

Inclusion of Disabled Students at the Federal University of Maranhão in Times of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract—*The current global outlook, created by the coronavirus pandemic, has brought an adverse situation for education in most countries. This exceptionality, consequently, also imposed new challenges to students with disabilities. Thus, the present study sought to identify the institutional actions developed by the Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA) in order to guarantee the inclusion of the target audience of Special Education in the context of the Emergency Remote Education (ERE) adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected through a bibliographic survey, document analysis, and institutional actions published in the news on the UFMA Portal from March 2020 to July 2021. The findings of this study signal that, despite hundreds of acts developed in favor of non-presence education, few contained actions aimed at the inclusion of students with disabilities.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) has installed a health crisis and an unprecedented scenario all over the planet. Isolation and quarantine measures were necessary in several countries in order to reduce the number of infected and dead people. As a consequence of these actions, teaching activities were initially suspended at all levels of education. In this context, authorities and education professionals were faced with the need to find a solution to minimize the damage to the 2020 school year, using Emergency Remote Learning, a common alternative term used by distance education researchers and professionals to establish a clear contrast to what many of us know as high-quality distance education (Hodges et al., 2020).

In Brazil, Ordinance n°. 343 of March 17, 2020, of the Ministry of Education [MEC] (2020a), will "Authorize, on an exceptional basis, the replacement of classroom subjects in progress by classes that use media and information and communication technologies [...]" (p. 39). With the increase in the amount of contaminated people and the worsening of the situation caused by the

coronavirus, the initial suspension of 30 school days, approved by the normative diploma previously mentioned, was extended until December 31, 2020, according to Ordinance n°. 544 of June 16, 2020 (Ministry of Education [MEC], 2020b). Moreover, the apparent stability in the number of cases and deaths initiated a dispute between the spheres of public power about the return or not of classes in person in the year 2021. Thus, in December 2020, some ordinances issued by the MEC attempted to force the Higher Education Institutions to return to face-to-face activities. Firstly, Ordinance n°. 1.030 would revoke Ordinance n°. 544, providing for the return to classes on January 1st, 2021 (Ministry of Education [MEC], 2020c), however, it was unsuccessful. Soon thereafter, Ordinance n°. 1,308 was published, seeking to amend the aforementioned, suggesting the resumption only on March 1, 2021 (Ministry of Education [MEC], 2020d). The impasse created by the aforementioned documents was resolved as of the CNE/CP Opinion n° 19/2020 of the MEC and the approval of the CNE/CP Resolution n°2, of December 10, 2020, determining:

Art. 31 In the scope of federal, state, district and municipal education systems, as well as in the Education Departments and in public, private, community and confessional school institutions, **the non-face-to-face pedagogical activities addressed in this Resolution may be used on an exceptional basis for the completion of the workload of pedagogical activities**, in compliance with the measures for facing the Covid-19 pandemic established in biosafety protocols (National Education Council, 2020e, p. 52, our emphasis).

Therefore, it was established that the current context would be the main point of analysis for the return or not of face-to-face classes in the 2021 academic year. However, non-face-to-face teaching would continue to be understood as being of exceptional nature. Given this panorama, developing classes remotely has presented itself as the greatest challenge for students and teachers at all levels. In Higher Education it has not been different. Institutions have built strategies and resources aimed at the maintenance of teaching activities for all their students. In this sense, this research presents as central question: what actions have been developed by the Federal University of Maranhão aiming to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities during the period of emergency remote teaching?

In order to answer the research problem, it was outlined as a general objective of this research: to identify the institutional actions of UFMA that ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities during the period of emergency remote education.

For the development of this research, of qualitative approach, it was developed a bibliographic and documental type research, because it "makes use of materials that have not yet received analytical treatment or that can still be reworked according to the research objects" (Gil, 2010, p. 30). After the delimitation of the general objective of the work, it began the bibliographic survey and data collection in the news section of the UFMA Portal, in the period from March 16, 2020 to July 20, 2021, with the descriptors: Inclusion; Accessibility; Disability/ Disabled; Pandemic/Covid-19. The objective of this search was to identify the news about university actions regarding the pandemic, organizing them into categories to identify and highlight which ones dealt with actions directly related to students with disabilities. Thus, the following categories of documentary analysis were established: institutional documents; courses; webinars; videos and news of institutional actions aimed at students with disabilities.

II. INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONAL ACTIONS AT UFMA

The documentary analysis presented here is the result of data survey, from March 16, 2020 to July 20, 2021, in the UFMA Portal. This research allowed listing several actions developed by the institution in the context of emergency remote education. The initial search was based on the descriptor "Pandemic", finding a total of 729 materials, containing: institutional documents approved for the organization of the university in the pandemic period; actions for non-presence education promoted by the site "EaD for you"; and news in general about initiatives aimed at students with disabilities.

It was discovered in the "News" section that numerous institutional documents were approved during this period, as can be seen in Table 1, organized chronologically:

Table. 1: UFMA's institutional documents referring to the actions for the period of the Covid-19 Pandemic, disclosed in the "News" section

N ^o	Document	Date of publication	Contemplates
1	Ordinance GR n°. 189/2020-MR	March 16, 2020	No
2	Ordinance GR n°. 190/2020-MR	March 16, 2020	No
3	Resolution n°. 1.978-Consepe	March 18, 2020	No
4	Resolution n°. 1.980-Consepe	April 2, 2020	No
5	Resolution n° 1.981-Consepe	09 April 2020	No
6	Resolution n° 1.982-Consepe	09 April 2020	No
7	Ordinance n° 241-MR	April 9, 2020.	No
8	Resolution n° 1.983-Consepe	April 15, 2020	No
9	Resolution n° 1.984-Consepe	April 15, 2020	No
10	Resolution n° 1.998-Consepe	May 15, 2020	No
11	Resolution n°. 1.999-Consepe	May 18, 2020	Art. 1, VI
12	Resolution n°. 2078-Consepe	July 17, 2020	Art. 7, §§1 and 2

13	Normative Instruction n°. 04-Proen	August 04, 2020	No
14	Resolution n°. 2.081-Consepe	August 10, 2020	No
15	Resolution n° 232-Consad	August 18, 2020	No
16	Normative Instruction 05/2020 - Proen	August 18, 2020	No
17	Ordinance GR n°472/2020-MR	August 19, 2020	Topic 1, letter h
18	Resolution n°. 2.083-Consepe	August 24, 2020	No
19	Resolution n°. 2.176-Consepe	March 22, 2021	No
20	Resolution n° 2.185-Consepe	March 22, 2021	Art. 5, §§ 1 and 2

Among the related documents, only four mentioned, in some excerpt, students with disabilities. However, these only deal with the referral of care for these students to the Directorate of Accessibility (DACES) of UFMA. Only after Resolution No. 2.078 - Consepe, of July 17, 2020, it is specified which public with disabilities will be served by DACES, as well as describes, more clearly, what would be the support offered to these students (Universidade Federal do Maranhão [UFMA], 2020). With the approval of Resolution n°. 2185 - Consepe, of March 22, 2021, the wording of the previous document is repeated, i.e., no further specifications or actions directed to such group are drawn up, as evidenced in Article 5°:

The undergraduate course coordination may request, if necessary, the support of the Directorate of Accessibility for students with disabilities, autistic spectrum disorder and high abilities who enroll in any of the curricular components offered in the academic period.

In case of a student with **visual impairment** enrolled in a curricular component, the teacher must send, 10 (ten) days in advance, to the e-mail address: braille@ufma.br, material to be adapted by the Accessibility Board.

In case of **deaf students** enrolled in the curricular component, the teacher must send, 15 (fifteen) days in advance, to the email: daces.proen@ufma.br, material

for adaptation by the Directorate of Accessibility (Federal University of Maranhão [UFMA], 2021, p. 4, our emphasis).

What is noted is the documentation of an action focused only on the mention of who this student is and who is responsible for his care. Therefore, measures, strategies and adjustments aimed at the care of these students are not planned or even officially presented by UFMA. From this perspective, Böck et al. (2020) emphasize that:

Although several advances can be identified regarding the participation of people with disabilities in different social spheres, **it can still be said that these people remain invisible when it comes to the development and implementation of public policies and other deliberations and decisions about the lives of these subjects. This is also a constant in the spaces of knowledge production, such as universities** (p. 134, our emphasis).

As can be seen, the number of documents approved by UFMA does not guarantee the visibility and inclusion of students with disabilities. It is observed that there was not even the participation of students with disabilities in the discussions, preparation and deliberations promoted about *online* education for this public in that institution. Moreover, the website "EaD for You" was created in April 2020 by the current Directorate of Technologies in Education (DTE), in order to support the distance learning activities of the university. According to Cavalcante (2020), "The purpose of the site is to offer information in the area of Technology in Education to the faculty and technicians of UFMA, through news, courses, training, webinars, among other educational initiatives" (para. 1). Thus, over the past few months, the team responsible for the site planned, created and made available a series of actions designed for the development of remote teaching in the institution.

The aforementioned DTE productions are described in the table below. The courses offered by the "EaD for You" are conducted through the VLE website, in partnership with the agreement between the Open University of Brazil (OUB) and the Unified Health System (UHS) and UFMA, "aiming to offer self-instructional courses conducted without the presence of a tutor, focused on the use of educational tools and technologies" (Potter, 2020, para. 1). Another resource developed by the DTE were the short videos, referring to varied themes and produced by experts in the area. Each section of the "Knowledge Drops" has three videos, available on the website and *YouTube*, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: List of Courses, Training and videos developed by the Directorate of Technologies in Education, published on the website "EaD for You

Nº	Courses	Contemplates
1	Creation of learning situations for DE	No
2	Online tutoring	No
3	Sources of educational resource information	No
4	Tools and teaching resources for video lesson production (module I)	No
5	Tools and teaching resources for video lesson production (Module II)	No
6	Planning lessons for EaD	No
7	Selection of digital media for DE	No
8	Copyright and digital educational resources	No
9	Introduction to Distance Education	No
10	Introduction to intellectual property, copyright, software and personality rights	No
11	Impact and visibility of educational resources	No
12	Application of the basic concepts of intellectual property, copyright, software and personality rights	No
Nº	Training	Contemplates
1	Creation of remote disciplines: subsidies	No
2	Preparing interactive remote classes	No
3	Booker Site	No
4	Your voice in remote classes: tips and care	No
5	Google Gmail, Calendar, and Drive	No
6	Google Forms	No
7	Active Methodologies	No
8	SIGAA	No
9	Google Meet and Google Classroom	No

10	Development of educational resources	No
Nº	Knowledge Drops	Contemplates
1	Copyright and personality rights	No
2	Pedagogical presence in distance education	No
3	Notions on how to record your video lesson	No
4	How to prepare an EaD lesson plan	No
5	What to consider when planning remote classes	No
6	Instructional Design	No
7	Gamification in education	No
8	Mediatization of content for remote learning	No
9	Researching educational materials for the online classroom	No
10	Professional attitude and best practices in online meetings	No
11	Behavior and good practice in the online classroom	No
12	Remote Learning and Distance Education	No
13	Learning situations in DE	No
14	Preparation for remote teaching	No
15	How can technologies be used for study and research?	No

Despite the variety of courses offered, these are intended only for the teaching staff and administrative technician of the institution, offering introductory and basic knowledge about topics, content, characteristics and resources related to educational technologies. According to the objectives outlined for each course in the article entitled "Registration open for self-instructional courses on the platform SITE AVA", published on the UFMA Portal, on January 15, 2021, there is no mention of the training needs to ensure the inclusion and accessibility of students with disabilities at UFMA. The training and videos produced are open to the public through the website and the YouTube video platform. However, in the same way as the courses, these productions are not focused and/or contemplate, in their approach, the inclusion of students with disabilities during the period of remote education.

What can be noticed is that "[...] education at the time of COVID-19 starts to understand technology as a space for struggle, transformation, but also for inequalities" (Barreto & Rocha, 2020, p. 2). That is why, to the extent that training spaces and resources are thought and created to ensure the viability of *online education* without contemplating the diversity; the needs and rights of people with disabilities, the exclusion process becomes more evident, expanding, consequently, the social and educational inequalities to other terms. "The quarantine makes social injustices, exclusion, human frailty and the suffering of the most vulnerable sectors of society more visible" (Silva et al., 2020, p. 130).

The DTE also offered, between May 2020 and July 2021, 57 webinars on various topics focused on the use of educational tools and technologies in the context of distance education. As known, during the pandemic period, videoconferences became common in the educational space, mainly because they are a resource that reduces geographical distances and can be used in real time by all participants through digital platforms. In this scenario, then, webinars appear - expression derived from the English word "*webinar*" - defined as "an online seminar in video, recorded or live, usually allowing the interaction of the audience via chat. [...] It is the same as a live, that is, live broadcast in which we have only one presenter [...]" (Mantilha & Boff, 2020, p. 3). The Table 3, below, presents all the webinars held until July 2021.

Table 3: List of Webinars developed by the Directorate of Technologies in Education, disseminated in "EaD for You", between mid-2020 and July 2021.

N ^o	Webinars	Cont.
1	UFMA's Computational Ecosystem: recent advances and achievements already available to the academic community	No
2	Information design for DE: contributions and perspectives	No
3	How to design learning situations for DE?	No
4	How to prepare a lesson plan in DE?	No
5	Notions of how to record your video lesson using resources available at home	No
6	Sources of information for building Educational Resources for ODL	No
7	Basic concepts of copyright for the production of educational resources for distance learning	No

8	Preparing digital content using the Google Platform for Education	No
9	Increased impact and visibility of the educational resources produced	No
10	<i>SaiteBooker</i> : tool to build <i>e-books</i> easily, quickly, free and easily accessible in e-pub format	No
11	Serious Games and Gamification: report of experience and tools	No
12	Creating online classes through <i>Microsoft Teams</i>	No
13	Online assessment methodologies and strategies for face-to-face or remote learning	No
14	Planning, Higher Education and <i>Online</i> Scenarios: meaningful learning in 2020	No
15	<i>Moodle x Google Classroom x Microsoft Teams</i> and SIGAA: digital platforms to support remote learning at UFMA compared	No
16	Pedagogical Presence in Distance Education	No
17	Active Methodologies and Educational Technologies	No
18	The role of Instructional <i>Design</i> in Distance Education	No
19	SIGAA as a virtual environment for remote classes at UFMA	No
20	Technologies for remote monitoring of research projects	No
21	<i>IBM Academic Initiative</i>	No
22	Strategies and resources for digital transformation of education: challenges and opportunities	No
23	Transposition of face-to-face discipline to the remote model	No
24	Gamification in education	No
25	Remote teaching and distance education: differences and limitations	No
26	Professional attitude and best practices in online meetings	No
27	Building Interactive Remote Classrooms	No
28	EaD Portal's Potential for You: Learn to work remotely autonomously	No
29	Potential of <i>Google Forms</i> and <i>Google</i>	No

	Drive for Remote Learning	
30	Mediatization of content for remote teaching: how to communicate better to teach better	No
31	What to consider when planning remote classes?	No
32	Bringing people together in remote learning: use of tools and technologies oriented to participation and engagement	No
33	The use of institutional e-mail by teachers, students, administrative staff and sectors of UFMA: advantages of use, legal and information security	No
34	Formative and Summative Assessment in the Remote Model: which tools and strategies to adopt?	No
35	Students with Disabilities and Remote Learning: suggestions for accessibility	Yes
36	Libraries and information services for online learning	No
37	Mental health dialogues in pandemic situations	No
38	Remote Verification of Learning: the <i>Game Quiz App</i>	No
39	Google Meet classes: resources and potential	No
40	Planning and Management of Postgraduate Courses Lato Sensu	No
41	Preparing for Remote Learning: details, tools and methodologies for a successful experience	No
42	The use of SIGAA by students: a tool for academic development	No
43	The perspectives of the use of <i>Google Classroom</i> and <i>Google Meet</i> by the student body	No
44	How can technologies be used for study and research?	No
45	Behavior and good practices in the online classroom	No
46	Suicide: Are we going to talk openly about it?	No
47	Student Assistance at UFMA: programs, advances and recent achievements for students	No

48	Learn how to digitally sign documents for free and with legal validity	No
49	LGPD: concepts and compliance process	No
50	<i>Microsoft Teams</i> for Educators and Students (Basic Level)	No
51	<i>Microsoft Teams</i> for Educators and Students (Intermediate Level)	No
52	AVA UFMA: the new virtual environment for distance learning at UFMA	No
53	<i>Microsoft Teams</i> for Educators and Students (Advanced Level)	No
54	COVID-19 and the <i>Burnout Syndrome</i> in health professionals	No
55	Demystifying the registration of computer programs at the National Institute	No
56	The bereavement process in childhood in times of COVID-19	No
57	Using the Electronic Information System in practice	No

Among the webinars produced, only one directly addressed the conditions and special needs of students with disabilities enrolled in courses in Higher Education, under the title "*Students with Disabilities and Remote Learning: suggestions for accessibility*", presented on August 14, 2020 by Professor Maria Nilza Oliveira Quixaba, director of DACES. In the context of this discussion about the invisibility of these students, authors such as Silva et al:

The target audience of Special Education is, again, invisible in public policies, decrees and decisions created by Pandemic [...]. However, the political-educational discourse considers that everyone is in the same conditions. **The reality imposes itself and shows us that people with disabilities are not yet in a situation of equal access to different technological, social and cultural possibilities** (p. 132, our emphasis).

The validity of the initiative should be exalted, however, the democratic profile and the potential to explore this type of resource/space, could and should be used for wide dissemination and promotion of more training, debates and clarifications about the difficulties, barriers, vulnerabilities and how to promote the inclusion of this public during remote education. From this point of view, then, it becomes essential to highlight the importance and the role of lectures and institutional web

conferences to ensure information and training on the right to inclusion of students with disabilities and their respective strategies. In view of this, it is also highlighted the role of the news referring to the target audience of Special Education since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis. Cardoso et al. (2020) consider that:

The COVID-19 pandemic has restricted communication/information channels to virtual media in virtually every aspect of the Brazilian citizen's life. **Education, communication and information have always been undeniably interconnected, however, the coronavirus pandemic has made the relationship between these rights one of extreme dependence** (p. 39, our emphasis).

In the UFMA Portal, hundreds of news were released since the year 2020, however, only those listed in Table 4 refer to the student with disabilities in the context of pandemic Covid-19.

Table 4: News calls about institutional actions directed to students with disabilities, in the context of Covid-19 pandemic

N ^o	Webinars	Cont.
1	DCom TV: UFMA in the fight against Covid-19.	08 and 14 April 2020 May 25, 2020
2	Launch of the "EaD for You" website.	April 28, 2020
3	Launch of the research "Psychosocial Demands in view of the Educational Accessibility of Students with Disabilities in the Context of Pandemic Covid-19 in the Campus São Luís - MA".	June 08, 2020
4	Dissemination of the webinar "Students with Disabilities and Remote Learning: suggestions for accessibility".	August 11, 2020
5	Dissemination of the Virtual Welcome of the Course of Pedagogy - Imperatriz Campus "Formative Experiences in Inclusive Education: Interlocutions and Pedagogical Praxis".	September 11, 2020
6	Information on Notices of Aid for Digital Inclusion specifically for	September 15,

	people with disabilities.	2020
7	Interview on the activities of the Directorate of Accessibility in the pandemic.	October 05, 2020
8	Research with people with disabilities verifies the accessibility of UFMA technologies.	October 27, 2020
9	Inclusive Debate Cycle will focus on accessibility and inclusion of students with de science in remote education.	March 03, 2021
10	Lecture "Assistive Technology for Visually Impaired Students" will take place on April 27 via <i>Google Meet</i> .	April 9, 2021
11	Pre-registration for those approved in Sisu in the first semester of 2021 begin on Monday, 19, exclusively online way.	April 19, 2021
12	Registration open for the third edition of the Cycle of Inclusive Debates promoted by the Board of Accessibility of UFMA, which will take place on 28 this month.	June 17, 2021
13	Accessibility Board promoted, online and with Libras interpreters, the III Cycle of Inclusive Debates focused on Higher Education.	July 1, 2021

As previously mentioned, 729 articles were found in the "News" section of the UFMA Portal about the pandemic, of which only the 13 previously listed were intended for activities and actions aimed at serving students with disabilities. Therefore, the scarcity of materials denotes, in reality, the small amount of diligences promoted by UFMA, in view of the specific educational needs already existing of these students and those that emerged in the last year. What is desired is the guarantee and respect for the rights of these students, because, as Carvalho (2016) states:

The right to equal opportunities, which we emphatically defend, does not mean an equal way of educating everyone, but **giving everyone what they need according to their interests and individual characteristics. The watchword is equity, which means educating according to individual differences**, without any manifestation of difficulties becoming an impediment to learning (p. 37, our emphasis).

It is expected that equality and equity are the foundations of movements towards Inclusive Special

Education in times of pandemic, since including the person with disabilities, whether in society itself or in certain spheres, such as education, is a dynamic and constantly building process that has become more complex in the Covid-19 scenario. Education professionals, caregivers, families and people with disabilities find themselves facing an exceptional situation in relation to inclusion in times of physical distance and interaction and interactivity through *online*. However, it is hoped that this now unsettling reality will be used to transform discriminatory situations into inclusive ones, not just act as a reinforcement to the numerous exclusionary mechanisms already in place.

III. CONCLUSION

The global pandemic of Covid-19 brought unprecedented challenges for authorities around the world. In education, it promoted an exceptional scenario, in which the only solution was to try to maintain the 2020 and 2021 school years with emergency remote education. However, for people with disabilities the context of non-presence education proved even more challenging.

In view of the achievement of the proposed objective of identifying the institutional actions of UFMA that ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities during the period of emergency remote education, it was concluded that, despite the numerous and varied actions developed and the documents published in the pandemic context of Covid-19, the referred institution contemplated little the Special Education students.

It was noticed, from the analysis of documents, the absence of curricular adjustments and inclusive teaching strategies; shortage of training activities and guidelines on assistive technologies and specific teaching-pedagogical procedures for students with disabilities and their teachers, that is, few were the institutional actions favorable to the teaching-learning process of the target audience of Special/ Inclusive Education, during the period of emergency remote teaching.

The importance of combating the invisibility of these students is reinforced, often camouflaged by ideological discourses, but revealed by exclusionary practices, segregating actions and the silencing of these people in discussions and deliberations on issues, apparently general, but with harmful impacts on already marginalized groups.

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