

## Um breve estudo sobre desigualdades vivenciadas por alunos com deficiência na pandemia da COVID-19

*Jessica Hilário PINTO<sup>1</sup>*  
*Gláucia Vieira CÂNDIDO<sup>2</sup>*

### Resumo

O artigo refere-se a um breve estudo acerca de situações de desigualdades que pessoas com deficiência podem enfrentar no contexto educacional brasileiro. Por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa, o objetivo desta pesquisa foi refletir sobre a inclusão em experiências vividas por estudantes com algum tipo de deficiência durante o período da pandemia da COVID-19. Para tanto, investigou-se um *corpus* composto por dados obtidos por meio da aplicação de um questionário respondido por um conjunto de mães, responsáveis por acompanhar, em suas respectivas casas, seus filhos com deficiência durante as aulas remotas. Os resultados deste estudo revelam que, no contexto pesquisado, apesar de os princípios de inclusão terem levado à criação de diversas leis e decretos, ainda é necessário reconhecer a complexidade que envolve a efetivação da educação inclusiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação. Desigualdade. Inclusão. Pessoas com Deficiência.

---

<sup>1</sup> Master's student in Education at the State University of Goiás. Tenured teacher at the Municipal School Professor Maria Eugênia Pessoa Borges. ORCID. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0055-0534>  
E-mail: [jhessica\\_hilario@hotmail.com](mailto:jhessica_hilario@hotmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. in Linguistics (2004) from the State University of Campinas (Unicamp). Faculty member of the Department of Linguistics and Portuguese Language. ORCID. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3790-9192>  
E-mail: [glaucia\\_candido@ufg.br](mailto:glaucia_candido@ufg.br)

## **A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic**

*Jessica Hilário PINTO*  
*Gláucia Vieira CÂNDIDO*

### **Abstract**

The article refers to a brief study about situations of inequality that people with disabilities may face in the Brazilian educational context. Using a qualitative approach, the objective of this research was to reflect on inclusion in the experiences of students with some type of disability during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, a corpus composed of data obtained through the application of a questionnaire answered by a group of mothers, responsible for monitoring, in their respective homes, their children with disabilities during remote classes was investigated. The results of this study reveal that, in the researched context, although the principles of inclusion have led to the creation of several laws and decrees, it is still necessary to recognize the complexity involved in implementing inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Education. Inequality. Inclusion. Disabled people.

## **Un breve estudio sobre las desigualdades experimentadas por estudiantes con discapacidad en la pandemia de COVID-19**

*Jessica Hilário PINTO  
Gláucia Vieira CÂNDIDO*

### **Resumen**

El artículo hace referencia a un breve estudio acerca de las situaciones de desigualdad que las personas con discapacidad pueden enfrentar en el contexto educativo brasileño. A través de un abordaje cualitativo, el objetivo de esta investigación fue reflexionar sobre la inclusión en experiencias vividas por estudiantes con algún tipo de discapacidad durante el periodo de la pandemia del COVID-19. Para ello, se investigó un corpus compuesto por datos obtenidos mediante la aplicación de un cuestionario contestado por un conjunto de madres, responsables por acompañar a sus hijos con discapacidad, en sus respectivos hogares, durante las clases remotas. Los resultados revelan que, en el contexto investigado, aunque los principios de inclusión hayan llevado a la creación de diversas leyes y decretos, aún es necesario reconocer la complejidad que involucra la concreción de la educación inclusiva, especialmente en situaciones de crisis como la vivida en razón de la pandemia del COVID-19.

**Palabras clave:** Educación. Desigualdad. Inclusión. Personas con Discapacidad.

## **Introdução**

This article presents results from a study focused on the persistent inequalities in educational contexts in Brazil, specifically those experienced by people with disabilities. The emphasis on this topic arises primarily because it is one of the main issues reinforcing the persistence of social inequalities faced by the Brazilian population in general. Therefore, it is a subject that needs to be addressed in greater depth within the academic sphere.

In addition to this, there is a need for more research focused on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>3</sup>, set by the United Nations (UN). In particular, Goal 10, which aims <sup>4</sup>, to reduce inequalities in Brazil and achieve social justice for various minority groups, including people with disabilities.

Additionally, the authors, being educators, have opportunities within their work environments to observe the experiences of students with disabilities. Beyond the students themselves, it is impossible to overlook the role played by the families of these students, particularly mothers who, in many cases, are the sole educational caregivers for their children, whether they have disabilities or not.

Given the topic in question and the guiding concerns of the study presented here, this text aims to reflect on some of the inequalities experienced by people with disabilities during a recent period in our history: the COVID-19 pandemic, declared in March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), due to the infection and death of millions of people worldwide caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Covid-19).

Like other misfortunes recorded in human history, the COVID-19 pandemic caused numerous and diverse harms across the globe. In addition to the threat to people's physical health, mental health was also strongly affected due to the fear of the dangerous virus, which caused thousands of deaths and brought much sadness, anxiety, and anguish to large segments of the global population. Other factors, such as the requirement for social distancing and the resulting financial crisis due to the

---

<sup>3</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals are part of the so-called “2030 Agenda,” the global pact signed during the United Nations Summit in 2015. This agenda includes 17 interconnected goals, broken down into 169 targets, aimed at overcoming the main development challenges faced by both the Brazilian and global populations (UNITED NATIONS, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Target 10.2 aims to empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all people by 2030, in order to reduce inequalities regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, economic status, or other factors. (Available at: <https://www.ipea.gov.br/ods/ods10.html>. Accessed on: October 5, 2022).

closure of businesses, also contributed to a significant increase in psychological and psychiatric disorders during this period.

The pandemic caused drastic changes in everyone's daily lives, particularly regarding social contact. There is no doubt about the importance, after the global health crisis was declared, of isolating people in their homes. As COVID-19 cases confirmed and the number of deaths increased, the need to maintain hygiene measures and social distancing became evident. At the same time, the urgency to resume professional activities in various sectors of society (business, industry, culture, among others) through alternative means such as remote work and the provision of services when possible, became more pronounced.

In this study, we highlight the demands of formal education, which also had to adapt to remote formats. After an initial period of total suspension of teaching and learning activities in educational institutions, teachers, students, and other education professionals resumed their activities while respecting the spatial distancing mandated by state decrees and the Ministry of Education, that is, by conducting their activities from their respective homes.

In various ways, especially from an economic standpoint, this situation demanded efforts from the entire school community. For teachers accustomed to delivering their classes primarily in person, they had to enhance their skills and competencies in using various technologies such as Google Meet, Zoom, Classroom, among others. They needed to develop pedagogical proposals focused on distance education to deliver their classes initially in a fully remote format<sup>5</sup>, and, later, also in a hybrid format<sup>6</sup>.

Similarly, students also had to adapt to these two modes of formal education, particularly due to financial difficulties, which are often faced by students in public schools. The lack of financial stability significantly worsened the situation for these students, leading to a substantial number of them abandoning their studies due to digital exclusion affecting a large portion of the population.

Another noted aspect is that families across all social classes had to increase their involvement in their children's educational process, especially for students in Early Childhood Education and the early years of Elementary School.

---

<sup>5</sup> Classes conducted exclusively in an online format, meaning teaching and learning occurred through applications and the internet. When this was not possible due to technical issues, such as lack of internet signal or financial constraints preventing the purchase of data packages or even computers or cell phones, activities were, in some cases, reproduced on paper and distributed to students with the necessary precautions.

<sup>6</sup> A methodology that combines teaching and learning in both in-person and remote formats, allowing students to access content delivered by instructors either in the classroom or at home, through online or even offline means.

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This complex shift in the teaching/learning format for thousands of students worldwide during the pandemic has led to many negative consequences for Brazilians. Specifically, concerning the education and learning of students with disabilities and the involvement of their caregivers in remote learning, it is possible to analyze data generated during the period when classes were conducted remotely. In this regard, there are already published studies, such as the work organized by Neiza de Lourdes Frederico Fumes and Bruno Cleiton Macedo do Carmo (2021), where scholars presented, in nine chapters of the e-book, data and impressions on how the educational crisis resulting from the global health emergency caused by COVID-19 highlighted the exclusion experienced by people with disabilities in the educational scenario.

In line with this reasoning, we conducted a brief study focusing on a specific situation involving a group of students and their families from the city of Damolândia, a municipality in the interior of the State of Goiás, Brazil, with a population of approximately 2,900 inhabitants. To carry out the study, we drew on the works of Arroyo (2009), Bezerra and Reis (2011), Araújo (2014), Baudelot and Establet (2014), Pinto and Sobral (2017), Pinto and Cândido (2020), Pletsch (2020), Guia COVID-19 (2020), Saviani and Galvão (2020), Fumes and Carmo (2021), among others. Starting with a brief review of recurring inequality formats in the school environment throughout the 20th century, our main objective in this study was to highlight the experiences of people with disabilities both inside and outside educational institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically examining data collected from the city of Damolândia-GO, seeking evidence of inclusion. To conduct the research, we first carried out fieldwork to collect data considering the social distancing requirements in place. Thus, data collection was done via video calls on the WhatsApp application, with the interlocutors being the educational caregivers of a group of four students with disabilities enrolled in schools in the municipality. Based on the application of a structured questionnaire with open-ended questions, testimonies were collected from four mothers of students who, like their peers, had to attend remote classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. After compiling the research corpus, the obtained data were systematized and analyzed based on the theoretical foundations of Hermeneutic-Dialectic analysis (MINAYO, 2002).

## **History of Public Education in Brazil: Pathways of Inequality**

Public education in Brazil began to expand from the mid-20th century, influenced by the process of industrialization and urbanization. These changes led to significant shifts in both the social and political structures of the country. Among these transformations, the state's prioritization of

education stands out. Until that time, education was considered a privilege for a select few, typically the more economically advantaged groups.

At that time, public education was evaluated as being of good quality, with reasonable salaries for professionals, adequate infrastructure, and appropriate technical and pedagogical materials for formal and technological education. However, this was not a reality shared by everyone; rather, it was limited to a small segment of the population. The majority remained underserved in terms of schooling and excluded from the formal education system.

In this context, it was paradoxical that the 1967 Constitution provided for education as a right for all. It mandated that education be offered free of charge for a minimum cycle of eight years (BRASIL, 1967). Despite this, as mentioned, few Brazilians, generally from less privileged groups, had access to this right. Although the sixth Brazilian Constitution promised access to what was termed democratic education, the necessary conditions for these individuals to enter and remain in school until the end of their schooling were not effectively implemented.

Baudelot and Establet (2014, p. 199) report that the educational path for a representative group of students resembled a process of social selection and elimination. The authors note that, while the relative weight of children from more privileged social classes was initially minority, it continued to increase over the years, to the detriment of students from less privileged backgrounds.

On the other hand, we cannot overlook the beginning of the process of democratizing education in this context. From the moment that basic education became mandatory, even with a negligible offer of places, public schools transformed into institutions that, at least in legal documents, promised equal access to education for the entire population of the country (ARAÚJO, 2014).

Given this factor, the change in the scenario is clear. The existing inequality was initially linked to the lack of access to education, and this disparity began to be associated with the failure within schools experienced by people with lower purchasing power. The reality is that, even though educators deliver educational content to students using the same methodologies and language, these contents could not be received with the expected equity due to social inequalities.

In light of this situation, the less privileged population also began to recognize and demand quality education. However, the barriers to achieving this right expressed in Brazilian legislation remain in place today. Even if a citizen aspires to pursue a dignified and continuous educational path, they often find that their chances of completing this journey are minimal, as they might be among "the 80% who

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic are failed, repeaters, multiple repeaters, outdated, or who have dropped out" (ARROYO, 2009, p. 153).

Arroyo's (2009) observation, made more than a decade ago, continues to echo and reinforce the fact that formal education in Brazil remains distant from addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups in society. This is due to longstanding issues faced by public education, ranging from inadequate infrastructure to a lack of public policies aimed at improving and constantly updating education professionals, as well as promoting the training of future teachers.

Returning to the main focus of this text formal education for people with disabilities historical issues can explain the current situations of exclusion and school dropout experienced by these individuals. Thus, the next section will present a brief history of how the process of inclusion of people with disabilities in public schools has been developed.

## **Inequality: People with Disabilities and Their History**

Human diversity is an inherent aspect of any society, but the way societies are organized can lead to certain expressions of this diversity resulting in phenomena of inequality (SANTOS, 2008, p. 510). Inequality, as a concept opposed to 'equality,' often affects individuals deemed different from the societal norm of 'normal.' This is particularly evident for people with disabilities and other minority groups who frequently experience inequality simply because they do not conform to societal standards.

In this context, it is important to mention the historically determined social standards of disability. Firstly, the social model of disability, which was developed in response to the medical model. In the latter, according to Lanna Júnior (2010), individuals with disabilities are treated as "patients," with their bodies identified as having some "problem" or "defect" that is seen as the cause of deviation from "normality" and as an exclusive attribute of these bodies. Thus, based on an exclusively pathological view of disability, the medical model ignores the factor of diversity and reinforces the exclusion of people with disabilities based on a clinical diagnosis of "abnormality."

From the social model, however, there is a shift towards seeking the restoration of the individual's integrity and their inclusion in economic, political, and cultural spaces. In this model, the clinical explanation of disability as a pathological diagnosis proves insufficient for understanding "the relationships between people, between them and the environment, and between them and the established rules of coexistence" (CARVALHO, 2014, p. 35).

Historically, physical or intellectual disabilities often elicited feelings of compassion, pity, and even aversion from others. These reactions can be attributed to, among other factors, a lack of information about the various disabilities and the individuals who have them. In the past, total rejection or overprotective attitudes towards people with disabilities contributed significantly to the establishment of shelters, hospitals, and even prisons where these individuals were "deposited" (VIGNON; SALIBA, 2015, p. 212). Removed from their families and excluded from mainstream society, people with disabilities were also separated from the educational environment, limiting their exposure to only assistive settings.

In the 19th century, following years of research on the conditions experienced by people with disabilities, educational practices focused on psychopathology were developed in Brazil and other countries (PINTO; SOBRAL, 2017, p. 146). These practices, which targeted mental disorders and/or diseases, involved medical treatments aimed at the rehabilitation, readjustment, or adaptation of individuals with disabilities. The main goal of such treatments was generally to reduce the burden on families and society by making individuals with disabilities more physically and mentally autonomous. However, this did not yet ensure education for people with disabilities, who remained somewhat segregated.

Over time, rehabilitation centers and so-called "special schools," such as the Pestalozzi Association of Goiânia<sup>7</sup> and APAE<sup>8</sup> (VIGNON; SALIBA, 2015) began to emerge. These developments indicated that society was starting to move towards the acceptance that people with disabilities, with specialized education and training, could be "productive" members of their communities. Despite the maturation of such ideas and apparent progress, resistance and prejudice in society remain evident. The expansion of education, as mentioned in the previous section, which made it possible for minorities to access public schools, was one of the goals of Brazilian educational policy aimed at integrating people with disabilities into schools, the workforce, and society in general, considering the integrated policy of human development. However, providing access to education for students with disabilities does not necessarily mean that these students were actually learning formal

---

<sup>7</sup> Based on the principles of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's philosophy, who incorporated affection into the classroom, the Pestalozzi Association of Goiânia is a philanthropic institution founded in 1970 by a group of parents, students, and education professionals. Available at: <https://pestalozzigoiania.org>. Accessed on: August 30, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Initially named the Association of Parents and Friends of Exceptional Individuals (APAE), it is an institution that emerged to "address the state's inefficiency in providing adequate assistance to individuals with Intellectual Disabilities or Multiple Disabilities." Available at: <https://apaebrasil.org.br/conteudo/quem-somos>. Accessed on: August 30, 2023.

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic school content in an equitable manner. This can be observed in some situations that occurred in what is known as the New School movement, an educational reform movement that developed strongly in Europe, the United States, and Brazil during the first half of the 20th century.

In this educational proposal of the New School movement, a process of classifying students began with the use of tests, such as the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scale, which defined levels of intelligence. Based on these tests, students were separated, leading to the creation of so-called “special classes,” which functioned both within and outside the school environment, marking the beginning of yet another cycle of segregation (PINTO; CÂNDIDO, 2020).

Positively, particularly in recent decades, people with disabilities have started to demand rights that had been historically denied to them, leading to the emergence of public policies in favor of this social segment. In Brazil, such policies are based on the current key legal document, the Brazilian Constitution of 1988. Thus, from the individual demands of each type of disability, it is possible to observe that more and more people have been included in the labor market and regular education. Consequently, their needs were recognized, highlighting the necessity for new ideas to implement diverse teaching methodologies to better serve them. This marks the beginning of a new way of viewing inclusion in schools (PINTO; CÂNDIDO, 2020, p. 316).

However, even though the ongoing struggle for the rights of this minority group of students has gained momentum, situations of what is termed “inclusion on paper” (PLETSCH, 2020, p. 61) are still evident within numerous educational institutions. Although students with disabilities may be enrolled in regular classes, many of them actually attend only specialized educational support rooms (*Atendimento Educacional Especializado* - AEE) or, if they do enter the general classroom, they often engage in different activities from their peers or, in even worse situations, are left in a corner of the classroom, ignored as if they were invisible and incapable of learning.

In summary, these situations highlight processes of inequality experienced by people with disabilities for an immeasurable amount of time. The implementation of important documents guaranteeing educational rights for people with disabilities undeniably represents progress. However, this is still not sufficient, as these documents ensure access to education but do not guarantee the effective participation and inclusion of these students in the school environment.

During the recent international health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the inequalities in the educational process for people with disabilities were further highlighted by emergency actions that, overall, did not meet the needs of this student population. Among the government actions was

the flexibility of school days. Starting in April 2020, Article 1 of Provisional Measure No. 934 established that,

the basic education institution is exempt, exceptionally, from the obligation to observe the minimum number of school days, [...] provided that the minimum annual workload established by the aforementioned provisions is fulfilled, in accordance with the regulations to be issued by the respective education systems (BRASIL, 2020, p. 1).

Following this document, Brazilian states discussed the possibility of remote activities. This unprecedented mode of education, according to Saviani and Galvão (2020), differs from distance education as it did not meet the minimum conditions necessary for expected teaching in an emergency situation. Furthermore, the authors highlight the difficulties faced by most students and even teachers in accessing educational activities conducted remotely.

The social role of the school is essential for human development (Souza and Dainez, 2020). However, when focusing on educational aspects related to people with disabilities, it is clear that remote education fails to fulfill this educational role effectively. Generally, this type of education showed more positive results for students with economic means to access the necessary equipment.

Additionally, we must not overlook the physical and mental conditions required for students to attend hours of classes via computer screens or mobile devices. For most students with disabilities in public schools, access to remote education proved to be extremely difficult or non-existent, so the longstanding inequalities experienced by people with disabilities and their families in schools may have worsened during the pandemic, as reflected in the next section.

## **COVID-19 Pandemic: Inequality Experienced by People with Disabilities**

The discussion presented here begins with a brief investigation of narratives produced by mothers of students with disabilities regarding their children's educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. All the students were enrolled in the municipal education network of Damolândia, a town with an estimated population of 2,900 inhabitants, located 50 km from the capital of the State of Goiás, Goiânia.

Although the data *corpus* is preliminary and the investigation is introductory, the aim is to provide important reflections on inclusion in public education in the mentioned municipality. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach was chosen, based on the fact that the aspects addressed here cannot be quantified but focus on the "understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social relations" (SILVEIRA; CÓDORVA, 2009, p. 32). Thus, our study is grounded in aspects that facilitate the

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic understanding of how teaching and learning occurred for students with disabilities in the aforementioned research *locus* during the period when they could not attend school.

The paths followed by the study were marked by four stages. The first stage involved defining the research participants. The initial criterion for this was the presence of medical and psychological reports for students with disabilities, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or some level of Dyslexia. Within the group of eligible students, four participants were selected—all of whom were mothers of children with some type of disability enrolled in school and who were required to participate in remote activities.

The second phase of the investigation consisted of checking the availability of the participants, which occurred when they were invited to participate in the research. In the third stage, interviews were conducted through pre-scheduled individual video calls via the WhatsApp application. The interviews began with an introduction to the topic and objectives of the research, followed by a period for the participants to ask questions. At this time, the consent form was read and signed.

In this stage, the participants committed to sharing their opinions about the research and answering the questions spontaneously, without direction from the researchers. To maintain neutrality in the data collection process, the interviewers pledged not to intervene in the participants' responses.

The fourth and final stage was based on Hermeneutic-Dialectic, which allows for a reflection grounded in two approaches for "conducting the process in both a comprehensive and critical analysis of social reality" (MINAYO, 2002, p. 14). This stage involved the organization, classification, and analysis of the narratives from the mothers of students with disabilities, provided in their responses to the questionnaire used in the research.

The following table provides a summary of basic information about the research participants, including their age, professional role, their children's disabilities (if any), and the grade level their children were in at the time of the interviews with their guardians. It is important to clarify that, to uphold the principle of impersonality, the participants' names will not be disclosed. In this study, to individually reference each participant, we have chosen to honor the vaccines created to combat SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, our collaborators will be referred to by the fictional names of Mother Coronavac, Mother AstraZeneca, Mother Pfizer, and Mother Janssen.

**Table I:** Mothers of Students from the Municipal Network of Damolândia – GO

Research participants	Age	Professional Role	Son's class	Child's Disability
Mother <i>Coronavac</i>	40 years	Teacher	4th grade	Does not have
Mother <i>Astrazaneca</i>	30 years	Homemaker	5th grade	Dyslexia.
Mother <i>Pfizer</i>	25 years	Pastry Chef	3rd grade:	Does not have
Mother <i>Janssen</i>	39 years	Teacher	4th grade	Autistic

Source: Prepared by the author (2021).

For the collection of data to constitute the research corpus, we applied a brief questionnaire consisting of three open-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to allow interviewees to expand their answers beyond what was requested in the questions if they wished to do so. This structured approach was intended to ensure the impersonal nature of the study and to provide consistency in the evaluation of each situation presented. The questions in the questionnaire were as follows:

- 1) What was your reaction when you found that your child needed your help to complete school activities? (Beginning of remote learning)
- 2) Did the teachers provide the necessary instructions and support to ensure that the education was delivered satisfactorily?
- 3) Did you ever consider giving up on your child's education at any point?

The first question refers to the attitude of the mothers participating in the research regarding the obligation to help their children complete school activities that were previously done at school but, due to the pandemic, had to be done at home. In their responses, all participants unanimously reported their distress, particularly during the initial days of remote learning. However, they later indicated that they managed to balance their domestic routines with the task of supporting their children with remote school activities.

According to the data, some caregivers of students with disabilities chose to have their children watch the explanatory videos from the teachers, while others opted to explain the content by strictly following the activity schedule provided by the school. In this context, it is understood that the accessibility outlined in Opinion No. 05, dated April 28, 2020, was partially achieved, as stated in this document,

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic  
Non-face-to-face pedagogical activities, whether mediated by digital information and communication technologies or not, will adopt equally guaranteed accessibility measures while the impossibility of face-to-face activities persists at the educational institution where students are enrolled, whether in basic or higher education (BRASIL, 2020b, p. 14).

However, one of the participants, Mother Janssen, reported that her child did not adapt to the routine of home-based school activities, consistently showing reluctance to complete the tasks. In this case, therefore, the accessibility outlined in Opinion No. 05, dated April 28, 2020, was indeed not achieved. In analyzing the other responses, in line with the COVID-19 Guide (2020, p. 11), we observed the importance of reviewing and adapting learning objectives and expectations for the isolation period. Otherwise, the social role of the school as a formative institution for citizens may be overlooked.

Another aspect to highlight concerns the disciplinary content that teachers needed to deliver to students in isolation. In this regard, Mother Coronavac notes: “It seems that the knowledge was reduced to the minimum that teachers could manage, just so that students wouldn’t be ‘idle’ at home without anything to do. I think it was a way to ensure they wouldn’t forget what they had already learned.” Similarly, Saviani and Galvão (2021, p. 42) reported that during the pandemic, there was

little teaching, little learning, little content, little class time, and little dialogue. On the other hand, there were many tasks. From the students' side, they were supposedly becoming “autonomous” and seeking their own knowledge, overwhelmed by the multiplication of readings, videos, podcasts, webinars, etc.

In line with the authors, we observed that despite the reduction in teaching content, dialogue between teachers and students, and class time, there was a considerable increase in the number of teaching activities. Reports indicate that even while at home, teachers faced difficulties balancing their work hours (organizing materials, responding to student messages, and delivering lessons). Similarly, students had to practice self-directed learning, as they often needed to understand content provided for their class on their own or seek help from household members to try to comprehend what was being “taught” to them.

The second question directed at the mothers participating in our research addressed the role of teachers in providing instructions and support to students and their families during the completion of proposed activities. In response to this question, Mother Coronavac noted that the support her child received was considered average or regular. Mother Astrazeneca reported having no issues, as she received full support from her child’s teacher. In contrast, Mother Pfizer reported difficulties, as she had to seek help from others. According to this respondent, her child’s educator did not respond to

her calls. Another complicating factor, according to this mother, was the difficulty in resolving her child's doubts through the videos provided.

These testimonies reveal quite different attitudes from the educators working with the children of our research participants. Regarding Mother Pfizer's account, studies have shown that, due to the prevailing tension during the pandemic, some behaviors of professionals can be attributed to the demands of adapting to remote teaching, which brought them work overload and “even the circumstances arising from social distancing” (SCHORN; SEHN, 2021, p. 4).

In her response to question 2, Mother Janssen adds: “It seemed like my son wasn’t even part of the class. It was as if he were invisible. The teacher even confused his name. The support teacher merely ‘adapted’ the activities, as if that was enough for him to complete them and learn.” Unfortunately, this is not an isolated experience. From our teaching practice and personal experience, we know that this was also the reality for the majority of students with disabilities in the public education system during the pandemic. The connection between knowledge and students in remote classes was challenging for all students, but those with disabilities faced even greater difficulties due to some professionals’ inadequate inclusion efforts.

In a study published before the COVID-19 health crisis, Bezerra and Reis (2011, p. 30) discussed negative experiences faced by students with disabilities and their caregivers, and pointed out ways for education professionals to address these issues. According to these authors, it is necessary that,

the people involved in the process persist, accept the challenges, believe that it is possible, and expand the actions taken. Only then will education cease to be a mere formality, an aspect guaranteed by legislation and educational documents as it is still seen by many and become increasingly real in schools. (BEZERRA; REIS, 2011, p. 30).

With the third question, we aimed to identify whether the participants had considered abandoning their children's education during the pandemic. Regarding this, Mother Coronavac responded: “Yes, I gave up! But then I quickly sought help from a professional in the field to assist him at home, because I was no longer able to ensure that the activities were completed with my help. So I preferred to pay!” Similar to Mother Coronavac, many other mothers made similar decisions, as they felt their homes were not being perceived by their children as a study environment, and this resistance naturally led them to seek new resources.

In contrast, Mother AstraZeneca responded to the question by stating that she never considered giving up, as she was able to ensure that her son continued to complete his activities. However, she noted

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic that "on some days," he did not complete any of them. She described that on these occasions, her son showed behavioral changes, becoming tearful and locking himself in his room, so it was necessary to let him calm down before trying to resume the activities the next day. Nevertheless, during these times, the teacher was very understanding and exhibited a supportive attitude towards her student with a disability.

In this regard, it is worth recalling Bezerra and Reis's (2011) words about the need for empathy and understanding from professionals concerning the living conditions of students who require special attention. This involves constantly keeping in mind the importance of respecting "individual differences and the great diversity of learning styles present in the school context, acknowledging each person's uniqueness and emphasizing their competencies" (BEZERRA; REIS 2011, p. 22).

Still regarding question 3, participant Mother Janssen provided the following response:

I seriously considered withdrawing him from school. He did not develop anything during this pandemic. He couldn't reconcile that home was also a place for studying. Therefore, the activities were left undone. I even went to the school to ask for help to get him back to school, but initially, I couldn't because no students had returned yet. Only after a few months did they call me to sign the authorization for him to attend school three times a week so he could gradually readjust to the routine. Returning helped him a lot!

In the above testimony, it becomes evident, in our perception, that students with disabilities are constantly sidelined, as if they were invisible beings. Once again, we refer to the COVID-19 Guide (2020, p. 10) to remind us that

This disregard reflects the still shocking invisibility that this segment of the population faces in Brazil, both in education and other sectors, despite significant legislative advances. Special Education students still seem to occupy a secondary status, where education is seen as a favor or a merit to be earned.

Overall, all the interviewees reported facing significant difficulties with their children's adaptation to remote learning. Although such challenges were experienced by all families, regardless of whether their children were students with disabilities or not, the routine for students with disabilities and their families was notably more exhausting. This is evident in the narrative of participant Mother Janssen, whose child has ASD. According to the mother, the decision to withdraw her child from school was crucial for the school to finally mobilize to meet his special needs. However, this was done through the involvement of professionals who were not adequately trained to include students with disabilities, as their roles were limited to sending activities that were adapted to lower levels than those of their peers, without implementing more concrete actions that could help the child grasp the content taught to the entire class. Thus, even though there was initially a positive

initiative, it ended up excluding him, as he was not engaging in the same activities as the other students.

In conclusion, these data support the idea that the inequalities experienced by people with disabilities in the past continue to persist today. In particular, they demonstrate that these inequalities were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. As expected, this situation has caused discomfort for students and their families, as well as for all those who continue to see barriers that should not be present in the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

Therefore, there remains a need for the engagement and commitment of all sectors of society to effectively include people with disabilities in the educational environment. As stated, conscious or unconscious acts of exclusion must be eradicated to make way for (re)recognition that difference is normal. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that differences, especially those represented by any type of disability, should not provoke fear or other inconceivable feelings today, and, most importantly, should not be subject to prejudice among education professionals. Instead, differences should be opportunities to expand our understanding of ourselves and others, because that is who we are: equal in our differences.

## **Final considerations**

This study reflectively addressed the situations of inequality experienced by students with disabilities in public schools during the pandemic. Specifically, this approach was carried out by presenting the results of the data analysis collected from a brief questionnaire administered to a group of mothers of students with and without disabilities from the municipal public network in the city of Damolândia, located in the state of Goiás.

In the first section, we discussed the historical trajectory of inequality within the educational sphere. As noted, such inequality has been present since the establishment of public regular education institutions. Although there was the provision of free and quality education in schools, the reality was that the retention of students with disabilities was only effective for those who could keep up with the content taught by the teachers. Ultimately, the teaching methods were tailored to the elite, so students who could not keep pace with the rhythm set by the educators ended up abandoning their studies.

In the following section, a brief historical trajectory of people with disabilities was presented, highlighting the struggle to secure the right to attend regular schools reflecting the ongoing efforts of

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic these individuals for greater societal inclusion. Despite existing laws that ensure the access and retention of students with disabilities in schools, there are still circumstances that suggest these rights remain largely on paper. The reality, which many of us as education professionals often witness, is that inclusion is still not fully effective. This is due to various factors, such as governmental neglect, the lack of professional training and interest in specialization in the field of inclusion, and inadequate school infrastructure, among others.

Although our study does not aim to generalize a situation, other studies on the topic, alongside statistical data and the experiences of the mothers participating in this research, lead us to reflect that Brazilian public schools continue to reproduce the exclusion of "non-dominant" groups. In such an environment, the "voices" of these groups are silenced, preventing them from expressing their identities, their living contexts, and their realities.

As discussions that have been ongoing for several years highlight the need for a shift toward pedagogical practices grounded in diversity, not in isolation but within the context where individuals are situated. For this to happen, it is crucial to sensitize everyone involved in the education of people with disabilities. All stakeholders must (re)acknowledge diversity and its importance, not just for students with disabilities but for society as a whole.

In this context, the perspective of society and, especially, educational institutions towards inclusion needs to move away from archaic views based on homogeneity—a prejudiced stance that fails to accept diversity. It is essential that exclusionary attitudes are reconsidered and eradicated from both the educational and social spheres.

The COVID-19 pandemic, despite its many unfortunate consequences, has also provided valuable learning experiences. One of these is the need to view others, particularly students with disabilities, as unique and naturally different individuals. Consequently, it is necessary to develop and implement specific methodologies for inclusive education, allowing these students to learn alongside their peer.

Looking back at the brief research, we highlighted its role in demonstrating how inequality has been and continues to be experienced by students with disabilities. We express our hope that schools, where the impact of this inequality is still evident, reflect on their practices to avoid the disregard that many of these students continue to face.

As education professionals, we must always recognize the strengths of all our students and view various disabilities as opportunities for further learning and teaching. Moving away from the medical

model to the social model where we learn from the person how best to teach them are possible pathways toward true inclusion.

Finally, we believe our study has highlighted the importance of discussing the discrimination faced by people with disabilities. Recognizing that, just as teachers and students with disabilities are part of a complex relationship, their families are also integral to this dynamic. These families deserve attention as well, because if they are properly understood, advancements in inclusive education will be achieved and justice will be served.

## References

ARAÚJO, Jurandir de Almeida. Educação e Desigualdade: A Conjuntura Atual do Ensino Público no Brasil. **Revista Direitos Humanos e Democracia**, Editora Unijuí, ano 2, n. 3, jan./jun., 2014. Disponível em: <https://www.revistas.unijui.edu.br/index.php/direitoshumanosedemocracia> Acesso em: 06 set. 2021.

ARROYO, Miguel González. O direito à educação ameaçado: segregação e resistência. In: ARROYO, Miguel González; ABRAMOVICZ, A. (Orgs.). **A reconfiguração da escola: entre a negação e a afirmação de direitos**. Campinas, SP: Papirus, 2009. p. 129-159.

BEZERRA, Claudia S. G. B.; REIS, Marlene Barbosa de Freitas. Educação Inclusiva: do paradigma da igualdade para o paradigma da diversidade. **Revista Polyphonia**, v. 22, n.1, p. 19-32, 2011.

BAUDELLOT, Christian; ESTABLET, Roger. **Escola, a luta de classes recuperada**. R. Pós Ci. Soc. V. 11, n. 22, jul/dez, 2014.

BRASIL. Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1967. Diário Oficial [da] República Federativa do Brasil, Brasília, 24 de janeiro de 1967. Disponível em: [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/constituicao/constituicao67.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao67.htm) Acesso em: 07 set. 2021.

BRASIL. Ministério da Educação/ Conselho Nacional de Educação. **Parecer CNE/CEP n. 05, de 28 de abril de 2020**, publicado no DOU de 01 de jun. de 2020.

BRASIL. Ministério da Educação. **Medida provisória nº 934**, de 1º de Abril de 2020. Disponível em: [https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2019-2022/2020/mpv/mpv934.htm](https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2020/mpv/mpv934.htm). Acesso em: 10 jan. 2021.

CARVALHO, Rosita Edler. **Escola inclusiva: a reorganização do trabalho pedagógico**. 6. Ed. Porto Alegre: Mediação, 2014.

FUMES, Neiza de Lourdes Frederico; CARMO, Bruno Cleiton Macedo do (Orgs.). **Deficiência, educação e pandemia [recurso eletrônico]: a desigualdade revelada**. Maceió, AL: EDUFAL, 2021.

A brief study about inequalities experienced by students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic  
GUIA COVID-19. **Educação Especial na Perspectiva Inclusiva**. 2020. Disponível em: <https://campanha.org.br/acervo/guia-7-covid-19-educacao-especial-na-perspectiva-inclusiva/>  
Acesso em: 02 out. 2021.

LANNA JÚNIOR, Mário Cléber Martins. **História do Movimento Político das Pessoas com Deficiência no Brasil**. - Brasília: Secretaria de Direitos Humanos. Secretaria Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos da Pessoa com Deficiência, 2010.

MINAYO, Maria Cecília de Souza. Hermenêutica-Dialética como Caminho do Pensamento Social. *In*: MINAYO, Maria Cecília de Souza. **Caminhos do Pensamento: epistemologia e método**. 1 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz, 2002.

ONU - Organização das Nações Unidas. Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos da ONU. Disponível em: <http://www.onu-brasil.org.br/documentos/direitos-humanos>. Acesso em: 05 out. 2022.

PINTO, Jessica Hilário; SOBRAL, Osvaldo José. Uma escola para todos: possibilidades de inclusão por meio da Escuta Sensível. **REVELLI**, v. 9 n. 2. Junho/2017. p. 142-161.

PINTO, Jessica Hilário; CÂNDIDO, Gláucia Vieira. Inclusão escolar e nomenclaturas para pessoas com deficiência: algumas reflexões com professores de Damolândia/GO. **Cadernos de Gênero e diversidade**: v. 06, n. 03 – jul.-set., 2020. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/cadgendiv/article/view/38381/24065> Acesso em: 10 out. 2021.

PLETSCH, Marcia Denise. O que há de especial na educação especial brasileira? Momento – **Diálogos em Educação**, v. 6, n. 3. p. 57-70, 2020.

SANTOS, Wederson Rufino dos. **Pessoa com deficiência: nossa maior minoria**. 2008. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/physis/a/SDWpCmFGWGn69qtRhdqqGSy/#>. Acesso em: 10 maio 2023.

SAVIANI, Dermeval; GALVÃO, Ana Carolina. Educação na pandemia: a falácia do “ensino” remoto. **Universidade e Sociedade**, n. 67, p. 36-49, 2021.

SCHORN, Solange Castro; SEHN, Amanda Schöffel. **Competências socioemocionais: reflexões sobre a educação escolar no contexto da pandemia**. 2021. Disponível em: <file:///C:/Users/Usuario/Downloads/4346.pdf> Acesso em: 01 out. 2021.

SILVEIRA, Denise Tolfo; CÓDORVA, Fernanda Peixoto. A Pesquisa Científica. *In*: GERHADT, Tatiana Engel; SILVEIRA, Denise Tolfo. **Métodos de Pesquisa**. Porto Alegre: Editora da UFRGS, 2009. p. 31-42.

SOUZA, Flavia Faissal de; DAINEZ, Débora. Educação especial e inclusiva em tempos de pandemia: o lugar de escola e as condições do ensino remoto emergencial. **Práxis Educativa**, Ponta Grossa, v.15, p. 1-15, 2020.

VIGNON, Luana; SALIBA, Marco. **Guia do educador: teorias pedagógicas: educação infantil**. 1. ed. São Paulo: Eureka, 2015.



Os direitos de licenciamento utilizados pela revista Educação em Foco é a licença *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International* (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Recebido em: 24/11/2022

Aprovado em: 22/08/2023