

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: FORMATIVE DEMANDS OF PROFESSORS AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN PARANÁ (UENP) – JACAREZINHO CAMPUS



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## **ABSTRACT**

Inclusive Education encompasses the provision of education for all people, whether they have disabilities or not. This theme has been discussed for more than twenty years when we look at Basic Education, however, the inclusion of students Target Audience of Special Education in the University is currently beginning its rise. In order to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities, universities and higher education institutions have developed support centers to think about Inclusive Education. At the State University of Northern Paraná - UENP, in 2022 the Student Support and Assistance Center - NAE was created, in addition to offering pedagogical and psychological support to students, the center is also responsible for training teachers for Inclusive Education. This study aimed to identify the formative demands related to special education of university professors at UENP at the Jacarezinho Campus. For this purpose, a questionnaire was prepared and applied to 33 teachers from the Jacarezinho Campus. The data pointed to an increase in the number of students Target Audience of Special Education in undergraduate courses, and the growing concern and need of teachers to be trained to work with this public. The teachers pointed out the importance of the pedagogical support to be offered by the NAE and the themes of Special Education, the main one pointed out was the formative need to deal with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The collection of these data is extremely important because it allows the continuing education offered by the NAE to be in line with the real needs of the university, thus favoring a cultural and postural change to promote the inclusion of PAEE students.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Higher Education, Teacher Training.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a social right and must be guaranteed to all students, whether they have disabilities or not, regardless of socioeconomic conditions, gender, race, color, and psycho-emotional conditions. Permeating education is inclusive education, which refers to the provision of an education that encompasses all students, their peculiarities and differences (UNESCO, 1994). For this, it is necessary to incorporate all students to the various levels of education, especially those students who for some reason were excluded from the educational process, among them, the Target Audience of Special Education (Rodrigues, 2007). The Target Audience of Special Education (PAEE) is composed of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders and high abilities/giftedness (Brasil, 2008).

Glat (2007) states that inclusive education should be understood beyond a new educational proposal, but as a new school culture. This perception of school culture and inclusive education is also elucidated by Pimentel and Nascimento (2016, p. 105):

The proposal of inclusive education is based on the philosophy of the school that accepts and recognizes diversity, having its principle based on the search for quality education for all. Therefore, the construction of an inclusive school implies necessary architectural, attitudinal and pedagogical changes; therefore, it implies the construction of an inclusive culture.

In this project, we transpose this concept to the university culture, when we refer to an inclusive culture we are referring to the promotion of a culture within the university that recognizes and works with diversity in its different aspects: people with disabilities, global developmental disorders, social and racial differences, psychological specificities, discussions about gender, and so on.

The way in which the traditional university has been historically structured, through a single, rigid curriculum, which treats students from a homogeneous point of view and expects them to respond satisfactorily in the same way, has meant that the culture promoted within the university has been a segregating culture of exclusion, which reproduced the hegemonic patterns of society (Pimentel; Nascimento, 2016). To break with this perspective of segregation, it is necessary that all the people responsible for promoting this culture (teachers, students, managers, servers, the academic community and family) can reflect on the themes that are part of inclusive education and can resignify attitudes, thoughts and practices, in order to promote this new culture in the academic environment.

Although the 90s were marked by great discussions about inclusion, fostered by public policies and researchers in the area, this problem remained concentrated in Basic

Education, while the discussion about inclusion in Higher Education was still scarce (Santos; Hostins, 2015). Oliveira (2011, p. 31) points out that:

Little has been documented about the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education, indicating a lack of reflections, studies and statistics, which makes it difficult to formulate public policies that contemplate actions that promote inclusive education in higher education as well.

The State University of Northern Paraná (UENP) is a multi-campus university composed of the Jacarezinho, Cornélio Procópio, and Bandeirantes Campuses, which established the Student Support and Assistance Center (NAE) in 2022. The Student Support and Assistance Center – NAE, is a body directly linked to the UENP Rector's Office that dialogues with all Pro-Rectories and Coordinators, through actions that promote, as a priority, conditions of permanence for students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses at UENP, in the face-to-face and distance learning modalities, from the perspective of inclusion and diversity. The services offered by the NAE include: psychological support (APSI), pedagogical support (APEI), social support (APSO), student housing, and the University Commission for Indigenous People (CUIA).

The APEI offered by the NAE aims to welcome, guide and monitor PAEE students and functional disorders in order to ensure the permanence of this public in the university and their effective learning for the training of trained professionals. Its operation is similar to the Specialized Educational Service (AEE) offered to PAEE students in basic education, however, it is the offer of SEA in higher education. However, although APEI offers individual assistance to PAEE students, there is another demand at the university that corresponds to the training of professors to work with PAEE students.

In this context and due to the importance of the aforementioned problem, this study aimed to identify the formative demands related to the special education of university professors at UENP at the Jacarezinho Campus. In this way, it is possible to outline continuing education for teachers in line with the real needs of the university.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **TYPOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

This is an exploratory study and Severino (2013) clarifies that exploratory research seeks to gather information about a given object in order to delimit a field of work and map the conditions of manifestation of this object.

## PARTICIPANTS

33 UENP higher education professors working in nine undergraduate courses at the Jacarezinho Campus participated in the research. The table below elucidates the number of professors and the respective course they belong to:

TABLE 1. SURVEY RESPONDENTS.

Higher Education Course	Number of teachers who responded to the questionnaire
Right	8
Pedagogy	7
Life Sciences	5
Physical education	3
Dentistry	3
Mathematics	2
History	2
Physiotherapy	2
Philosophy	1
Total	33

SOURCE: THE AUTHORS

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

According to Barbosa (2008), the questionnaire is a data collection instrument widely used in educational research. It allows you to gather a series of pertinent information. In this sense, a questionnaire was prepared consisting of questions through the *google forms platform*. The questionnaire was composed of the informative part that corresponded to the identification of the professors and their respective courses and later the following questions were asked:

1. In the discipline you teach, is there any student who is the target audience of special education? Which one(s)?
2. For you, what are the attributions of inclusive pedagogical support (APEI/NAE) at UENP?
3. What kind of support would you like APEI to offer to teachers?
4. Would you like to participate in lectures/training aimed at strategies for the inclusion of students with disabilities at the university? If so, list the themes you would like to be worked on.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

After the questionnaire was prepared, an individual meeting was held with the course coordinators of the 11 undergraduate courses of the CJ, namely: Biological Sciences, Law,

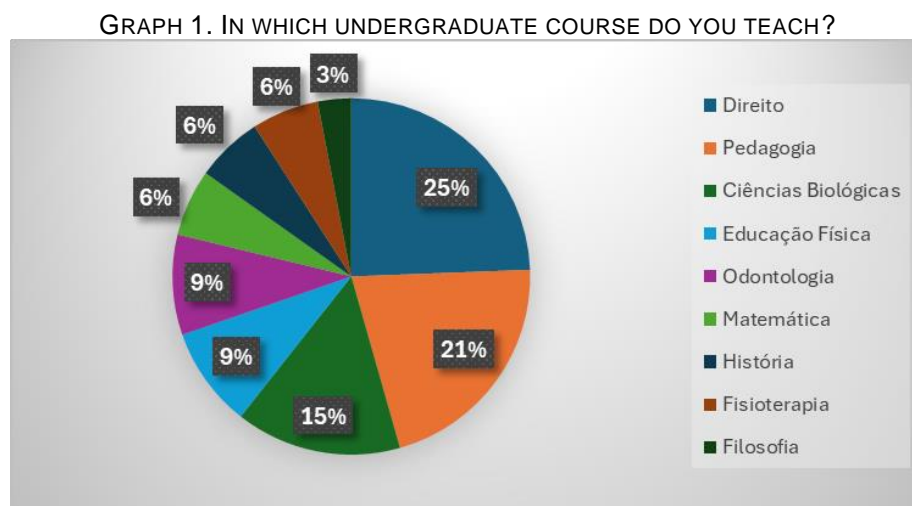
Pedagogy, Philosophy, Languages (English and Spanish), Physical Education, Physiotherapy, Dentistry, History, and Mathematics. On this occasion, the work carried out by the NAE was presented, talked about specific cases of students Target Public of Special Education (PAEE), and the respective questionnaire was sent to the coordinators so that they could forward it to the teachers of their collegiate. After being sent by the coordinator, the questionnaire was resent twice via email requesting wide dissemination to the professors.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected by the questionnaire were tabulated via excel for quantitative analysis and also analyzed qualitatively through the bias of content analysis (Bardin, 2005).

## RESULTS

The questionnaire had a total of 33 responses, with the law course comprising the largest number of responses (24.2%), totaling 8 faculty responses, and the philosophy and mathematics courses obtained only one professor's response, as illustrated in graph 1 below.

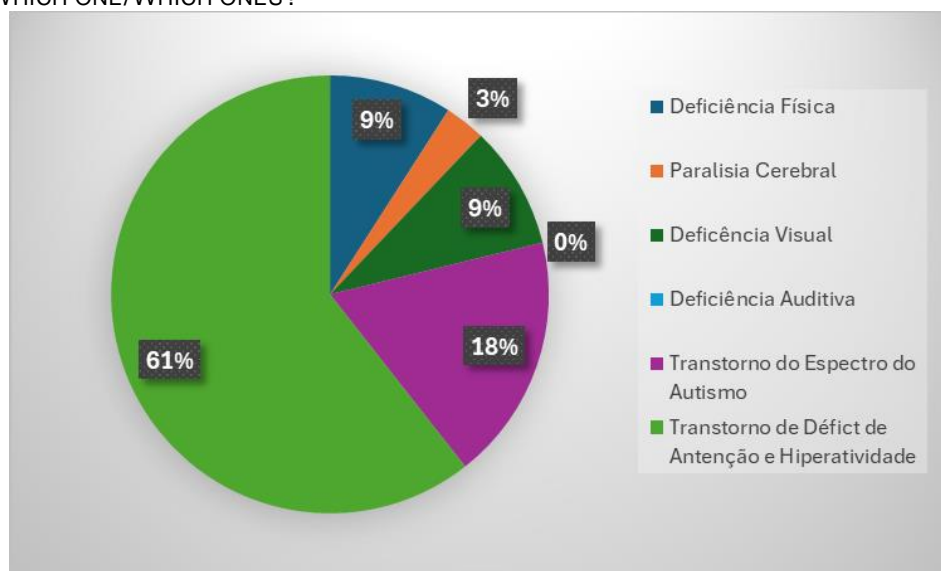


SOURCE: THE AUTHORS

It was possible to verify that although the university has several undergraduate courses, which in theory are more concerned with the issue of Inclusive Education, such as Pedagogy, Biological Sciences, Physical Education, Mathematics, History and Philosophy, the greatest adherence to the questionnaire response came from the Law course. It is

important to emphasize that the articulation between the university, the collegiates, the professors, and the NAE is extremely important so that the work carried out by the pedagogical support can be strengthened.

GRAPH 2. IN THE DISCIPLINE YOU TEACH, IS THERE A STUDENT WHO IS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION? WHICH ONE/WHICH ONES?



SOURCE: THE AUTHORS

It is possible to notice a gradual increase in enrollments of the Special Education Target Audience - PAEE in higher education from the 2000s onwards and more expressively from 2010 onwards (Olivate et al. (2020). Law 13.409 (Brasil, 2016) that provides for the reservation of vacancies for people with disabilities in higher education institutions is one of the factors that impacted this increase to happen. This increase is graphically shown in the following figure:



FIGURE 1. YEAR AND NUMBER OF ENROLLMENTS OF PAEE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION ACCORDING TO INEP.



FONTE: OLIVATE ET AL. (2020, P.34)

The increase in the number of PAEE enrollees in higher education highlights the need to think about an accessible university, as shown by Wellichan and Souza (2017, p. 146):

In the educational area, in higher education, for example, the growing increase in the number of enrollments in the university environment demonstrates how far people with disabilities can go, demystifying years of the history of exclusion. And for this inclusion to actually happen, it is necessary to look at what was previously the focus of basic education, rethinking the entire concept of accessibility, practices and coexistence, reviewing the space of Higher Education as a whole.

This thought is in line with the Special Education Policy in the Perspective of Inclusive Education, which provides that for an educational institution to be inclusive it is necessary to work on the elimination of architectural, attitudinal, and pedagogical barriers (Brasil, 2008).

An alternative that came to meet this demand to look at the PAEE in higher education was the creation of accessibility centers within universities (Melo; Araújo, 2018). The creation of these centers was encouraged by the Accessibility in Higher Education Program - Incluir Program, created by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2005 (Brasil, 2005). The Incluir Program aimed to encourage the access, permanence and completion of students with disabilities in this type of education. In short, the accessibility centers, also in some institutions of accessibility commission, aim to promote the inclusion of PAEE students in higher education. In the state of Paraná, the reference for this type of work is



the accessibility center of the State University of Londrina (UEL), which has been working since 1993 to promote inclusion in higher education.

At the State University of Northern Paraná - UENP, the creation of the Student Support and Assistance Center dates back to 2022. Among the works and actions offered by this nucleus (mentioned above in the introduction), this work focuses on the provision of pedagogical support. Regarding the attributions of pedagogical support, the teachers signaled some demands that need to be contemplated, in the table below follows the suggestions indicated by some teachers.

TABLE 1. SUGGESTIONS FROM TEACHERS ON THE ATTRIBUTIONS OF PEDAGOGICAL SUPPORT AT UENP.

Intervention planning: developing personalized pedagogical intervention plans, adapting curricula and teaching methods to meet the individual needs of students.
Support and guidance: Offer ongoing support and guidance to teachers in implementing inclusive strategies in the classroom, ensuring that all students have access to educational content equitably.
Development of resources: create and make available adapted pedagogical materials, such as audiovisual, tactile or digital resources, that facilitate learning with special needs.
Training and capacity building for educators, school staff and families, aiming to increase awareness and the ability to deal with diversity in the school environment.
Planning of actions that ensure the access, permanence and participation of students in research, teaching and extension activities at the university, preferably those Target Audience of Special Education.
Assist in the inclusion of students who need special care; train teachers and staff for this inclusion; evaluate the effectiveness of the inclusion of students with special needs within the courses.

Technical support
What strategies to use for students with intellectual disabilities, ASD, and how to help students continue studying.
Training in LIBRAS
Training of teachers and staff for inclusive education
Suggested means of effective inclusion
Training including precautions to be taken
Provide training for teachers to work with the target audience of special education
Guidance on how to proceed in cases of inclusion
More direct support channel for teachers who have students with special needs, with an emphasis on specific guidance, based on existing cases in the classroom
Active Listening

SOURCE: THE AUTHORS

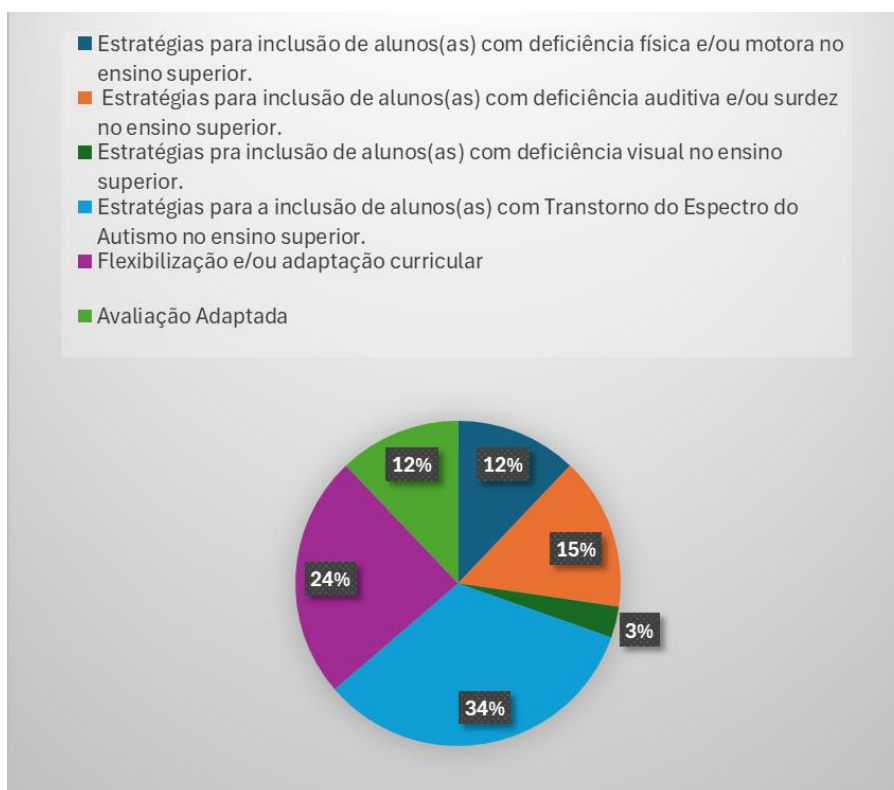
The answers above showed that teachers feel the need for specific support regarding Inclusive Education and they evidence this by asking for training and/or training and also specific case studies. Knowledge is constantly evolving, the continuing education of teachers in this sense is extremely important to update teachers, thus collaborating in the inclusion of PAEE students in higher education. This training should always be offered with the reflective teacher in mind (Alarcão, 2012), in the promotion of formative moments that

provide opportunities for reflection on practice and on practice (Schon, 2000), in order to resignify the teaching actions towards PAEE students.

Candido; Birth; Martins (2016) in a bibliographic and documentary study on the inclusion of PAEE students in higher education, concluded that pedagogical work is extremely important for the promotion of inclusion in the university.

Regarding training demands, the theme that stood out was "Strategies for the inclusion of autistic students in higher education" (33.3%), followed by "theme of curricular flexibility" (24.2%), "inclusion of students with hearing impairment in the university" (15.2%), "adapted assessment" (12.1%), "inclusion of students with physical and/or motor disabilities" (12.1%). and "inclusion of visually impaired students" (3%). As the following chart illustrates:

GRAPH 3: WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN LECTURES/TRAINING AIMED AT STRATEGIES FOR THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE UNIVERSITY? IF SO, LIST SOME THEMES THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE WORKED ON.



SOURCE: THE AUTHORS

The main formative demand evidenced by the teachers was related to the inclusion of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD in higher education. The abrupt increase in students with ASD in higher education impacted this formative need reported by professors (Olivati et al.; 2020). Another point to be considered is that when we have a

visually impaired student, we know the importance of adapting materials through auditory and tactile pathways; when we have a student with hearing impairment, we resort to the LIBRAS interpreter and visual stimuli; when we have a student with physical and/or motor disabilities, we think about architectural accessibility and accessibility resources; but, when we have a student with ASD, there is no standard performance to be offered because within the spectrum each individual is unique and will have peculiarities, thus making it more difficult for teachers to promote the necessary adaptations.

The inclusion of students with ASD in higher education has proven to be a great challenge. Aguilar and Rauli (2020) carried out a research with the objective of identifying, from the point of view of the student with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the process of adaptation to the university, the difficulties faced, the strategies used and the resources offered by the universities. Seven students with ASD enrolled in university courses participated in the research, and the focus group technique was used for data collection. After analysis, the authors pointed out that:

The participants reported difficulties in obtaining didactic-pedagogical adaptations, despite the existence of centers for this purpose. Although each autistic person demands specific interventions, the HEI needs to build mechanisms that welcome them and favor the inclusion process. Universal measures, available to all academic staff, with a focus on promoting equity, advocating and valuing diversity, and educating the campus community by providing information about ASD are necessary not only for the inclusion of autistic people, but for the construction of a fairer society for all (Aguilar, Rauli, 2020, p.1)

Melo; Constant; Ferreira (2023) also aimed to identify the main difficulties encountered by students with autism in higher education, but through the literature review, the studies surveyed show that the main barriers that impact the permanence of students with ASD in higher education refer to the lack of information in the academic community, the lack of teacher training.

The data collected showed the need for the NAE to work not only with the offer of pedagogical support to PAEE students, but also in the offer of continuing education of teachers in order to qualify the university's teaching staff to work with students with disabilities. In addition, it is essential that training and awareness actions take place for the entire academic community, favoring the promotion of inclusive culture and valuing diversity.

## REFLECTION ON TRAINING STRATEGIES TO SERVE STUDENTS WITH ASD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The growing increase in students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in universities reflects advances in access to education, driven by inclusive public policies, such as the *National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education* (BRASIL, 2008). However, guaranteeing the right to permanence and effective learning of this public requires continuous teacher training, guided by strategies that meet the specificities of ASD.

One of the main difficulties reported by teachers is the absence of clear and adaptable strategies, given the heterogeneity of the autistic spectrum (AGUILAR; RAULI, 2020). Each student has particularities, such as different levels of social interaction, sensory sensitivity and learning styles. For this reason, **there are no single or standardized pedagogical solutions**. In this sense, it is essential to adopt an approach that considers the individuality of each student, prioritizing the development of flexible and reflective teaching skills.

Alarcão (2011) emphasizes the importance of the reflective teacher, who analyzes his practice and constantly adapts to the needs of the students. This reflection should be encouraged through continuing education that addresses **case studies**, inclusive pedagogical practices, and interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals. Schon (2000), when dealing with the concept of reflection on practice, proposes that teachers should experience formative processes that challenge them to think critically about their pedagogical strategies and adjust them in real time.

Among the most relevant training strategies for the care of students with ASD, the following stand out:

1. **Training for curricular flexibility:** Curricular adaptation is essential to allow content to be accessible to students with ASD. This may include the use of visual resources, structured activity scripts and active methodologies that favor the organization and predictability of the academic environment (MELO; CONSTANT; FERREIRA, 2023).
2. **Improvement of communication skills:** Training in inclusive communication should be prioritized. Teachers need to learn to use clear, objective and accessible language, avoiding ambiguities that can generate confusion. In addition, knowledge **of Brazilian Sign Language (LIBRAS)** is essential, especially for autistic people who have concomitant deafness or verbal difficulties.

3. **Case studies and individualized strategies:** According to Aguilar and Rauli (2020), each autistic person demands specific interventions. Training that analyses concrete case studies allows teachers to better understand individual needs and learn how to develop personalised pedagogical plans.
4. **Sensitization and awareness of the academic community:** The promotion of an inclusive culture goes beyond teaching. It is necessary that the entire academic community, including managers, employees and classmates, be sensitized about ASD, demystifying prejudices and encouraging welcoming practices (GLAT, 2007).
5. **Use of assistive technology:** The introduction of digital resources and assistive technology, such as learning support software and applications for organizing routines, can be worked on in training as tools that facilitate the learning of students with ASD.

The role of universities, through their **Accessibility and Pedagogical Support Centers**, such as UENP's NAE, is fundamental to provide this continuous teacher training based on scientific evidence. Melo and Araújo (2018) highlight that such centers should act not only in direct support to students, but also in **teacher training**, promoting meetings, workshops and lectures that dialogue with the real demands of teachers and the target audience of special education.

Finally, it is essential to emphasize that the inclusion of students with ASD in higher education cannot be seen only as a technical or individual issue. The construction of an **inclusive culture**, as advocated by Pimentel and Nascimento (2015), depends on attitudinal, pedagogical and institutional changes that transform the university into a truly accessible and welcoming space. In this process, training strategies for teachers are the starting point to ensure that diversity is recognized and valued as an integral part of academic practice.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The increase in PAEE students in higher education has impacted the way the university is organized and it is necessary to restructure the offer of pedagogical support and training actions that effect the inclusion of PAEE students in the university. University professors do not feel prepared to work with the PAEE and highlight the need for training and collaboration to promote inclusion in undergraduate and graduate courses. Among the

work with the PAEE and other themes related to Inclusive Education, the promotion of training that works with the theme of ASD was the main need reported by the teachers.

In this sense, training strategies aimed at serving students with ASD should be a priority in continuing teacher training. Curricular flexibility, the use of assistive technologies, the offer of specific case studies, and training in inclusive pedagogical practices are essential to meet the particularities of the autism spectrum. In addition, raising awareness among the entire academic community and building an inclusive culture are essential for the permanence and development of these students in higher education. Such actions, when articulated by support centers, such as the NAE, have the potential to transform universities into more welcoming and equitable environments.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the inclusion of the PAEE student in higher education must go beyond the sphere of pedagogical and psychological support offered by the institution. There needs to be a profound cultural change in which diversity is valued, the protagonism of students with disabilities made possible, thus promoting representativeness, and above all that the academic community as a whole adopts a posture of welcoming and valuing differences, overcoming the biological model of disability and promoting inclusion within the university.



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