, which indicates that, even though most grandmothers were not directly familiar with the school culture, except for one of the students, they made a significant effort to ensure their granddaughters' academic success.

We also emphasize that studies on educational longevity in lower-income communities (and even in other social segments) must not neglect the interconnection of diverse contemporary

family structures, such as single-parent households or families where parents are absent. In these situations, grandparents and/or uncles and aunts are often relied upon for assistance. Sometimes, even with limited formal education, grandparents from lower-income backgrounds develop tactics and strategies aimed at ensuring their grandchildren's continued schooling, what shows the importance of shedding light on the role these key figures play in the contemporary educational process.

This study also highlights grandmothers being referred to as "safe harbors" by their granddaughters. The emotional and financial security provided by their grandmothers were elements that stood out in the students' testimonies. However, it is important to note that the young women who participated in the study were students with good academic performance throughout their educational trajectories and met their families' expectations.

We also highlight that grandmothers influenced their granddaughters' schooling in two ways: direct educational role, in which the grandmother acted as the central figure in co-education, while the mother's or aunt's role was more limited; indirect educational role, in which the grandmother played a co-educational role alongside the mother or aunt, characterized by hybrid involvement, meaning that both participated in the raising/care of the students. The presence of cousins assisting with schoolwork demonstrated the importance of a support network in the educational journey of the young women interviewed.

For future research, it is important to shed light on the relationship between grandparents and reading habits, as we observed that, despite having limited formal education (except for Ana's grandmother), older generations seek to engage with literate culture, which influences their grandchildren's co-educational process. Finally, we hope that the findings of this study will contribute to future analyses and research on "unlikely" educational trajectories and educational longevity among lower-income communities, especially in family structures where grandparents are the primary figures responsible for their grandchildren's education. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is far richer than what can be perceived at a superficial level and deserves further exploration in the field of Education studies.

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