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Special Education Students Enrollment at a Public University in Brazil¹

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Abstract: The significant increase in the enrollment rate of students with special needs in higher education has been much discussed. In this text it is intended to describe and analyze the contributions of an instrument provided by INEP/MEC for the identification of this cohort in a university context. The sample used in this study was composed of 597 students who answered a questionnaire and declared themselves to be disabled, with global developmental delay, high skills, and/or giftedness, in a mapping carried out by a public university in São Paulo state, Brazil. Data was collected by means of an electronic form during re-enrollment, in accordance with the guidelines of the Higher Education Census. Although the findings of this investigation show that the collection instrument indicated by INEP/MEC made it possible to map the data of special education recipients at this level of learning, it was found that the use of terminologies, without

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characterizing the cohort in question, contributed to the overvaluation of visual impairment by the respondents. Nevertheless, studies of this nature show that the provision of this type of public policy have contributed to demystify the anonymity of persons with disabilities in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education; Disabled people; Public policy; Inclusive education; Special education

A Matrícula de Estudantes da Educação Especial em uma Universidade Pública do Brasil

Resumo: O aumento expressivo do índice de matrículas de estudantes público-alvo da Educação Especial no ensino superior tem sido um tema bastante discutido, na atualidade. Este texto objetiva descrever e analisar as contribuições da utilização de um instrumento disponibilizado pelo INEP/MEC para a identificação desse público, em contexto universitário. A amostra deste estudo foi composta por 597 estudantes respondentes deste instrumento e que se autodeclararam com deficiência, transtorno global do desenvolvimento, altas habilidades e/ou superdotação, no mapeamento realizado por uma universidade pública do estado de São Paulo, no Brasil. A coleta de dados foi efetivada por meio de formulário eletrônico, durante a rematrícula, seguindo as orientações do Censo da Educação Superior. Apesar de os achados desta investigação evidenciarem que o instrumento de coleta indicado pelo INEP/MEC possibilitou mapear os dados do público da educação especial, nessa modalidade de ensino, constatou-se que o emprego das terminologias, sem caracterizar o público em questão, corroborou para a supervalorização da indicação da deficiência com visual pelos respondentes. A despeito dessa constatação, estudos dessa natureza asseveram que a provisão de políticas públicas direcionadas a esse fim vêm contribuindo para desmistificar o anonimato de pessoas com deficiência, no ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: Ensino Superior; Pessoas com deficiência; Políticas públicas; Educação Inclusiva; Educação Especial.

Matrícula de estudiantes de la educación especial en una universidad pública del Brasil

Resumen: El aumento expresivo del índice de matrículas de estudiantes público blanco de la educación especial en la enseñanza superior ha sido problematizado en la actualidad. Este texto objetiva describir y analizar las contribuciones de la utilización de un instrumento ofrecido por el INEP/MEC para la identificación de este público en el contexto universitario. La amuestra de datos de este estudios se compone de 597 estudiantes que se declaran con discapacidad, trastorno global de desarrollo, altas habilidades y/o superdotación en el mapeo realizado por una universidad pública del estado de São Paulo, en Brasil. La recolección de los datos se realizó por medio de un formulario electrónico durante el proceso de reinscripción, conforme las orientaciones del Censo de la Educación Superior. Por más que los resultados de este estudio evidencien que el instrumento de recolección indicado por el INEP/MEC posibilitó mapear los datos del público de la educación especial en esta modalidad de enseñanza, se constató que el empleo de las terminologías sin caracterización llevó al público en cuestión a supervalorar la indicación de discapacidad con visual por los respondientes. A pesar de eso haber ocurrido, estudios de esa naturaleza ratifican que la provisión de políticas públicas direccionadas a esta finalidad han contribuido para desmitificar el anonimato de las personas con discapacidad en la enseñanza superior.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza superior; Personas con discapacidad; Políticas Públicas; Educación inclusiva; Educación Especial

Challenges for Higher Education in Brazil

The contemporary movement in favor of an inclusive society requires a revision of social paradigms in order to re-signify the paths taken by less favored groups to gain access to higher education. Policies aimed at the social participation of minorities, the recognition of diversity, and consequently the democratization of education in elementary school, have contributed to raising the visibility and increasing the participation of more vulnerable groups in education.

Based on the assumptions of guaranteeing fundamental rights for all Brazilians, with access to the material, cultural, and social goods produced by humanity, it is imperative to see education as a basic right for fairness of opportunity, ensuring that all individuals start from the same point so that they can experience equal opportunities for study at any stage and/or level of education (Oliveira, Mello, & Issa, 2012).

In defending the role of higher education as contributing to social justice, as noted by Sousa and Brandalise (2017), it has to be taken into account that this stage is marked by college entrance exams, which benefit the population segment belonging to the top of the social pyramid in Brazil. This group concentrates the greatest financial resources to prepare for entrance exams, thereby occupying vacancies in public universities, since social groups that are less privileged economically end up suffering the consequences of a subpar education. As a rule, students from public schools, due to the low quality of the formal education received, end up being marginalized in relation to higher education since “the educational system itself, conditioned by social, economic and political aspects, among others, eliminates them” (Sousa & Brandalise, 2017, p.515).

Sousa and Brandalise explicitly state that the educational system favors social conservation, offering conditions of ascension to higher levels of society for those who are already privileged. In general, few poor students want to enter higher education because historically, university studies are part of the lives of those who do not have the need to work to guarantee their livelihood or their family. In a society in which higher education is regarded as the privilege of the few, the vast majority give up the ‘dream’ of entering a higher education institution because of the historical tradition of exclusion. The system induces these students to believe that they cannot overcome access barriers to higher levels of academic instruction. Exceptions that overcome the obstacles imposed by the natural legitimation of school selection are rare (Sousa & Brandalise, 2017), while these challenges are even greater for students who are disabled due to historical exclusion from social spheres.

Recent history shows that the participation of people with disabilities in common spaces of education only began to gain prominence in the last decades of the twentieth century, due to the review of the understanding of disability anchored on a social model that sees difference as constitutive of the human being. For the purposes of current policies, this understanding appears in Art. 2 of Law no. 13146, from July 6, 2015 (2015), in which the condition of being disabled is characterized as having “a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment, which, in interaction with one or more barriers, can obstruct their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other people”, identifying them as the target audience of special education – (PAEE) - in the perspective of inclusive education (Ordinance 555, 2008). Also included in this group are:

II - students with global developmental delays: those with a clinical scenario of alterations in their neuropsychomotor development, impairment in social relations, and communication or motor stereotypies. Included in this definition are students with classic autism, Asperger’s syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder (psychoses), and other unspecified invasive disorders.

III - students with high skills/giftedness: those who present a high potential and great involvement with the areas of human knowledge, either isolated or combined: intellect, leadership, psychomotor, arts and creativity. (Ordinance 555, 2008, Resolution 4, 2009)

In light of various studies that problematize the narrowing of the entrance funnel to higher education (Cabral & Melo, 2017; Sobrinho, 2010; Sousa & Brandalise, 2017), the nation-state has a responsibility to encourage mechanisms of access and permanence for the most vulnerable groups to this stage of education. Therefore, the commitment to managing income distribution conflicts and to favoring the development of a population contingent at higher levels of schooling and academic education requires educational managers to focus on the academic demands of those with special educational needs. Among other recommendations are the guidelines of Edict no. 555 (2008), which enacted the National Policy on Special Education in the Perspective of Inclusive Education:

[...] the school inclusion of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high skills/giftedness, guiding education systems to ensure: access to regular education with participation, learning and continuity at the highest levels of education; the transversality of special education from early childhood education to higher education; [...] architectural accessibility, transportation, furniture, communications and information; and intersectoral articulation in the implementation of public policies (2008, p.14).

In accordance with these recommendations, data from the higher education census suggests an increase in enrollment in higher education, based on the implementation of federal government programs created during the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party) administration which started in 2003. These programs were supported by different segments of society, but have faced upheavals and tensions to intensify the development of affirmative action by the state, which, according to Piovesan (2008, p.889), can "be understood not only by the retrospective prism - in the sense of alleviating the burden of a discriminatory past - but also prospective - in the sense of fostering social transformation, creating a new reality". Affirmative policy programs "aim to accelerate the process of equality, with the achievement of substantive equality for socially vulnerable groups, such as ethnic and racial minorities," among whom the presence of so-called PAEE students is highlighted.

To exemplify the situation, during the 2000s the Brazilian government created various education incentive programs, such as PROUNI (University For All Program - *Programa Universidade para Todos*), REUNI (Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities - *Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais*), and FIES (Student Financing Fund - *Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil*), aimed at increasing student demand and helping expanding access to higher education. It should be noted that such actions offered scholarships to students in private universities and proposed to increase the number of entry places, student mobility, revise the academic structure, diversify undergraduate degrees, expand student assistance and inclusion policies, and link undergraduate and post-graduate studies and public higher education with basic education.

An example of the legislation which governs provisions related to this area is Decree no. 3298 (1999b), responsible for the National Policy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities. It was enacted almost two decades ago and aims to ensure mechanisms for the full exercise of their rights, as well as respect and equality of opportunity in society, without privileges or paternalism in the offer of employment or labor qualifications. It stipulates that the education of disabled persons take place in regular educational establishments, with the provision of the necessary support, or in special education establishments, at all stages/levels of education. Art. 27 requires higher education

institutions to offer adaptations of tests and the necessary support for people with disabilities, when requested in advance, including: additional time for tests, according to the specific needs presented by the candidate both in the entrance exam and during their academic trajectory; inclusion of content and/or disciplines related to disability, in undergraduate courses. In addition, the provisions of Edicts no. 1679 (1999a) and no. 3284 (2003), which specify the instruments designed to assess the conditions of higher education, consider accessibility requirements in meeting the special needs of people with disabilities, guaranteeing the conditions of access and permanence of this cohort in higher education. Circular no. 277 (1996) follows the same lines, reaffirming the need for higher education and/or vocational education institutions to provide specialized support services for persons with disabilities by ensuring their access and permanence, through actions that make possible the flexibility of educational services, infrastructure, training of human resources, and adaptation of physical space, as well as providing adaptations of evidence and the necessary support (including additional time for tests), among others.

PAEE Enrollment Indicators for Higher Education

Melo and Martins (2016) argue that the increase in enrollments of students with disabilities in face-to-face and distance courses appears more explicitly, especially in public institutions, after the creation of the Include Program (*Programa Incluir*).

Based on the analysis of the census microdata from INEP (Anísio Teixeira Research Institute) between 2010 and 2014, Silva (2016) confirms that total enrollments in higher education jumped from 6,379,299 in 2010 to 7,828,013 in 2014, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Evolution of enrollment by administrative category

	2010	2011	2012	2012	2014
Private	4,736,001	4,966,374	5,140,312	5,373,450	5,867,011
Public	1,643,298	1,733,315	1,897,376	1,932,527	1,961,002
Total	6,379,299	6,699,689	7,037,688	7,305,977	7,828,013

Source: Silva (2016).

As can be seen in the table, 74.95% (5,867,011) of enrollments made in 2014 of students in higher education institutions were in private institutions. Although public universities are in a minority in undergraduate courses in the country, accounting for only 25 % of places, when compared to the private network, access and permanence policies revealed greater flexibility in the creation of inclusive environments. Of the 1,961,002 students enrolled in public higher education, 0.70 % (13,723) benefit from those policies, confirming their greater recurrence in public institutions in the country. In evolutionary terms in 2009 PAEE enrollment was 20,287, for those who declared themselves to have educational needs, increasing to 33,377 in 2013. Furthermore, in private higher education institutions there were a total of 19,654 such students in 2013, compared to 13,723 in public institutions. Thus, to paraphrase the conclusions of Silva (2016), the PAEE enrollment quota in public and/or private institutions does not reach 1% of the academic population, totaling 0.43% of those declared in this condition (p. 60), according to the census indicators analyzed.

In the study by Duarte, Rafael, Filgueiras, Neves and Ferreira (2013), who investigated the enrollment of PAEE in higher education in the city of Juiz de Fora, in the state of Minas Gerais (MG), it was noted that in 2009 the number of students with declared disabilities corresponded to

0.17% in courses of higher education institutions in the private network compared to 0.07% in public institutions, associating these findings, as a rule, with the

[...] more competitive selective process and lack of a university quota policy for people with disabilities in public higher education institutes (HEI); the greater availability of evening courses, the possibility of a PROUNI scholarship, and also easier access to student funding from FIES in private networks. (Duarte et al., 2013, p.294).

The inclusion of students with disabilities in universities was the object of a recent bibliographical review study published by Cabral (2017). This paper discusses the exclusion indicators of secondary education as explanatory of the constraints on the life story of the students, on their university choices and paths, and how they are configured with new challenges for higher education institutions (Cabral, 2017, 60). It also analyzes the work of Almeida et al. (2015, cited by Cabral), and states that the conditions of the current context will tend to worsen, due to the problems of architectural, attitudinal and pedagogical structure of the higher education institutions, consolidated in an established student model, excluding people with different conditions from an environment that should be adapted to their demands and needs.

The scenario presented to the PAEE students in the survey carried out (Bisol et al., 2010, Silva, 2014, cited by Cabral 2017) adds information about those who sought to discuss and understand disability as a social phenomenon, in the context of university education. In this context, such studies warn that the entrance of PAEE students into higher education entails identity and subjectivity signs constituted by cultural loans and sharing of the most diverse types, which restrict PAEE students' quest for the social sign that implies being a university student and for a future professional identity.

Despite the advances and achievements previously mentioned in the policy recommendations, there are innumerable challenges to guarantee this cohort access to university. Proposals which reinforce the participation of public institutional management largely reveal the educational indicators of public service, in order to impact the organization of national education and, more specifically, the special education format whose projects and operationalization are based on specialized educational services, which in basic education have as a priority locus the Multifunctional Resource Room (*Sala de Recursos Multifuncionais*), and in higher education the Include Program (*Programa Incluir*) - for the creation of accessibility centers, as described by Melo and Martins (2016).

In relation to the consolidation of the Include Program, Cabral and Melo's study (2017) presents a national overview of this, aiming to illustrate the representativeness of the paths followed by the Accessibility Centers (*Núcleos de Acessibilidade*) of Brazilian federal higher education institutions, particularly in relation to the 2005 – 2014 period. They examine the ten years of the Include Program, as well as reflecting on current organizational conditions, functioning, and the main challenges that these institutions identify in the process of legitimizing the rights of the target public of special education in higher education. The study also draws attention to some aspects of student identification and their needs, as well as the contingencies that may motivate them to self-declare their disabilities. However, under such circumstances it is also revealed that most of the institutions analyzed in the research fail to systematically present the institutional process and/or pathway for the identification of these students and their educational needs, questions which are covered in this article.

Many students who were unable to apply for a place in higher education, including PAEE and other vulnerable groups, have the opportunity to enter federal public universities because of university quotas, in accordance with Law no. 13409 from November 2016, which stipulates the beneficiaries of affirmative policies in higher education institutions in Brazil. This prerogative, given the multiple functions that it has in relation to democratization policies, since it facilitates access to

higher education for those who do not have equal chances to compete for this level of education, has been considered as just one instrument to achieve democracy, since formal conquests are only instruments for true socialization (Sousa & Brandalise, 2017; Duriguetto, 2007).

In relation to the above, it can be observed in Anache, Rovetto and Oliveira (2014) that there is a need to revise the institutional structures of the PAEE service, since they still call into question the culture of class homogenization, referring to other aspects that deserve attention, such as the enrollment process, professional choice, curriculum organization, and the form of evaluation, leading to the discussion of guidelines for the construction of HEI teaching projects, in the perspective of inclusive education (Anache, Rovetto & Oliveira, 2014, p.309).

Although the challenges lie in the fight for the maintenance of contributions, resources, and subsidies allocated to affirmative policies that support actions to ensure the permanence of this segment of population in public and private universities, this text will focus on analyzing the institutional policies that are intended to identify special education for public undergraduate students, as a way of broadening this group's access to public universities.

Methodological Procedures

This work stems from a network research entitled “Accessibility in higher education: from the analysis of public educational policies to the development of instrumental media on disability and inclusion”, funded by the Education Observatory Program (*Programa Observatório da Educação*, Proc. N°. 23038.002628/2013- Edital/CAPES nº 49/2012 41), and involving the participation of several Brazilian universities in the period 2013-2017. Its aim was to investigate Brazilian educational regulations and policies aimed at the access and permanence of persons with disabilities in higher education, in order to evaluate the effects of these policies on initial teacher training and the development of media resources focusing on this theme.

In addition, this study is a spin-off of that extensive research, as it sought to ascertain the identification of PAEE in one of the participating public universities. The material collected refers to the data provided by one of the universities involved, whose campuses and facilities were distributed among 24 municipalities in the state of São Paulo. It offered 134 undergraduate courses and 141 postgraduate programs in various areas of knowledge at the time, as well as free pre-university courses and various community service extension programs. In 2015, it had 50,594 students enrolled (37,388 undergraduate and 13,206 graduate). At the time, its professional body consisted of 3,380 teachers and 7,071 technical-administrative staff.

Data Collection Instrument

The Higher Education Census form (INEP, 2013a) in question consisted of multiple choice questions and was aimed at gathering information to outline the profile of higher education students, as well as mapping university accessibility conditions. Its completion is mandatory for higher education institutions, and it is subdivided into areas of research of interest. It was thus possible to verify various completed fields by comparing them with data related to university registration, its organization and operation, and other educational census data regarding courses, students, teachers and other employees. Since 2013, the field of identification of the special education target audience has been mandatory on the form.

Similarly, in the field concerning the functioning of the university, the library was investigated, as were conditions of access to it and organization of materials, as well as the means available for academic research. The census data of the courses characterize what areas and modalities were offered, including the duration and places available in them.

In reference to students, teachers, and other employees, this material made it possible, in addition to registration data, to collect socioeconomic and instructional information.

To map the special education public present at the university, the items of the form that seek to specify the condition of the student appear as follows: blindness, impaired vision, deafness, hearing loss, physical disability, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, intellectual disability, autism, Asperger's syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder and high skills/giftedness. Other additional questions on the form seek to identify the physical structure of the university and the library, as well as questions about conditions of access to the various environments and what resources are made available to the university community.

The form was initially used at the time of enrollment in the first semester of 2014, when it was made available in the electronic environment responsible for storing student data on the institution's website. Completion was compulsory for all undergraduate students in all university units. Students completed the form individually, indicating their special needs whenever there were any.

It is worth mentioning that prior to the use of this form, the identification of students with disabilities and/or high skills at that university occurred through the migration of the data obtained from the registration form for those taking the university entrance exam, which indicated the necessity for special resources for this exam. It can thus be seen that this identification occurred in a decentralized and non-standardized way. The results obtained from these procedures served to map these students and was made available in the university's statistical yearbook of the university. However, such data was approximate and perhaps hardly portrayed reality.

However, with the so-called Computerized Undergraduate System (Students' Portal), the information was updated annually, at (re)enrollment, allowing students to be mapped.

Results

After collecting the answers given and analyzing the information, it was found that out of a total of 29,972 students enrolled in 2014, 660 self-declared as special education target groups. Of this number, 63 completed all fields and were therefore eliminated from the analysis of this study. The sample thus consisted of 597 respondents, which is equivalent to 2% of the total. Figure 1 shows the incidence of the sample profile.

If self-declared students with high skills are excluded from the sample, the percentage drops to 1.7% of students with disabilities compared to total enrollment. The percentages were more expressive in comparison with other studies that aim to portray the presence of students with disabilities in universities, such as that of Leonel, Leonardo and Garcia (2015) carried out at the State University of Maringá - UEM, where they found that the enrollment of disabled students represented 0.64% of total students. The study by Ciantelli (2015) reports that the enrollment of students with disabilities in the 17 Federal Institutions of Higher Education (Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior – IFES) was less than 1.5% of the total, with the highest enrollment concentration occurring at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (1.31%) and the lowest in the Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (0.01%).

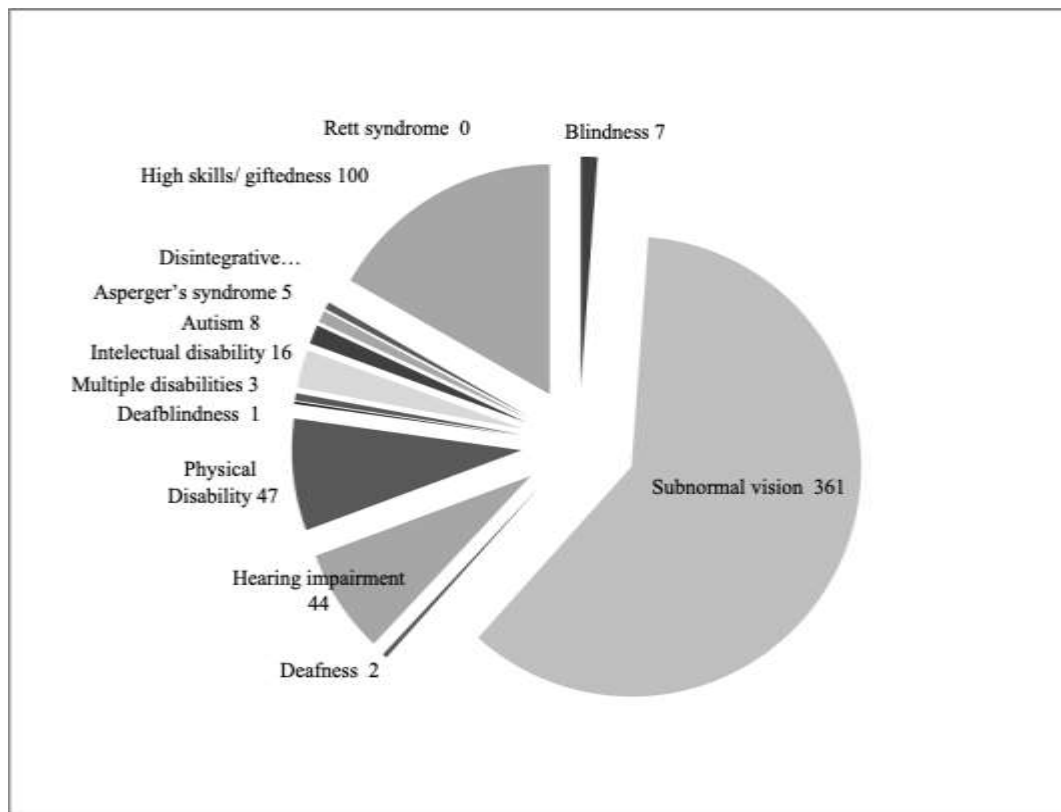


Figure 1. Profile of students enrolled in the university

A more detailed analysis of the data in Figure 1 reveals a higher incidence of self-described people with poor vision, with a total of 361 students and representing 60.5% of the analyzed population. In turn, 100 students reported having high skills and/or giftedness and 136 were classified with the other conditions. Of the categories mentioned, the lowest indexes were deaf-blindness, deafness, disintegrative disorders and multiple deficiency – none of them with more than three occurrences. Rett Syndrome was not cited by any respondents.

There is a high concentration of self-declarations related to visual impairment, which contrasts with the other specified conditions. Without neglecting its relevance but allowing room for reflection, it is incumbent upon us to think about the investigation of the cited conditions, taking into account students' previous knowledge about their needs and about the identification process, perhaps linked to the fact that people are unaware of criteria that define the condition or even the concept of disability, because it is a complex and multi-determined phenomenon (Leite, 2017). Thus, for example, many believe that the use of this corrective lens alone allows them to be classified as 'visually impaired'.

It can also be observed that the university units offering courses in the Exact Sciences presented lower indices of enrollments of disabled students. In contrast, those in which the occurrence of courses in the area of Humanities is more expressive presented a higher incidence of enrollments of these students. Corroborating such evidence, Duarte et al. (2013) explain that most of the enrollments in the universities investigated focused on the Humanities area, which is in line with the data of this study, and may reveal, according to Cabral (2017, p.378), "a social stigma that ties professional competencies to disability conditions in the fields of Health and Exact Sciences".

In addition to these observations, it should be mentioned that in the previous year, in the same HEI, only 24 students with a disability in all university units had been identified, according to data available in the 2013 statistical yearbook, while a year later an impressive increase occurred, with almost 500 students identified as such in 2014, after the adoption of the need to fill in the enrollment and re-enrollment form provided by the undergraduate system, according to the detail described in the methodological field.

It is believed that the items that sought to measure aspects related to PAEE were completely erroneously. This reveals that the recommendations and terminologies described in the INEP form, and consequently adopted by the investigated university, were not sufficiently clear for the respondents to outline their higher education profile, perhaps leading to an overvaluation of this cohort in the investigated university. Therefore, determining how such information is presented to university students at the time of enrollment can influence the panorama of those with these disabilities, which is the situation examined here.

Final Considerations

The considerations treated in this text indicate that the occurrence of PAEE enrollments has been a necessity when thinking about the guarantee of a more pluralistic and democratic higher education, which people with different attributes have access to. Drawing a numerical panorama with the indicative profile of this contingent in higher education has been a goal pursued by university management and the competent bodies in the Brazilian context - and in this HEI it is no different. Martins, Leite and Lacerda (2015, p. 1001) point out that the “way of conceiving disability is a predominant factor in the success of students with disabilities in their school career”.

In paraphrasing Leite and Martins (2012), it can be said that disability is associated with an organic or psychological issue and that these respond to the influences of norms and expectations of the social environment in which they are present. In order to think about an inclusive education that is a reality in the university context, it is necessary to consider that educational systems organize themselves to respond to the needs, since in addition to the removal of the architectural barriers, Ferreira (2007, p.44) points to the need to take into account the clearing of attitudinal barriers in order to promote the adaptation of the psychological space that will be shared by people very different from each other.

Returning to the survey examined in this paper, the data presented was included in the statistical yearbook of the university, a document responsible for aggregating information about the annual enrollment of undergraduate and graduate students and employees, with emphasis on the population profile of each university center. After being collected, the university sent the data to the National Institute of Studies and Educational Research (*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira – INEP*), the body responsible for the integration of the sample and national percentage of this population segment in higher education institutions.

While, on the one hand, the study reveals an advance in affirmative actions causing the administration of higher education institutions to create the means to trace the profile of this cohort in the university, on the other hand it indicates that INEP’s guidelines still demonstrate limits when tracing this profile, because as evidenced, 497 students declared themselves to have some disability, 60% of this being poor vision, which suggests some misunderstanding in the form. As is the case in the National General Population Census (*Censo Nacional Geral da população brasileira – IBGE*), it is known that this type of data does not refer exactly to visual impairment itself, but most likely to people who have vision problems and who use corrective lenses, but who are not clinically classified as visually impaired.

Also, after the insertion of additional questions related to disability and other aspects in the enrollment form (initial and follow-up) available in the undergraduate system there was a substantial increase in PAEE students, a fact most probably unreal. Cabral (2017) points out that inadequate completion of questions of this nature can result from a lack of understanding and/or positioning on more subjective issues, such as the concept of disability and special needs, or even practical issues which are related to the instruments and strategies adopted in each university context for this purpose.

However, the data presented here implies the efforts of university administrators to refine the procedures used and/or indicated by the Higher Education Census (INEP, 2013b). Examples of this nature reveal that the recommendations and terminologies described in the INEP form, and consequently adopted by the university investigated, may not have been sufficiently enlightening to the respondents in order to outline their profile in higher education, perhaps leading to an overvaluation of PAEE in the university context.

It should be noted that the economic and social condition of students, as well as other mandatory data in the census database sent to INEP (INEP, 2014), were not considered in the scope of this study. However, as Sousa and Brandiste (2016) point out, such data, although not evidenced in the article, certainly should be part of the concerns of the studies that refer to this subject - race, economic situation, and public school history - since such students in general are affected by the problems of social and economic exclusion, to a great extent those who define themselves as beneficiaries of affirmative policies.

The data of this research confirms how difficult and costly the mapping of population segments such as those investigated here is, i.e., students with some deficiency and/or high skills. This may be aggravated by the issue of self-declaration, which on the one hand appears to be the most feasible way to collect the personal characteristics of a particular sample, but on the other hand it is fragile and dependent on the reliability of the answers given. In other words, it is necessary to inform respondents of the commitment to fill out the census form truthfully in order to be able to draw a picture closer to reality, and from this, to gain more concrete data about the participation of these students in higher education.

Finally, making higher education equally accessible to all who are qualified and willing to attend it leads to the coexistence of the actions of professionals who research and who legislate on the basic right of access to education. The provision of public policies aimed at the development of affirmative actions meant to alleviate the conditions of inequality and exclusion of persons with disabilities, such as some of the students investigated, must also meet the demands for the elimination of the barriers that prevent the full participation of this cohort in the university.

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