


NEURODIVERSITY AT SCHOOL: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS AND BUILDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL

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ABSTRACT

This article addressed the relevance of educational and digital inclusion for neurodivergent students, focusing on the contributions of assistive technologies and personalized pedagogical practices in the school environment. The aim was to investigate how neuroscience and adapted pedagogical strategies can promote equity and academic, social, and emotional development of these students. The study used a bibliographic research approach, based on Bastos and Keller (1995) and Gil (2002), with the purpose of clarifying fundamental aspects of the theme and organizing existing information to respond to the research problem. Topics such as the role of neuroscience in supporting neurodivergent students, strategies for the formation of innovative citizens, technological practices applied to inclusive teaching and concrete examples, such as the impact of the Wall-F adapted piano, were analyzed. The results showed that the personalization of teaching, when associated with assistive technologies, favored the learning, autonomy and social interaction of students, in addition to evidencing the importance of teacher preparation to ensure the effectiveness of these practices. However, the study also pointed out challenges, such as the need for continuing education for teachers and the analysis of the long-term impact of inclusive initiatives. It was concluded that the integration between technology, neuroscience and pedagogical practices constitutes an essential approach to transform the school environment into a more welcoming and equitable space, stimulating new research that delves into these issues.

Keywords: Neurodivergence, Inclusive education, Assistive technology, Cognitive development, Pedagogical practices.

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of educational and digital inclusion has gained prominence in the contemporary context due to the growing demand for pedagogical practices that meet the needs of neurodivergent students. This issue has acquired even greater relevance in the face of the expansion of the use of assistive technologies as tools to promote equity, autonomy and cognitive development in the school environment. Inclusion, in this scenario, was understood as a collective effort to ensure that all students, regardless of their characteristics, can reach their full potential.

In view of this problem, this study aimed to investigate how neuroscience, together with educational and technological strategies, can contribute to the construction of inclusive and innovative environments. The research started from the following guiding question: what are the contributions of assistive technologies and adapted pedagogical practices for the inclusion of neurodivergent students in the educational environment?

To answer this question, a bibliographic research approach was used, based on the principles pointed out by Bastos and Keller (1995) and Gil (2002). According to Bastos and Keller (1995), scientific research is configured as a systematic investigation with the aim of clarifying aspects related to the theme under analysis. Gil (2002) points out that research is required in situations where there are gaps or disorder in the available information, requiring a methodical effort to reach coherent answers. This methodology allowed the analysis and integration of theoretical references that dialogued directly with the objectives of the investigation.

The development of the article was structured in four main sections. First, the theme Neurodiversity at School: A Dialogue Between Neuroscience and Inclusive Practices was discussed, highlighting the role of neuroscience in understanding the needs of neurodivergent students. Then, the Strategies for the Formation of Innovative Citizens were explored, relating educational and digital inclusion to the preparation of individuals for contemporary challenges. Subsequently, Strategies and Practices for Neurodivergent Students were addressed, emphasizing the importance of technological tools and adapted pedagogical methods. Finally, the Educational Transformations with the *Wall-F Adapted Piano initiative was analyzed*, which exemplified the impact of assistive technologies on inclusive education.

At the end, the results and discussions were presented, which reinforced the effectiveness of the strategies analyzed and pointed out challenges that demand attention,

such as the need for teacher training and studies that explore the impact of these practices in different contexts. Therefore, this article contributed to the understanding of the transformative role of digital technologies and inclusive pedagogical practices, while stimulating future reflections and investigations on the construction of a more equitable and innovative education.

NEURODIVERSITY IN SCHOOL: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN NEUROSCIENCE AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

The evolution of neuroscience offers significant perspectives for understanding and managing the needs of neurodivergent students in the school environment. Mourão-Júnior, Oliveira and Faria (2011) emphasize that advances in this area enable innovative treatments and approaches for neurological disorders that impact millions of people annually. This progress, in addition to directly benefiting health, has relevant implications for the educational field, as it allows pedagogical strategies to be adjusted based on the functioning of the Central Nervous System. In consonance, Santos and Sousa (2016) highlight that neuroscientific knowledge has promoted improvements in the quality of life of society and contributed to practical solutions to educational problems, reinforcing the need for a continuous dialogue between neuroscience and education.

In this context, educational interventions play a central role in the inclusion of neurodivergent students. Hugo *et al.* (2024) point out that these interventions should be personalized, considering the individual characteristics of each student, especially in the case of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and high abilities. Such interventions, when well structured, aim not only to meet the specific needs of students, but also to enhance their academic and socio-emotional development. In this way, personalization becomes an indispensable tool to promote effective inclusion, aligning with the contributions of neuroscience.

In addition, curricular differentiation emerges as an essential strategy to meet the demands of students with double exceptionality. As described by Hugo *et al.* (2024), this practice allows the adaptation of teaching content and methods to the students' skills and interests, ensuring a more balanced development. This approach, grounded in advances in neuroscience, provides a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Narciso *et al.* (2024) reinforce this idea by arguing that inclusive pedagogical practices should ensure equitable access to learning, regardless of students' abilities or needs.

In addition, curriculum enrichment and acceleration programs are highlighted as effective strategies to meet both high abilities and needs related to ASD (Hugo *et al.*, 2024). These practices allow students to explore their interests and talents more deeply, while receiving support in dealing with the challenges associated with neurodiversity. By implementing these programs, schools can create an environment of engagement and belonging, promoting school inclusion that goes beyond intentions, as Narciso *et al underline*.(2024), by arguing that inclusion should be supported by concrete actions and effective policies.

Finally, neuroscience sheds light on the importance of evidence-based educational practices for neurodivergent students. Mourão-Júnior, Oliveira and Faria (2011) and Santos and Sousa (2016) agree that scientific advances offer not only solutions to neurological problems, but also tools to transform education into a more inclusive space. In this sense, it is essential that schools adopt an integrated approach, combining personalized pedagogical strategies with knowledge from neuroscience, in order to ensure that all students, regardless of their characteristics, reach their full potential.

EDUCATIONAL AND DIGITAL INCLUSION: STRATEGIES FOR THE FORMATION OF INNOVATIVE CITIZENS

Educational inclusion is essential for building a more equitable society that is prepared for contemporary challenges. According to Stainback (1999),

When appropriate programs are in place, inclusion works for all students with and without disabilities, in terms of positive, mutually developed attitudes, gains in academic and social skills, and preparation for community life (p. 22).

This statement reinforces that inclusion benefits not only the students directly involved, but also the school community as a whole, promoting a more collaborative and inclusive learning environment. In addition to the school environment, the role of the family is equally crucial for the success of educational inclusion. Szymanski (2009) highlights that "the family environment is conducive to numerous activities that involve the child in an intentional action" (p. 24). This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating families into the educational process, creating a support network that expands the possibilities of children's development. In this way, inclusion is not limited to the school space, but expands to everyday life, enhancing the integral formation of students.

Educational inclusion must also prepare citizens to face the challenges of the contemporary world. In this sense, Moran (2004, cited in Santana *et al.*, 2021) emphasizes: "society needs innovative people, who adapt to new challenges, possibilities, jobs and situations" (p. 2090). This vision dialogues directly with the concept of inclusion, which values the diversity of experiences and skills as sources of innovation. Therefore, by promoting inclusion, the school and society not only meet the immediate needs of individuals, but also collaborate for the development of citizens capable of transforming the world.

On the other hand, digital inclusion has been a significant challenge in the contemporary context. Bonilla (2009, cited in Santana *et al.*, 2021) warns that "throughout Brazil and around the world, there is a need for digital inclusion projects that, in reality, are nothing more than computer rooms with the use of leveling programs" (p. 2092). This critique highlights the need to rethink digital inclusion initiatives, broadening their scope to encompass practices that develop technological and creative skills. Only in this way can digital inclusion effectively contribute to the formation of citizens able to face the demands of the twenty-first century.

Thus, educational and digital inclusion must be understood as an indispensable foundation for the formation of innovative individuals prepared to transform society. As pointed out by Stainback (1999), Szymanski (2009) and Moran (2004, cited in Santana *et al.*, 2021), inclusion must transcend good intentions, being based on concrete actions and connected with the reality of each individual. By articulating efforts between school, family, and society, it is possible to build truly inclusive environments, where all students can develop their potential and contribute to a more just and equitable future.

DIGITAL INCLUSION AND STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Educational and digital inclusion is an indispensable approach for neurodivergent students, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Studies show that the use of digital technologies can significantly improve the communication, socialization, and cognitive development of these students. Digital platforms, when personalized, offer a protected and nurturing environment, allowing students to learn and express themselves in ways that respect their interests and abilities. This ability of digital tools to adapt not only

supports learning, but also expands the possibilities of social interaction, promoting a more inclusive and participatory environment (Narciso *et al.*, 2024).

The effectiveness of digital technologies, however, is directly related to their integration with pedagogical practices adapted to the individual needs of students. The literature emphasizes that the school inclusion of children with ASD requires personalized pedagogical adaptations, which consider both the diversity of the class and the specificities of each student (Weizenmann *et al.*, 2020). These adaptations include the planning of differentiated activities and the use of resources that ensure the active and effective participation of all in the teaching-learning process.

In this sense, the training and preparation of educators are also essential factors. Research indicates that teachers' beliefs and previous experiences significantly influence the pedagogical approach used with neurodivergent students (Sanini; Bosa, 2015). Thus, investing in continuing education and technical support for teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive practices.

Differentiated pedagogical practices have been shown to be effective in favoring the interaction and learning of neurodivergent students. Among the strategies, the use of technological tools that enable the personalization of teaching stands out. Resources such as augmentative and alternative communication applications have been widely used to facilitate the interaction of students with difficulties in verbal communication. Such tools allow students to express themselves in a functional way, strengthening their autonomy and participation in the school environment.

In addition, the use of adapted digital platforms, such as virtual learning environments, allows the adjustment of content to the pace and individual needs of students. This type of personalization enhances student engagement and motivation, contributing to more meaningful learning. These pedagogical strategies are aligned with the need to promote inclusive environments that respect the unique characteristics of each student (Favoretto; Lamônica, 2014).

In the practical context, the application of digital technologies can include the use of applications such as 'Proloquo2Go', which helps students with ASD to communicate through visual icons and sentence construction. This technology directly supports students who face verbal communication difficulties, promoting their active participation in school activities. Another relevant initiative is the use of virtual environments such as *Google*

Classroom, which can be configured to meet the individual needs of students, offering interactive and adapted content.

In addition, gamification in teaching is a strategy that can benefit neurodivergent students, by integrating game elements that encourage engagement and learning (Santana *et al.*, 2024). By personalizing these activities, educators are able to align pedagogical content with students' interests, creating a more inclusive and stimulating learning environment.

Educational and digital inclusion for neurodivergent learners requires an integrated approach that combines adaptive technologies with personalized pedagogical practices. The use of digital tools, combined with strategies that respect the particularities of each student, promotes not only learning, but also autonomy and social interaction. In this way, the school can transform into a truly inclusive space, where all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential in a welcoming and equitable environment.

INCLUSION AND INNOVATION: EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS WITH THE WALL-F ADAPTED PIANO

The delivery of the *Wall-F piano* at APAE in Lages, Brazil, is a concrete example of how assistive technology can transform the educational environment, especially for neurodivergent students. This initiative demonstrates the practical application of the concepts discussed in the literature on educational and digital inclusion. According to Narciso *et al.* (2024), the use of digital technologies has the potential to expand communication and cognitive development of individuals with specific needs, being essential to provide meaningful and personalized experiences. The *Wall-F* piano, with its innovative design, reflects this approach by offering a sensory resource that combines music and technology to support emotional and cognitive development.

The use of music as a therapeutic and educational tool in the context of inclusion is widely recognized in the literature. Adapted pedagogical strategies, such as those provided by the *Wall-F* piano, dialogue with the ideas of Weizenmann *et al.* (2020), which emphasize the importance of adapting pedagogical resources to meet the diversity of classes. The adapted piano not only facilitates students' interaction with musical content, but also promotes the development of skills such as concentration and emotional expression. Thus, initiatives like this represent a significant advance in the creation of more inclusive and stimulating educational environments.

In addition, the *Wall-F piano project* illustrates how the union between technological innovation and social responsibility can generate transformative impacts on education. The partnership between the robotics team of the SESI Lages School, the Sicredi Social Fund, and the *Rotary Club* reflects the importance of intersectoral collaborations to enable inclusive solutions. Sanini and Bosa (2015) argue that the success of inclusive practices depends not only on actions in the school environment, but also on the involvement of the community and institutions. This collaboration exemplifies how joint efforts can result in initiatives that transform lives and strengthen the link between technology and education.

The delivery of the *Wall-F piano* also reinforces the need to go beyond traditional teaching, embracing projects that directly impact the quality of life of students. Favoretto and Lamônica (2014) highlight that differentiated pedagogical practices favor learning and interaction, especially for students with specific needs. In this context, the adapted piano allows students to explore music in a meaningful way, promoting not only learning, but also emotional balance and connection with the environment.

This initiative represents a milestone in the advancement of inclusive education, highlighting the importance of integrating assistive technology with innovative pedagogical practices. As pointed out by Narciso *et al.* (2024), customizable digital tools such as the *Wall-F piano* create opportunities for neurodivergent students to express themselves and develop their skills in protected and stimulating environments. Thus, projects like this exemplify how education can be transformed through the union between technology, inclusion and innovation.

In summary, the *Wall-F adapted piano* not only transforms the educational experience of APAE students in Lages, but also serves as an inspiration for the creation of similar initiatives in other institutions. By integrating music, technology, and social responsibility, this action highlights the potential of inclusive education to promote human development and equity in the school environment.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the study highlight the importance of integrating digital technologies and inclusive pedagogical practices to meet the needs of neurodivergent students. Technological tools, such as adapted digital platforms and assistive resources, have been shown to be effective in promoting the autonomy, socialization, and cognitive development of these students. In addition, it was evidenced that strategies such as curricular

personalization and the use of sensory resources, exemplified by the *Wall-F piano*, contribute to create more welcoming and equitable environments. Such initiatives not only support learning but also promote emotional balance and social interaction, reinforcing the positive impact of innovative and collaborative approaches.

The table presented helps the reader of this research to realize that the contributions of the different authors converge to reinforce the importance of educational and digital inclusion, especially in the context of neurodivergent students.

Table 1 - Referenced authors

Author(s)	Year of Publication	Research Subject	Relevance of the Research
Mourão-Júnior, Oliveira and Faria	2011	Neuroscience and its impact on education and health	Advances in neuroscience allow the creation of pedagogical strategies based on the functioning of the Central Nervous System.
Santos e Sousa	2016	Contributions of neuroscience to education	It relates neuroscientific advances with improvements in the quality of life and solutions to educational problems.
Hugo <i>et al.</i>	2024	Educational interventions and personalization for neurodivergent learners	She defends personalized interventions as fundamental for the academic and socio-emotional development of students with ASD.
Narciso <i>et al.</i>	2024	Use of digital technologies for inclusion of neurodivergent students	It points out how digital technologies can support communication, socialization, and cognitive development in educational settings.
Weizenmann <i>et al.</i>	2020	Pedagogical adaptations for the inclusion of students with ASD	It emphasizes the need for differentiated pedagogical planning to meet the diversity in classrooms.
Sanini and Bosa	2015	Influence of teachers' beliefs and experiences on inclusion	It points out that the technical and emotional preparation of teachers is essential for successful inclusive practices.
Favoretto and Lamônica	2014	Differentiated pedagogical strategies	It highlights that differentiated practices favor the learning and interaction of students with specific needs.
Stainback	1999	Educational inclusion as a tool for academic and social gains	It states that adequate inclusion programs benefit students with and without disabilities, promoting learning and coexistence.
Szymanski	2009	Role of the family in educational inclusion	It emphasizes the importance of the family environment to support the development of children in inclusive practices.
Moran	2004 (cit. em Santana <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Inclusion and innovation in education	It argues that education should form innovative citizens, adaptable to the challenges and changes of contemporary society.
Bonilla	2009 (cit. em Santana <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Digital inclusion in Brazil and challenges	It criticizes limited digital inclusion projects, advocating for practices that develop technological and creative skills.

Source: author himself.

These findings underscore the need for a continuous dialogue between neuroscience, education, and technology to expand the possibilities of school and social

inclusion. The personalization of teaching methods, based on neuroscientific principles, has proven to be an essential practice to ensure equity in access to education. The relevance of these practices transcends the school environment, as it forms individuals who are more prepared to face contemporary challenges, as defended by Moran (2004, cited in Santana *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the integration of digital technologies into education is not only a pedagogical strategy, but also a tool for social transformation.

The results of this study converge with the conclusions of Narciso *et al.* (2024), which highlight the impact of digital technologies on the cognitive development and communication of neurodivergent students. In addition, they reinforce the findings of Weizenmann *et al.* (2020), which highlight the need for personalized pedagogical adaptations to meet diversity in the classroom. The existing literature, such as that of Favoretto and Lamônica (2014), also corroborates the idea that differentiated pedagogical strategies are fundamental to ensure the learning and interaction of students with specific needs. In this way, the present study broadens the understanding of the role of assistive technologies in educational inclusion, connecting to a growing body of evidence on the effectiveness of these practices.

Despite the advances presented, some limitations must be considered. One of them is the need for cultural and regional contextualization of inclusive practices, as pointed out by Bonilla (2009, cited in Santana *et al.*, 2021), which criticizes digital inclusion projects limited to basic infrastructure. In addition, the effectiveness of digital technologies depends on teacher training and preparation, an area that still faces significant gaps, as highlighted by Sanini and Bosa (2015). Finally, the initiatives analyzed, such as the *Wall-F* piano, still lack longitudinal studies to evaluate their long-term impact on neurodivergent students.

Some unexpected results emerged from the analysis, such as the initial resistance of some educators to the use of digital technologies, even in adapted environments. This resistance can be explained by the teachers' beliefs and previous experiences, as discussed by Sanini and Bosa (2015), who state that such factors significantly influence the teaching-learning process. In addition, a lack of familiarity with technological tools may have limited the full exploration of their benefits. These results point to the need for continuing education and technical support for professionals involved in inclusive education.

Based on the limitations and findings of the study, it is suggested that future research be conducted that explores the following aspects:

1. **Long-term impact:** To investigate the effects of assistive technologies, such as the *Wall-F piano*, on the academic and social-emotional development of neurodivergent students over the years.
2. **Effectiveness in diverse** contexts: Analyze how inclusive practices and digital technologies adapt to different cultural and economic contexts, expanding their applicability.
3. **Teacher training:** Develop and evaluate continuing education programs for teachers, focusing on the use of digital technologies in inclusive pedagogical practices.
4. **Digital inclusion:** Explore approaches that transcend basic infrastructure, promoting the development of technological and creative skills in students with specific needs.

These directions can contribute to further strengthening the field of inclusive education, integrating neuroscientific, technological, and pedagogical advances in favor of a more equitable and innovative society.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to explore the relevance of educational and digital inclusion in the context of neurodivergent students, highlighting how assistive technologies and personalized pedagogical practices can transform the school environment into a more welcoming and equitable space. Through the analysis of various initiatives and theoretical frameworks, it was possible to meet the proposed objectives, demonstrating the importance of integrating neuroscientific, technological, and pedagogical advances to promote equity and autonomy for these students.

The results achieved reinforce that the personalization of teaching, combined with the use of technological resources, favors not only academic development, but also the emotional balance and social interaction of students. In addition, initiatives such as the *Wall-F piano* illustrate how the union between technological innovation and social responsibility can generate significant impacts, offering new possibilities for educational inclusion.

Despite the advances presented, the study also identified challenges that need to be faced, such as the need for continuing education for teachers and the deepening of research on the effectiveness of these practices in different contexts. Such questions

underscore the importance of a collective effort involving educators, institutions, communities, and researchers to expand the possibilities of inclusion.

Thus, it is encouraged that more studies be carried out on this topic, focusing on the development of new assistive technologies, the adaptation of pedagogical practices to different realities and the analysis of the long-term impact of inclusive initiatives. In this way, it is hoped that this article will contribute to broaden discussions and inspire actions that promote a truly inclusive and transformative education.

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