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Inclusive education and special education: from enrollment to participation, learning, and autonomy.

Inclusive and special education: from enrollment to participation, learning and autonomy
Inclusive and special education: from enrollment to participation, learning and autonomy

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes inclusive education as a pedagogical and institutional process that goes beyond formal access to school. Through a narrative review, it discusses barriers to learning and participation, universal design, individualization, specialized educational services, collaboration between school and family, monitoring, and technology. Official data from the School Census contextualize the recent expansion of special education in Brazil. It concludes that effective inclusion requires accessible planning, graduated support, formative assessment, and evidence-based institutional coordination.

Keywords: inclusive education; special education; learning; accessibility; autonomy.

ABSTRACT

This article examines inclusive education as a pedagogical and institutional process that goes beyond formal school access. Through a narrative review, it discusses barriers to learning and participation, universal design, individualization, specialized educational support, school-family collaboration, monitoring, and technology. Official School Census data contextualizes the recent expansion of special education in Brazil. Effective inclusion requires accessible planning, graduated supports, formative assessment, and evidence-informed institutional coordination.

Keywords: including education; special education; learning; accessibility; autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education shifts the educational debate from the mere physical presence of the student to the...
guaranteeing participation, learning, and belonging. From this perspective, differences in
development, communication, mobility, attention, or learning pace cannot be
treated as automatic justifications for lowering pedagogical expectations. The challenge
Institutional support involves recognizing barriers, organizing support, and diversifying teaching methods.
without breaking the student's connection to the common curriculum and to the collective life of the school.
International literature has reinforced the idea that inclusion is a systemic process. The Report
UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report argues that diversity should be incorporated.
educational planning, including curriculum, teacher training, infrastructure, assessment, and technology.
and the relationship with families influence a school's ability to accommodate different profiles of

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students. Thus, special education, from an inclusive perspective, is not limited to a set of
Individual techniques are important, but it depends on well-coordinated pedagogical and organizational decisions.
In Brazil, the expansion of special education enrollments and the growth in the presence of students
In mainstream classrooms, this debate becomes particularly relevant. Data from the School Census shows...
a significant expansion of the registered population in special education between 2020 and 2024. This
The movement increases the responsibility of networks and schools to transform access into
Effective learning, preventing enrollment from being confused with fully realized inclusion.

2 METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a narrative review of an analytical nature, focusing on inclusive education.
special education, differentiated learning, universal design for learning, support
Specialized educational practice and collaboration between school and family. Narrative review was chosen.
because it allows the integration of normative documents, institutional reports, and scientific literature of
different traditions, without the intention of producing a meta-analysis or a single causal estimate.
Sources published up to 2025 were prioritized, with an emphasis on documents from organizations.
Educational resources, official statistics, and peer-reviewed studies. Among the conceptual bases
The following are taken into consideration: UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report and documents from INEP (National Institute for Educational Studies and Research).
relating to the Basic Education School Census, literature on Universal Design for Learning and
Studies on multilevel support systems.
The analysis was organized into the following themes: concept of inclusion; barriers to learning and participation;
Accessible pedagogical planning; individualization and support; institutional collaboration; and
Monitoring of results. Statistical data are used only to contextualize the scale.
from the phenomenon and not to infer, in isolation, the quality or effectiveness of school practices.
One limitation is that policies, statistical categories, and support models vary.
between educational systems. Therefore, international concepts are discussed in dialogue with the
Brazilian reality, without presupposing automatic equivalence between legal or professional structures of
different countries. The goal is to offer a pedagogical and institutional synthesis, not a protocol.
clinical or diagnostic.

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3 Inclusive Education as an Organization of the Learning Environment
LEARNING

Inclusion requires understanding that learning difficulties can emerge from the interaction between
Student characteristics and barriers present in the environment. A task with language.
excessively abstract, an unpredictable routine, inaccessible materials, or assessments that allow
Offering only one type of response can create obstacles that are not inherent to the student. This reading
It prevents every difficulty from being individualized and invites the school to examine its own practices.
Inclusive planning begins before individual adaptation. Universal Design for Childhood Development
Learning aims to broaden the possibilities for engagement, representation, and action/expression.
offering multiple routes to access content and demonstrate learning. Recent literature
It is registering promising results, but also warns that implementation depends on training.
Time, resources, and consistency between principles and practices.
Playful resources, concrete materials, images, music, assistive technology, and sensory activities.
They can have a pedagogical function when associated with clear objectives. The value of these resources is not...
Not in the novelty, but in the ability to reduce barriers, sustain attention, and make concepts observable.
and allow for meaningful participation. The choice should consider age, curriculum, and profile of
learning and evidence of progress.
Pedagogical differentiation does not mean producing a parallel and permanently different curriculum.
Simplified. Instead, it involves adjusting the mediation, complexity, timing, support, and form.
participation is essential to preserve relevant educational objectives. When an adaptation reduces
By indiscriminately denying learning opportunities, it can produce exclusion within the classroom itself.
common.

Social participation is also part of the process. Interactions with colleagues, cooperative work and
Real opportunities for choice contribute to belonging and autonomy. Inclusion, therefore,
This should be observed both in academic indicators and in the quality of participation of
Students are guided in routines, relationships, and decision-making processes that are appropriate for their age group.

4. INDIVIDUALIZATION, SPECIALIZED EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE, AND EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY

Individualization is necessary when universal support is insufficient. This presupposes
Identify priority objectives, specific barriers, available resources, and ways to monitor them.
The student's response to interventions. Pedagogical decision-making should be dynamic:

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Strategies that work in a particular content area or context may need revision when...
Demands change.

In the Brazilian context, Specialized Educational Services have a complementary function or supplementary to schooling and should not be understood as a substitute for the regular classroom. The articulation Communication between the lead teacher, support staff, special education staff, management, and family is crucial to avoid... Fragmentation. When each agent works with disconnected objectives, the student may receive Multiple appointments without a coherent educational trajectory.

Adapting activities should be based on the content and pedagogical intent. It may involve More segmented instructions, visual aids, reduction of irrelevant stimuli, increased time, Manipulative materials, shared reading, or different forms of response. Appropriateness depends. based on the observed effect on comprehension and participation, and not on a fixed list linked to diagnosis.

Data from Inep shows that enrollments in special education increased from 1,308,900 in 2020 to 2,076,825 in 2024. This growth increases the need for institutional capacity to plan. Support and monitoring of results. Quantitative expansion is a step forward in access, but it requires... Continuous investment in teaching practices, training, and coordination.

Formative assessment allows us to verify whether the support offered is promoting learning. Performance records, work samples, systematic observation, and short-term goals can To guide adjustments. This follow-up is most useful when it avoids generic labels and describes... Observable behaviors: what the student is able to do, under what conditions, and with what type of tools. support and with what degree of autonomy.

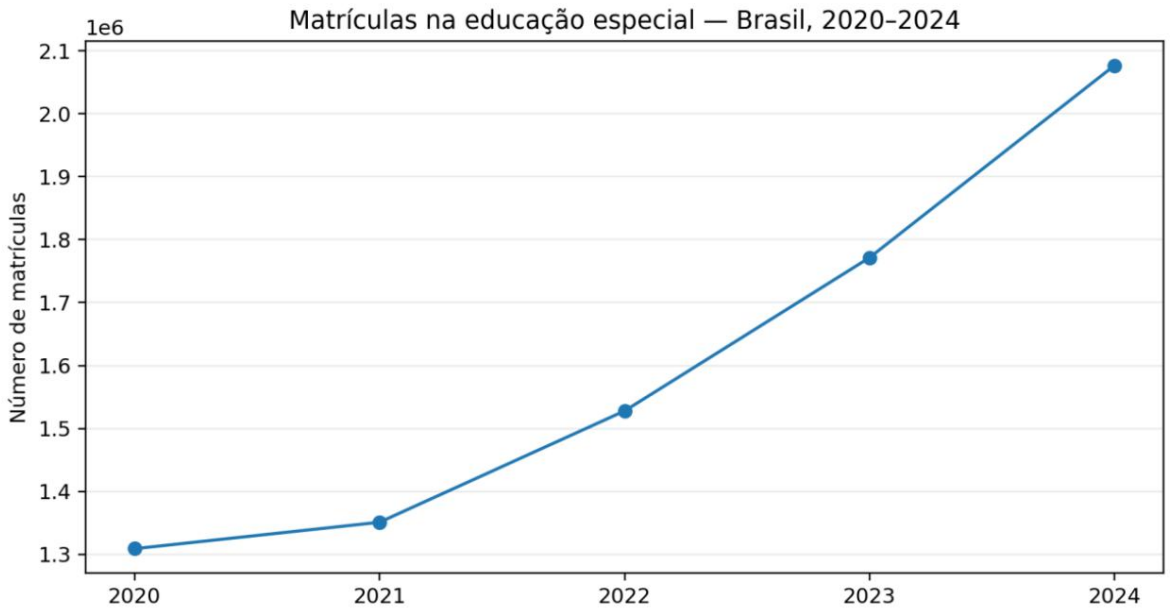

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Chart 1 — Enrollments in special education in Brazil, 2020–2024. Source: Inep, School Census of Basic Education 2024.

5. Collaboration between teachers, families, and school staff.

Inclusive education is weakened when responsibility for the student is transferred to a single individual. person. The class teacher remains responsible for the curriculum, while professionals Specialists contribute knowledge and offer support. Collaborative models favor Shared planning reduces the tendency to separate the student from collective experiences. Families possess relevant information about communication, interests, routines, and forms of support. which can inform pedagogical decisions. At the same time, the school needs to translate objectives. educational content in understandable language and avoid relationships based solely on communication. problems. The partnership is more productive when there are defined objectives and regular channels of communication. follow-up.

Teacher training should bridge the gap between theory and real-life classroom situations. (Specific courses) They can broaden their repertoire, but sustainable change requires opportunities to observe practices. To plan together, test strategies, and discuss learning evidence. The school learns. Institutionally, when it transforms individual experiences into shared knowledge.

School management influences inclusion by setting planning deadlines and allocating resources. The educational priorities and monitoring mechanisms. A culture that values... Collaboration and pedagogical research tend to respond better to diversity than a single approach. An organization focused solely on individual referrals.

Collaboration also protects against two extremes: denying necessary support in the name of a Abstract equality or reducing the student to diagnosis. The pedagogical focus should remain on educational needs observed and in the removal of barriers, with respect to dignity, to potential and the right to learn.

6 Evidence-Based Practices and Monitoring

The expression 'evidence-based' should not be used as a generic label. A practice educational research needs to be examined in terms of the quality of the research that supports it, and the context in which It was tested and found to be compatible with the student's objectives. Scientific evidence, experience. Professionals and data produced in daily school life should interact with each other.

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Structured literacy interventions, explicit instruction, feedback, distributed practice and
Frequent monitoring can be combined with inclusive resources. The central point is that...
The methodological choice must be justifiable and its effectiveness monitored. Popular strategies,
However, if they are not clearly related to the learning objective, they should be treated with caution.
Multilevel support systems offer a useful rationale: universal quality practices for all.
Additional support for those in need and more intensive interventions when the response continues.
insufficient. Although the terminology varies between countries, the idea of grading intensity based on
Data helps to avoid both passive waiting and premature referrals.
Monitoring needs to include undesirable effects. Support can improve the achievement of
tasks and, at the same time, increase dependence on an adult. Therefore, the indicators of
Autonomy, generalization, and participation should accompany academic measures. The ultimate goal
It's not just about completing an activity, but also about expanding the capacity to learn and participate.
An inclusive school functions as a learning organization: it gathers information and tests hypotheses.
pedagogical, it reviews practices and shares knowledge. This perspective shifts the question from
'What is the student's problem?' becomes 'What barriers are present, what support is needed, and the...'
What do the data show about the response to these support measures?

7 TECHNOLOGY, ACCESSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY

Technology can broaden access, but it is not inclusive by definition. Digital platforms, readers
Screen-based, alternative communication, multimodal resources, and organizational tools should be
Selected based on the barrier they aim to reduce. Technological solutions lacking accessibility.
or lacking the training for its use can create forms of exclusion.
Digital materials allow you to adjust font size, contrast, speed, audio, and subtitles.
and the forms of interaction. These resources benefit students with diverse needs and can
to be incorporated into the overall planning, reducing the need for late adjustments. A
Accessibility gains strength when it is considered from the outset.
For students who need more intensive support, visual and technological resources can
to promote predictability, communication, and task sequencing. However, its use should be
accompanied to avoid rigid dependence. Support is more effective from the point of view
Educational tools can be gradually adjusted as autonomy increases.
Privacy also deserves attention. Data on disability, performance, and behavior are
Sensitive materials should not circulate without pedagogical necessity. Schools need to reconcile collaboration.
among professionals with responsible practices for recording and sharing information.

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Inclusive innovation, therefore, is not measured by the quantity of tools adopted, but by...
The ability to broaden participation, understanding, and independence. Technology should
to remain subordinate to the pedagogical project and the evidence of learning.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is a commitment to access, participation, learning, and...
belonging. Their advancement depends on overcoming a narrow view, according to which enrollment in
A common class would be enough to characterize inclusion.
The growth in special education enrollments makes it urgent to strengthen pedagogical capacity.
of schools. More students in shared environments means a greater diversity of needs and,
Consequently, there is a greater demand for flexible planning and coordination.
Universally accessible practices can reduce barriers before individual adaptations are needed.
necessary. When specific support is indicated, it must preserve educational objectives.
relevant and should be evaluated based on their concrete effects.
The connection between the common classroom, specialized care, management, and the family is central.
Fragmentation of responsibilities tends to produce inconsistent responses and hinder the...
Monitoring progress.
The use of evidence requires discernment. It is not enough to simply label a strategy as inclusive; it is
It is necessary to verify the quality of the scientific support, its suitability to the context, and the response of...
student.
Formative assessment and continuous monitoring allow for adjustments to interventions and recognition.
Academic, social, and functional advancements. Autonomy and participation should be considered alongside this.
of curricular performance.
Technology and differentiated materials expand possibilities when they address real barriers.
Its value lies in its educational function and accessibility, not in innovation itself.
In short, an inclusive school is one that transforms diversity into a planning parameter.
By combining a common curriculum, flexibility, graduated support, collaboration, and data analysis, the
The institution increases its capacity to teach diverse students without diminishing the rights of any.
From them to meaningful educational experiences.

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