LUMEN ET VIRTUS

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN A SMALL MUNICIPALITY: AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Special education in Brazil has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, especially with regard to the promotion of inclusive education for people with disabilities. As for the methodological aspects, the study is guided by a qualitative approach, through a bibliographic review and a documentary analysis of public policies for special education in Brazil. Therefore, this article aims to discuss the care services in special education in a small municipality, focusing on the inclusive perspective, in order to analyze the public policies of inclusion in the municipality and examine the pedagogical practices discussed in the literature. The main findings indicate that, despite these difficulties, good practices can be developed when there is an effective commitment from managers and continuous training of teachers, so that there is a latent need to improve special education services in small municipalities in the country, especially in areas that demand greater attention from the government due to their characteristics and peculiarities.

Keywords: Special Education, Inclusive Education, Municipalities – Brazil, Public Policies.

INTRODUCTION

Special education in Brazil has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, especially with regard to the promotion of inclusive education for people with disabilities (Mazotta, 2011). The National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (PNEEPEI), launched in 2008, reaffirms the country's commitment to the inclusion of students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders and high abilities or giftedness in regular education (Brasil, 2008). Despite the advances, the implementation of these policies faces considerable challenges, especially in small municipalities.

These municipalities, characterized by a more limited infrastructure and less availability of financial and human resources, have difficulties in offering adequate specialized educational services (Borges; Pereira, 2020). Schools often lack the trained

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professionals, pedagogical resources, and assistive technologies necessary to ensure the full inclusion of students with special educational needs (Gatti, 2019). The educational reality in these contexts reveals the need to discuss inclusive strategies that consider the specificities of these locations.

In view of this scenario, the central question of this study arises: what are the barriers and potentialities of special education services in small municipalities? This questioning aims to explore both the challenges faced by these locations in providing inclusive education and the opportunities that can be taken advantage of to improve the service to students with disabilities

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education system is a right guaranteed by Brazilian legislation, as provided for in the Brazilian Inclusion Law (LBI), also known as the Statute of Persons with Disabilities (Brasil, 2015). However, the reality faced by students in smaller municipalities highlights gaps in the process of implementing inclusive policies. The research is justified by the need to promote equal opportunities and learning conditions for all students, regardless of their location. Small municipalities, although they present structural and financial challenges, can also be favorable environments for innovations and inclusive pedagogical practices that value community participation and the creative adaptation of resources. By investigating these barriers and potentialities, this study contributes to the formulation of more efficient public policies and to the improvement of pedagogical practices aimed at special education in these regions.

Regarding the methodological aspects that guide the study, it will adopt a qualitative approach, through a bibliographic review and a documentary analysis of public policies for special education in Brazil. The literature review will include academic works and relevant legislation on the topic of inclusive education. The documentary analysis will be based on data and reports analyzed from documents from the National Education Plan and the Municipal Education Plan.

In this sense, the objective of the article will be to discuss the care services in special education in a small municipality, focusing on the inclusive perspective, in order to analyze the public policies of inclusion in the municipality and examine the pedagogical practices discussed in the literature

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BRAZIL

Inclusive education in Brazil is the result of a long process of struggles for rights, especially with regard to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the educational system (Perini, 2018). Historically, the educational care of individuals with special needs was

guided by a welfare and exclusionary model, in which people with disabilities were often segregated in specialized institutions, far from regular education. Until the mid-twentieth century, these institutions were mainly responsible for offering education, albeit in a limited way, to students with disabilities (Mendes, 2010).

It was only in the last few decades that Brazil began to adopt policies and legislation aimed at educational inclusion, aligning itself with global discussions on human rights and equal opportunities for all (Drago; Gabriel, 2023). The Federal Constitution of 1988 represented a milestone in this process by ensuring the right of all to education, without discrimination, and by providing for the provision of specialized educational services preferably in the regular school system (Brasil, 1988).

From the 1990s onwards, with the enactment of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) in 1996, Brazil has made significant progress with regard to inclusive education. The LDB emphasized the right of access to education for all people with disabilities, establishing the obligation of their insertion in regular classes, with the necessary specialized support (Brasil, 1996). This moment marked the beginning of a process of transformation of the Brazilian educational system, which began to adapt to meet the diversity of students.

HISTORICAL AND LEGAL APPROACH TO THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE REGULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM

The inclusion of students with special needs in the regular Brazilian education system was strengthened after the creation of the National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education (PNEEPEI) in 2008. This policy consolidated Brazil's commitment to full inclusion, reaffirming the right of all students, regardless of their conditions, to attend regular schools and receive adequate care for their needs (Brasil, 2008).

PNEEPEI introduced a new approach to special education, no longer seeing it as a parallel and exclusive system and starting to integrate it into common education. The policy establishes that specialized educational service (SES) should be carried out in regular schools, with the support of multifunctional resource rooms and the continuing education of teachers, in order to ensure that the teaching-learning process is inclusive and meets the uniqueness of students (Mantoan, 2015).

In addition to PNEEPEI, the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (LBI), sanctioned in 2015, reinforced the right to inclusive education, highlighting the importance of accessibility and non-discrimination at all levels of education. The LBI

stipulates that educational institutions, whether public or private, are required to offer the necessary adaptations to ensure that students with disabilities can study on equal terms with others (Brasil, 2015).

Another relevant document in this context is the National Education Plan (PNE), which establishes goals for the inclusion of students with disabilities at all levels of education. The PNE provides for an increase in the enrollment of students with special needs in regular schools and the improvement of infrastructure and training of professionals to ensure the quality of inclusion (Brasil, 2014).

This legal and normative framework has allowed significant advances in the inclusion of students with disabilities in Brazil. Data from the School Census show a continuous increase in the number of enrollments of students with disabilities in regular schools, evidencing the positive impact of these policies (INEP, 2022). However, there are still challenges to be faced, especially with regard to the effective implementation of inclusion in more vulnerable contexts, such as in small municipalities, where the scarcity of resources and the lack of specialized professionals compromise the inclusive process (Sassaki, 2010).

PUBLIC INCLUSION POLICIES IN BRAZIL

Special education in Brazil is governed by a series of laws and public policies that aim to guarantee the right to inclusive education for people with disabilities, global developmental disorders and high abilities (Mazzotta, 2011). At the federal level, the Federal Constitution of 1988 already established, in its article 208, that specialized care would be ensured preferably in the regular school system (Brasil, 1988). This commitment was reaffirmed with the enactment of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN), Law No. 9,394/96, which determined the need for curricular and methodological adaptations to meet the specific needs of each student (Brasil, 1996).

In 2008, the Ministry of Education (MEC) launched PNEEPEI, a milestone for inclusive education in the country. This policy established that regular schools should be the main place of schooling for students with disabilities, with the support of complementary SEA services. In addition, it provided for the implementation of multifunctional resource rooms, architectural accessibility, teacher training and the use of assistive technologies to promote inclusion (Brasil, 2008).

In 2015, the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Statute of Persons with Disabilities) brought significant advances by detailing the rights of people with disabilities in various areas, including the right to inclusive education. The Statute reinforces

that education must be offered in an inclusive manner at all levels and modalities of education, without discrimination and with equal conditions (Brasil, 2015).

STATE PUBLIC POLICIES

Brazilian states, within their spheres of action, have developed action plans and specific programs for the promotion of inclusion in special education. The State Education Plan (PEE), in many states, is aligned with the national guidelines established by the PNE that establishes goals and strategies for special education until 2024. Among the goals, Goal 4 stands out, which deals with the universalization of access to basic education for students with disabilities and the strengthening of specialized educational service (SES) (Brasil, 2014).

Each state seeks to adapt these guidelines to its reality, according to financial capacity and regional demands. For example, the state of São Paulo, through Resolution SE 68/2017, reorganized the functions of SEA teachers and established a support network for regular schools, promoting the continued training of educators and the expansion of multifunctional resource rooms (São Paulo, 2017). Other states, such as Amazonas, have also invested in teacher training and expanding access to assistive technology for students with disabilities in more remote areas (Amazonas, 2020).

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC POLICIES

At the municipal level, inclusion policies often reflect local conditions, both in terms of infrastructure and human resources. The Municipal Education Plans (PME), aligned with the PNE, guide actions for special education, adapting national guidelines to local particularities. However, small municipalities face considerable challenges, such as lack of adequate funding, lack of specialized professionals, and scarcity of materials and assistive technologies (Garcia; Alves, 2021).

Some initiatives have been highlighted as good practices in smaller municipalities. In some regions, municipal departments of education have established partnerships with universities to train teachers in special education and develop low-cost assistive technologies. In addition, digital inclusion programs and the construction of support networks between schools have been viable strategies to promote inclusion in contexts of limited resources (Almeida, 2019). However, the implementation of these policies faces significant barriers, such as the scarcity of funds and the lack of qualified professionals in more isolated areas. The continuous training of educators, the adaptation of schools to

ensure architectural accessibility and the provision of full-time specialized care are still persistent challenges in many small municipalities (Fernandes; Santos, 2020).

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN SMALL MUNICIPALITIES IN BRAZIL

Municipal education networks in Brazil are responsible for most of basic education in the country, especially in early childhood education and elementary education. The decentralization of the educational system, provided for by the 1988 Constitution, established that municipalities would assume a large part of the responsibilities for education in their regions, promoting autonomy in the management of resources and in the execution of educational policies (Saviani, 2013). However, this autonomy is accompanied by considerable challenges, especially in small municipalities, where financial and human resources are scarce.

According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), more than 60% of Brazilian municipalities have less than 20 thousand inhabitants (IBGE, 2022). In these locations, the structure of educational networks is usually limited, with a reduced number of schools and specialized professionals, which directly impacts the quality of education offered. This context affects special education services more acutely, since the inclusion of students with disabilities requires adequate infrastructure, trained professionals, and specific pedagogical resources.

THE CONTEXT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN SMALL MUNICIPALITIES: CHALLENGES AND SPECIFICITIES

Since the implementation of the PNEEPEI in 2008, special education in Brazil has sought to integrate students with disabilities into the regular education system (Brasil, 2008). However, in small municipalities, this integration encounters more significant barriers. The lack of resources, combined with the difficulty of attracting and retaining trained professionals, makes the supply of specialized pedagogical support services insufficient (Cunha; Fernandes, 2020).

In addition, the organization of municipal education networks in these municipalities tends to centralize specialized support services in a few school units, which makes access difficult for students living in rural or remote areas. School transportation is another factor that impacts inclusion, as many municipalities are unable to offer an accessible and adequate service for students with disabilities (Soares, 2019). These structural obstacles hinder effective educational inclusion and often result in the exclusion of students with special educational needs from the teaching-learning process.

One of the main challenges faced by education networks in small municipalities is the lack of adequate infrastructure to meet the demands of special education (Mendes, 2010). The adaptation of schools, with the inclusion of accessibility ramps, adapted bathrooms and multifunctional resource rooms, is often unfeasible due to the budgetary limitations of the municipalities (Oliveira; Corrêa, 2021). In this regard, according to Mendes (2010), access to assistive technologies, which could facilitate the learning process of students with disabilities, is scarce, as most of these technologies require investments that go beyond the financial capacity of local administrations.

Another critical factor is the lack of trained professionals to work in special education. Although public policies emphasize the need for continuing education for teachers, few municipalities are able to offer regular training programs, especially in more isolated areas (Silva; Ferreira, 2017). For Moreira and Cabral (2021), the result is that many teachers are unprepared to deal with the specific demands of students with disabilities, which compromises the inclusion process and the academic performance of these students.

Local community participation also has a significant impact on special education in small municipalities. In many cases, the perception of inclusion of students with disabilities still faces prejudices and cultural barriers, which hinders the process of full integration (Gonçalves; Santos, 2018). Educational inclusion, in order to be effective, needs to have the support of families, managers and the community in general, which does not always happen harmoniously in smaller locations, where the proximity between community members can both facilitate and hinder the implementation of inclusive policies (Silva; Ferreira, 2017).

As Moreira and Cabral (2021) observe, special education in small municipalities does not only affect students, but also the social and economic dynamics of communities. When a student with disabilities does not receive the necessary educational support, their social integration and future participation in the labor market are impaired, which can result in greater social exclusion and dependence in the long term (Borges; Pereira, 2020). On the other hand, it also states that when inclusive policies are implemented effectively, the effects are wide-ranging, benefiting not only students, but promoting a more just and equitable society.

STRATEGIES AND GOOD PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The implementation of inclusive educational policies in small municipalities faces challenges related to the lack of human, financial and structural resources. However, well-founded strategies can turn these challenges into opportunities for innovation. According to

Carvalho (2014), public policies aimed at the continuing education of teachers, investments in school infrastructure and the strengthening of the educational support network are essential to ensure inclusive education. According to Mantoan (2015), a truly inclusive education needs to be based on the principle that all students, regardless of their differences, have the right to learn together and enjoy the same educational opportunities.

A relevant example of this need to improve public policies is the Inclusive Education Program, which aims to strengthen the management of special education in municipalities and train education professionals. Initiatives such as this have shown potential to foster the creation of more inclusive school environments, while addressing the specificities of each municipality (Brasil, 2008).

Improvements in teacher training and training

Teacher training and capacity building is a crucial factor for the effective implementation of inclusive education, especially in small municipalities, where there is often a lack of specialized professionals. According to Gatti (2019), teacher training needs to be aligned with the contemporary demands of inclusive education, and must include both theoretical and practical aspects. It is essential that initial and continuing education courses address the particularities of the education of students with disabilities, in addition to promoting a culture of inclusion inside and outside the classroom.

Therefore, the hiring of more specialized professionals should be encouraged, such as support teachers, Libras interpreters and SEA professionals, as recommended by legislation (Brasil, 2015). The creation of partnerships with universities and training centers can be an effective strategy to address the lack of local training. School infrastructure is one of the pillars of inclusive education and often one of the biggest challenges in small municipalities. Schools in isolated regions often lack physical adaptations and technological resources to adequately serve students with disabilities (Santos; Souza, 2021). According to Sassaki (2010), accessibility in schools should include everything from the physical adaptation of the space to the provision of assistive technologies, which are fundamental for the autonomy of students.

Figueira (2013) understands that investments in architectural adaptations, such as ramps, accessible bathrooms and multifunctional resource rooms, are essential to ensure the physical inclusion of students. In addition, the expansion of internet access and the availability of technological devices, such as adapted computers and augmentative and alternative communication software, can promote digital and pedagogical inclusion. The improvement of inclusive education also depends on an institutional commitment of city

halls and education departments, which need to act as facilitating agents in the inclusion process (Figueira, 2013). The entire list of actors must contribute to this process, from educational blinds, school principals and coordinators to public entities must be trained to implement inclusive practices and create collaborative environments within schools. According to Lopes (2017), inclusion is a process that must be planned and managed collectively, with the active participation of all actors involved.

According to Mendes (2010), one of the good practices in school management involves strengthening the dialogue between the school, the families and the community. When managers promote clear and open communication about the needs and potential of students with disabilities, a more welcoming and collaborative environment is created, so that the implementation of community projects aimed at inclusion can reinforce the commitment of the entire school community to the full development of students (Mendes; 2010).

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS AND MANAGERS IN OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

For inclusive good practices to be effective, it is necessary for teachers and managers to be aligned in their approaches. Teachers, as mediators of the learning process, must adopt differentiated and individualized pedagogical strategies, ensuring that all students can actively participate in the proposed activities. Administrators, on the other hand, need to ensure that these practices are supported by an inclusive school environment, which offers continuous technical and pedagogical support (Aranha, 2003).

As Mendes (2015) points out, teachers have a central role in the inclusion process, as they are responsible for adapting and differentiating pedagogical practices according to the needs of each student. To this end, it is essential that they are prepared and trained to deal with the particularities of inclusive education, including the use of accessible teaching resources and strategies that promote the active participation of students with disabilities.

According to Carvalho (2014), the continuing education of teachers is indispensable for the success of inclusive practices, as inclusion is a dynamic and constantly changing process. In this sense, training needs to address topics such as the use of assistive technologies, differentiated pedagogical strategies, and teaching methodologies that respect the learning pace of each student. While teachers deal directly with students and their pedagogical practices, educational managers, such as principals and pedagogical coordinators, have the function of ensuring that schools are prepared to receive these students, providing the necessary resources and support (Mendes. 2015). For Lopes (2017), the commitment of managers to inclusion should start with the planning of strategic

actions that involve all levels of the school, from the pedagogical team to the school community.

Carvalho (2014) argues that there should be a joint effort between managers and public agencies to ensure that the resources allocated to inclusive education are properly applied. The allocation of financial resources, the hiring of trained professionals and the promotion of continuing education programs are essential aspects for the consolidation of quality inclusive education in small municipalities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to discuss the services of care in special education in small municipalities, with emphasis on the inclusive perspective. Throughout the research, public inclusion policies, the role of managers and teachers, and the latent need to expand teaching and pedagogical practice in small municipalities, especially those with a greater need for investment, were analyzed. It was found that, although there are significant efforts to promote inclusion, there are still barriers related to inadequate infrastructure, lack of specific training of professionals and limited access to technological resources and adapted materials.

The main findings indicate that, despite these difficulties, good practices can be developed when there is an effective commitment from managers and continuous training of teachers. The role of these professionals is essential to transform the school environment into an inclusive and welcoming space for all students. The study also highlighted the importance of partnerships between city halls, universities and the local community as a strategy to expand opportunities for inclusion.

In this way, the study sought to contribute to the advancement of discussions on inclusive education in small municipalities from a more detailed perspective of the barriers and potentialities of special education services. By highlighting the need for continuous training of professionals and improvements in school infrastructure, the survey reinforces the importance of an integrated approach to inclusion, which involves teachers, managers, family members and the community.

In addition, this work offers theoretical subsidies for educational managers who seek to implement or improve inclusive policies in their schools. The analysis of good practices presented here can serve as a guide for future research on the topic aimed at discussing municipalities that face similar difficulties, especially with regard to teacher training and resource management.

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