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The consequences of late ADHD diagnosis for the education of students with ADHD in the final years of elementary education in state schools in Macapá, Amapá, Brazil, from 2020 to 2026

As consequências de um diagnóstico tardio para o ensino de alunos com TDAH nos anos finais do ensino fundamental em escolas estaduais de Macapá-Amapá, no período de 2020 a 2026

Las consecuencias de un diagnóstico tardío para la enseñanza de alumnos con TDAH en los últimos años de la enseñanza fundamental en escuelas estatales de Macapá, Amapá, entre 2020 y 2026

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Abstract:
This study aims to analyze the consequences of late diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) for the education of students in the final years of elementary education in state schools in Macapá, Amapá, Brazil. The research is motivated by the growing number of late diagnoses, accompanied by reports of emotional distress, difficulties in adapting to the school environment, and various personal setbacks. It also considers the current context of public schools in Macapá, where challenges related to the implementation of public policies remain significant. Accordingly, analyzing the educational, emotional, and social effects of late ADHD diagnosis constitutes one of the main objectives of this research. Regarding the methodological procedures, the study is classified as basic research in terms of its purpose, descriptive in terms of its objectives, and quantitative in terms of its approach, using the inductive method. The research was conducted through a literature review, analysis of official documents, and field research involving the administration of questionnaires. The findings highlight that early identification of ADHD is important for promoting educational equity and multidimensional development. The study concludes by reinforcing the need for government initiatives focused on continuing teacher education to support the inclusion of students with late ADHD diagnoses, strengthening partnerships among families and schools, and implementing teaching methodologies adapted to the needs of students with ADHD.

Keywords: ADHD; late diagnosis; inclusion; school inclusion.

Resumo:
A presente pesquisa, objetiva analisar as consequências do diagnóstico tardio do TDAH para o ensino de alunos dos anos finais do ensino fundamental em escolas estaduais de Macapá – Amapá, tendo como ponto de partida o crescente número de casos de diagnósticos tardios, acompanhados de relatos de sofrimentos, dificuldades de adaptação escolar e diversos prejuízos pessoais, também cita-se o contexto atual das escolas públicas de Macapá, onde as dificuldades e implantação de políticas públicas estão longe do esperado. Então a análise dos efeitos educacionais, emocionais e sociais do diagnóstico tardio do TDAH é um dos principais requisitos desta pesquisa. Ao referir aos procedimentos metodológicos, o tipo de pesquisa quanto a finalidade é uma pesquisa básica pura, quanto aos objetivos é descritiva, quanto a abordagem é quantitativa com método indutivo. Essa pesquisa foi realizada através de revisão

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bibliográfica, análise de documentos oficiais, a pesquisa de campo foi feita através da aplicação de questionários. Neste estudo observa-se que a identificação precoce do TDAH é fundamental para garantir a equidade educacional e o desenvolvimento multidimensional. Conclui-se que está pesquisa veio para reforçar a necessidade de ações governamentais voltadas à formação continuada de professores para a inclusão de alunos com diagnostico tardio do TDAH, consolidação de laços entre família, escola e acima de tudo a implementação de metodologias adaptadas no que se refere as necessidades de alunos com TDAH.

Palavras-chave: TDAH, diagnóstico tardio, Inclusão, Inclusão escolar.

Resumen:
Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar las consecuencias del diagnóstico tardío del TDAH para la enseñanza de alumnos de los últimos años de la enseñanza fundamental en escuelas estatales de Macapá, Amapá. Parte del creciente número de diagnósticos tardíos, acompañados de relatos de sufrimiento, dificultades de adaptación escolar y diversos perjuicios personales. También considera el contexto actual de las escuelas públicas de Macapá, donde las dificultades y la implementación de políticas públicas están lejos de lo esperado. Así, analizar los efectos educativos, emocionales y sociales del diagnóstico tardío del TDAH constituye uno de los principales requisitos de esta investigación. En cuanto a los procedimientos metodológicos, es una investigación básica pura por su finalidad, descriptiva por sus objetivos y cuantitativa por su enfoque, con método inductivo. Se realizó mediante revisión bibliográfica, análisis de documentos oficiales e investigación de campo con aplicación de cuestionarios. El estudio observa que la identificación temprana del TDAH es fundamental para garantizar la equidad educativa y el desarrollo multidimensional. Se concluye reforzando la necesidad de acciones gubernamentales orientadas a la formación continua docente para incluir a alumnos con diagnóstico tardío del TDAH, consolidar los vínculos entre familia y escuela y, sobre todo, implementar metodologías adaptadas a las necesidades de los alumnos con TDAH.

Palabras clave: TDAH; diagnóstico tardío; inclusión; inclusión escolar.

1. Introduction

Inclusive school education is a pedagogical proposal distinguished by recognition of students' specific characteristics, advocating equality and access to mainstream schools as guaranteed by Article 206, item I, of the 1988 Federal Constitution. School inclusion therefore requires joint efforts to develop a welcoming environment. According to Narciso et al. (2024), it not only supports students' academic development but also promotes respect, solidarity, and equality within the school community, since it is essential to live alongside people willing to listen to and understand our struggles (Gendron, 2024).

School inclusion thus involves considering each individual's uniqueness in education (Kupfer, 2001). Paulo Freire (1996) supports this by stating that teaching is not transferring knowledge but creating possibilities for its production or construction. Contemporary teachers

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therefore face the challenge of meeting students' diverse educational needs while promoting inclusive, equitable, quality education. From this premise, Melo et al. (2020) emphasize that teachers must understand the particular characteristics of disabilities present in their classrooms to determine how to work and enhance what their students can do.

Consequently, Douglas Guilherme (2017) points out that inclusion, when treated merely as a normative principle, tends to conceal exclusionary practices that continue to exist in schools.

Promoting inclusive school education therefore requires creating an educational environment where all students, regardless of their differences, are welcomed, respected, and included in teaching and learning. For Narciso et al. (2025), school inclusion is fundamental to promoting more equitable education, ensuring that all students have access to quality teaching regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, or cultural circumstances.

Achieving this requires joint efforts involving public policies, teacher training, suitable physical infrastructure, and inclusive teaching approaches. Challenges clearly remain, including cultural resistance, insufficient resources, and a lack of specific professional training. Maria Montessori (1995) emphasizes that education should assist life, showing that teaching must be student-centered and fully address individual needs. Inclusion, both as public policy and as discourse, is traversed by contradictions reflecting how the Brazilian State constructs and manages differences (Almeida, 2025).

Many embarrassing situations within schools could be avoided. In this regard, Salime (2021, pp. 94-95) shows that:

> The answer lies in creating a strong support network involving children, adolescents, and responsible adults. A network that provides resources, offers positive approaches, and respects what children with ADHD think and say about themselves as students. A network that recognizes school as the most difficult area for children with ADHD, because it requires them to draw on brain areas heavily affected by deficits in their executive functions.

Regarding teachers' role, Mantoan (2015) states that training teachers from the perspective of inclusive education entails redefining their role, that of schools and education, and the teaching practices customary within exclusionary education at all levels. It is also important to emphasize that inclusion, often used as performative discourse, requires a profound transformation of the educational project to become effective; otherwise, the discourse risks remaining symbolic without corresponding to genuinely inclusive practices (Santos, 2025).

Teacher training and school community awareness are essential to creating an environment conducive to inclusion. Continuing education is needed so that educators can meet

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and respond to children's needs; these actions can greatly assist school inclusion work (Pontis, 2022).

However, despite regulatory progress, school management faces various challenges in implementing inclusive education (Arruda, 2025). Inclusion must not be conceived as an addition to traditional teaching practice, but as an indispensable transformation of teaching to address every student's particular characteristics (Mantoan, 2015).

2. The school community's response to the presence of students with ADHD

As an essential social institution, schools play a role extending beyond the simple dissemination of content. They can also be considered environments for coexistence, citizenship education, and individuals' overall development.

According to Schwartzman (2008), ADHD requires special attention, since understanding who the student is is necessary for knowing how to support them pedagogically. Schools should thus be seen as spaces of equity within an inclusive perspective that recognizes ADHD as a neurobiological condition. Precisely for this reason, continuing teacher education ceases to be an “extra” topic and becomes part of what truly sustains meaningful inclusion (Batista and Silva, 2026).

It is important to make clear, however, that Brazilian reality reveals a fundamental contradiction: while policies advocate universal inclusion, the everyday exclusion of students with disabilities remains normalized (Souza et al., 2025). This can affect personal, social, and academic life and impair learning.

The Education at a Glance 2020 report (OECD, 2020) states that equitable education systems are those capable of reducing the effect of social background on educational outcomes. Complementing this view, Mantoan (2020) emphasizes that inclusive education is not an addendum but the core of a pedagogical project committed to equity.

Because the disorder brings diverse symptoms, students may experience low self-esteem, feelings of failure, and instability in relationships with classmates. Children and adolescents with ADHD tend to experience greater peer rejection (Mattos, 2024). People with ADHD need parents, teachers, and other education professionals to be open-minded and willing to help. Although various tips are available in different books, it is important to emphasize that no specific technique or teaching approach can improve attention and performance in children with ADHD (Mattos, 2024). Misinformation must be challenged, since the aim is to teach

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children to take responsibility for their learning positively, a far from easy task for teachers (Maté, 2025).

School reality remains exclusionary: even with diagnostic reports, people with the disorder are seen as lazy and uninterested. Teachers must address children with ADHD's attention difficulties, low self-esteem, insubordination, and profound social anxiety. They may also have to confront their own lack of preparation (Maté, 2025).

Seeking early diagnosis in school contexts is essential for good academic development and maintaining high self-esteem, since it ensures targeted interventions and appropriate, inclusive methods. Teachers and others involved in teaching and learning must study this topic seriously (Caixeta et al., 2024). As school is the first setting where signs are noticed, it is important to understand that:

> The disorder can be a burden, endless suffering, the reason a brilliant person never achieves success and drags on for years consumed by frustration, shame, and a sense of failure amid demands to try harder, go with the flow, mature, or somehow change (Hallowell and Ratey, 2024, pp. 13-14).

Schools truly respond to the needs of students with ADHD when continuing education and institutional structures enable positive responses. Cunha and Capellini (2021) state that schools often lack systematic guidance to help teachers understand the needs of students with ADHD. Thapar and Cooper (2022) add that a lack of understanding of the disorder contributes to inappropriate teaching practices, unfair assessments, and conflicts that appropriate support could prevent. Most students with ADHD thus need more time to internalize what has been taught (Caixeta et al., 2024).

Regarding social interaction, students face difficulties interacting and socializing at school, which can generate conflict, making clear the need for a welcoming school environment. Continuing teacher education, active learning methods, and partnerships between school and family are therefore central to overcoming barriers imposed by ADHD (Silva et al., 2025).

Schools recognize inclusion and the continued attendance of students with the disorder, yet despite legal guidelines they still encounter practical difficulties. The Brazilian Inclusion Law (Brasil, 2015) broadens the understanding of accessibility to include overcoming both attitudinal and pedagogical barriers. This corresponds to everyday experiences with ADHD, where barriers often lie in rigid organization of lessons, assignments, and assessments (Batista and Silva, 2026).

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Schools continue to seek responses in continuing teacher education and support. Within this same theoretical horizon, Ridolfi et al. (2025) emphasize thorough continuing education on the purpose of inclusive actions. When teachers understand ADHD and acquire this broader perspective, they participate more actively in students' school lives and address much-feared labeling. Nevertheless, curricular rigidity continues to be discussed, revealing incompatibility with students with ADHD.

According to Carvalho and Junior (2025), inclusion requires a change in attitude throughout the school community, with mainstream classroom teachers receiving technical and pedagogical support from special education to ensure adequate support for students with specific needs.

3. Diagnosis - The various forms of assessment

ADHD diagnosis is complex and involves various processes, including detailed clinical assessments, life history, and social and emotional contexts, to prevent overlap with other disorders from masking symptoms and causing confusion. Because diagnosis is observational, some people still do not believe in ADHD diagnosis simply because its symptoms can be observed to varying degrees in anyone (Mattos, 2024), with no specific confirmatory test. Mattos (2024) adds, however, that the issue is not whether someone has symptoms of inattention or hyperactivity.

What determines whether a problem exists is how many of these symptoms a person has. Because diagnosis is based on behavioral criteria, the clinical perspective of various behavioral professionals is necessary, observing and using the following techniques:

- Clinical interview (anamnesis): The initial diagnostic step, involving the patient and parents. It should be emphasized that ADHD diagnosis requires a detailed clinical assessment, including a systematic survey of symptoms and the patient's history (Alves et al., 2023).
- Use of DSM-5 criteria: Used to ensure consistency and measure the process, since this is the principal standardized system of mental health diagnostic criteria, defining symptoms, duration, functional impairment, and differential criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).
- Scales and questionnaires: Used for screening and characterizing symptoms. Teachers, parents, and the patient must participate at this stage, since standardized scales complement clinical interviews when diagnosing disorders such as ADHD, contributing to

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objective assessment of symptoms and individual functioning (Martins and Machado, 2022).

- Neuropsychological assessment: Conducted by a psychologist specializing in neuropsychology, this assessment aims to identify mental patterns consistent with ADHD to distinguish it from other conditions.
- Behavioral observation: Involves observing the patient in different environments to complement behavioral data already collected. The DSM-5-TR reinforces that diagnosis depends on clinical observation and behavioral assessment across multiple settings (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

School assessment: Regarding this technique, Carvalho et al. (2022) state that school is the first setting where ADHD symptoms become evident, and teachers contribute behavioral observations essential to diagnosis. Reports are therefore important for checking whether symptoms are present.

- Multidisciplinary assessment: The American Psychiatric Association (2022) determines that ADHD diagnosis should be based on information from multiple sources and settings (clinical, school, and family). This directly supports the need for multidisciplinary assessment to avoid mistakes and ensure diagnostic accuracy.

4. Inclusion of people with ADHD

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5. Final considerations

At the end of this study, the following final considerations emerge: late ADHD diagnosis is intrinsically associated with obstacles such as difficulties concentrating, paying attention, and participating. Teachers' hesitation in dealing with late ADHD diagnosis was also observed.

These obstacles also clearly favor declining performance and accumulated frustrations in school life, contributing to self-rejection, self-devaluation, and feelings of inferiority, which often lead students to drop out of school.

These results support the idea that students' obstacles arising from late ADHD diagnosis extend beyond school failure, affecting social relationships within and outside school and leading to social isolation and conflict.

It is also evident that characteristic ADHD behavior is sometimes misinterpreted at school as lack of commitment to activities, indiscipline, or even disinterest. This view increases discrimination and prejudice, intensifying obstacles to students' inclusion and social development.

Other significant issues identified in the research were barriers in teaching practice: teachers feel frustrated by difficulties identifying students with ADHD's specific characteristics and planning effective teaching methods. This clearly reveals the need for continuing education focused on inclusion.

Beneficial alternatives for effective inclusive education were also identified. Research participants acknowledge that adopting different methods followed by precise guidance increases the participation and engagement of students with late ADHD diagnoses, who show greater involvement when these methods become part of everyday practice.

It is also important to encourage open communication among parents, teachers, and health professionals to provide appropriate support in every area of the individual's life. Treatment for attention deficit generally involves a multidisciplinary approach, including behavioral and psychoeducational interventions and, in some cases, medication.

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