



Teachers with Physical Disabilities in the Brazilian Educational Scenario: A Systematic Review

Professores com Deficiência Física no Cenário Educacional Brasileiro: Uma Revisão Sistemática

Profesores con Discapacidad Física en el Escenario Educativo Brasileño: Una Revisión Sistemática

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Resumo

A presente revisão sistemática objetivou elucidar como pesquisas têm abordado a realidade dos professores com deficiência física no Brasil, considerando estudos publicados de 2011 a 2021. A revisão sistemática foi conduzida e realizada de acordo com as diretrizes descritas na declaração PRISMA. Foram incluídos estudos qualitativos disponíveis nas bases de dados Biblioteca Digital Brasileira de Teses e Dissertações - BDTD e SciELO, focados nas trajetórias formativas e profissionais desses docentes. Dos 697 registros identificados, dois estudos atenderam aos critérios de inclusão. A análise revelou que, além de barreiras físicas, os professores enfrentam estigmas sociais que impactam a percepção de suas competências pedagógicas, evidenciando a influência da imagem corporal e do capacitismo em seu cotidiano profissional. Conclui-se que o preconceito estrutural e a escassez de

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políticas inclusivas perpetuam desafios, enquanto a literatura ainda apresenta lacunas significativas sobre as experiências docentes, dessa população.

Palavras-chave: Professores com deficiência física. Inclusão. Educação Especial.

Abstract

This systematic review aimed to elucidate how research has addressed the reality of teachers with physical disabilities in Brazil, considering studies published from 2011 to 2021. The systematic review was conducted in accordance with the guidelines described in the PRISMA statement. It included qualitative studies available in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) and SciELO databases focused on the educational and professional trajectories of these teachers. Only two studies of the 697 records identified met the inclusion criteria. The analysis revealed that in addition to physical barriers, teachers face social stigmas which impact the perception of their pedagogical skills, highlighting the influence of body image and ableism in their daily professional lives. The conclusion is that structural prejudice and the scarcity of inclusive policies perpetuate challenges, while the literature still shows significant gaps in the teaching experiences of this population.

Keywords: Teachers with physical disabilities. Inclusion. Special education.

Resumen

Esta revisión sistemática tuvo como objetivo dilucidar cómo la investigación ha abordado la realidad de los profesores con discapacidad física en Brasil, teniendo en cuenta los estudios publicados entre 2011 y 2021. La revisión sistemática se llevó a cabo de acuerdo con las directrices descritas en la declaración PRISMA. Se incluyeron estudios cualitativos disponibles en las bases de datos Biblioteca Digital Brasileña de Tesis y Disertaciones (BDTD) y SciELO, centrados en las trayectorias educativas y profesionales de estos profesores. De los 697 registros identificados, dos estudios cumplieron los criterios de inclusión. El análisis reveló que, además de las barreras físicas, los profesores enfrentan estigmas sociales que impactan en la percepción de sus competencias pedagógicas, destacando la influencia de la imagen corporal y del capacitismo en su cotidiano profesional. La conclusión es que los prejuicios estructurales y la escasez de políticas inclusivas perpetúan los retos, mientras que la bibliografía sigue mostrando importantes lagunas en las experiencias docentes de esta población.

Palabras clave: Profesores con discapacidad física. Inclusión. Educación especial

Introduction

The debate on inclusion of people with disabilities in social spaces is increasingly being investigated, reflecting an urgent need for systematic approaches. The United Nations (UN) reports that there are approximately one billion people with disabilities in the world (Vassie, 2018). A recent survey by the National Household Sample Survey (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios - PNAD) in Brazil in 2022 identifies that the population with disabilities from the age of two is estimated at 18.6 million, corresponding to 8.9% of the population in this age group.

Data from the 2022 Higher Education Census in Brazil highlight a specific demographic composition within the higher education context. Of the approximately 9 million enrolled students, 79,262 are identified as having a disability, constituting 0.8% of the total student body in distance and in-person learning modalities. This figure marks a significant increase of almost 25% compared to the data recorded in the previous 2021 Census, not only reflecting an upward trend in educational inclusion, but also challenging higher education institutions to adapt to a growing diversity within their student body.

Although there has been a notable increase in the enrollment of students with disabilities in Higher Education, their insertion into the labor market remains disproportionately low. Data from the 2022 PNAD survey indicate a labor force participation rate of 66.4% for individuals without disabilities, contrasting with a significantly lower rate of 29.2% for those with disabilities. This disparity highlights the urgent need to not only facilitate access and retention in Higher Education for people with disabilities, but also to ensure that transitions into the workplace are viable and sustainable.

Despite legislation established to promote inclusion in the labor market such as the Quota Law (Law No. 8,213, of July 24, 1991), which has been in force for more than three decades, an analysis of the current situation in Brazil reveals that the labor rights of people with disabilities are often not fully enforced. As Oliveira (2015) points out, the proportion of this population formally included in employment continues to be substantially lower than the proposed goals, indicating a gap between the legislation and its effective implementation.

The predominant focus of the literature in the educational sphere has been on the experiences of students with disabilities and the attitudes and perceptions of educators regarding teaching this specific population, as demonstrated in the studies by Moraes (2022) and Cueto (2019). However, there is a notable shortage of studies focused on training and professional experiences of teachers with disabilities, an area which requires in-depth analysis for comprehensive understanding of inclusion in the educational environment (Santos, 2019).

An analysis of the apparent paradox present in the inclusion of teachers with disabilities in the basic education scenario requires exploring their educational journeys and professional trajectories. In this context, this systematic review examines the literature published from 2011 to 2021, aiming to elucidate how academic discourses have addressed the reality of teachers with physical disabilities in Brazil. This work is part of a broader doctoral thesis, entitled "Physical education teachers with physical disabilities: from the training path to exercising the profession". Herein, we focus on revealing the professional realities of teachers with physical disabilities through an analysis of articles, dissertations and theses using their life stories as a prism to examine teaching practice amid challenges and adaptations.

Methods

A systematic review is a rigorous method designed to collect studies on a well-defined topic using meticulous and replicable search and selection techniques. This method is not only instrumental in assessing the quality and integrity of existing research, but also in determining its relevance and potential for implementation in specific intervention contexts (De-Latorre-Ugarte-Guanilo et al., 2011). The present study

adopts this methodological approach to select and analyze publications which outline teachers with physical disabilities working in basic education in the Brazilian scenario from 2011 to 2021.

According to Kitchenham (2004), a systematic review unfolds in three critical stages: planning, execution, and dissemination of findings. The initial stage involves formulating a detailed protocol, while execution involves identification, selection, and synthesis of relevant studies. The conclusive stage focuses on effectively communicating the results obtained through the review.

The systematic review was conducted and reported in accordance with the guidelines established by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) statement (Page, 2021). The methodology strictly followed the proposed steps, starting with a precise delimitation of the research question through the choice of data sources, definition and refinement of the keywords used in the searches, up to a systematic search and storage of the results. The studies were selected according to previously defined eligibility criteria, ensuring the inclusion of only the most relevant studies. The data from the selected studies was extracted with methodological rigor, followed by a synthesis and detailed interpretation of the collected data (Costa & Zoltowski, 2014).

Eligibility criteria

The inclusion criteria are: (I) studies with a qualitative method focused on teachers with physical disabilities working in Basic Education in Brazil; (II) publications between 2011 and 2021. The period from 2011 to 2021 was delimited with the objective of covering the scientific production in the decade prior to beginning data collection (2021), temporally aligning with a doctoral study developed by the authors of this study; (III) academic works (articles, dissertations, and theses) available in the selected databases (Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations - BDTD and Scientific Electronic Library Online - SciELO); and (IV) studies which address the experience of teachers in the training path and/or exercising the profession by teachers with physical disabilities. The choice of physical education teachers working in Basic Education considered that: a) this is a stage which concentrates a greater number of student enrollments; b) the social relevance of Basic Education as a pillar of the school trajectory; c) this is a stage which requires significant structural conditions for performing the work of a physical education teacher in practical classes, which could highlight aspects related to the barriers and accessibility faced by teachers with physical disabilities. The exclusion criteria included: (I) Studies which do not directly address teachers with physical disabilities in Basic Education; (II) Publications outside the defined period (2011-2021); (III) Works not available in the selected databases; (IV) Studies with quantitative methodology; and (V) Studies that deal with disabilities in a very general way, without a specific focus on teachers with physical disabilities.

Search strategy and study selection

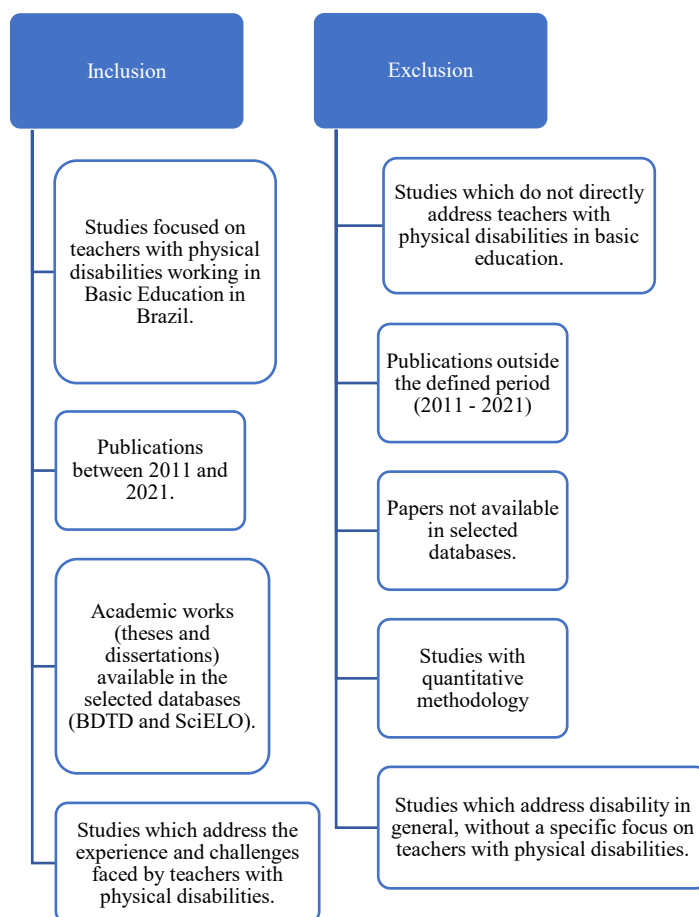
Data were collected from two prominent digital libraries. A search was initially conducted in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD). The BDTD was chosen due to its comprehensive collection of academic works produced in Brazil, which allows a detailed and up-to-date mapping of research conducted in higher education institutions in the country. The BDTD brings together dissertations and theses which represent a primary source of academic research, with diverse methodological and theoretical approaches applied over the years.

In addition, the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) database was explored, internationally recognized for its rigorous curation of peer-reviewed scientific publications. The choice of SciELO is justified by the quality and credibility of the scientific articles available which are frequently cited and respected in the academic community. The SciELO database provides access to studies which have undergone a rigorous peer review process, ensuring that the information collected is reliable and relevant to the topic under

investigation. The search in these databases was performed in July and August 2022 and focused on articles which specifically address the performance of teachers with physical disabilities.

The search strategy used combinations of the following keywords: “Physical Education”, “teacher” and “disability”, “physical disability” and “degree”, “Physical Education and teacher training”. A time limit was applied, restricting publications from the period between 2011 and 2021, and no language limit was used. The entire search process for publications was performed by the researchers independently, obtaining the same results.

Figure 1 - Criteria for acceptance and rejection of studies



Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

Selection process

All titles, abstracts, keywords, authors and journals of the references found in the selection stage were saved, totaling 697 potentially relevant references, of which 11 studies were in the SciELO database and 686 studies in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD).

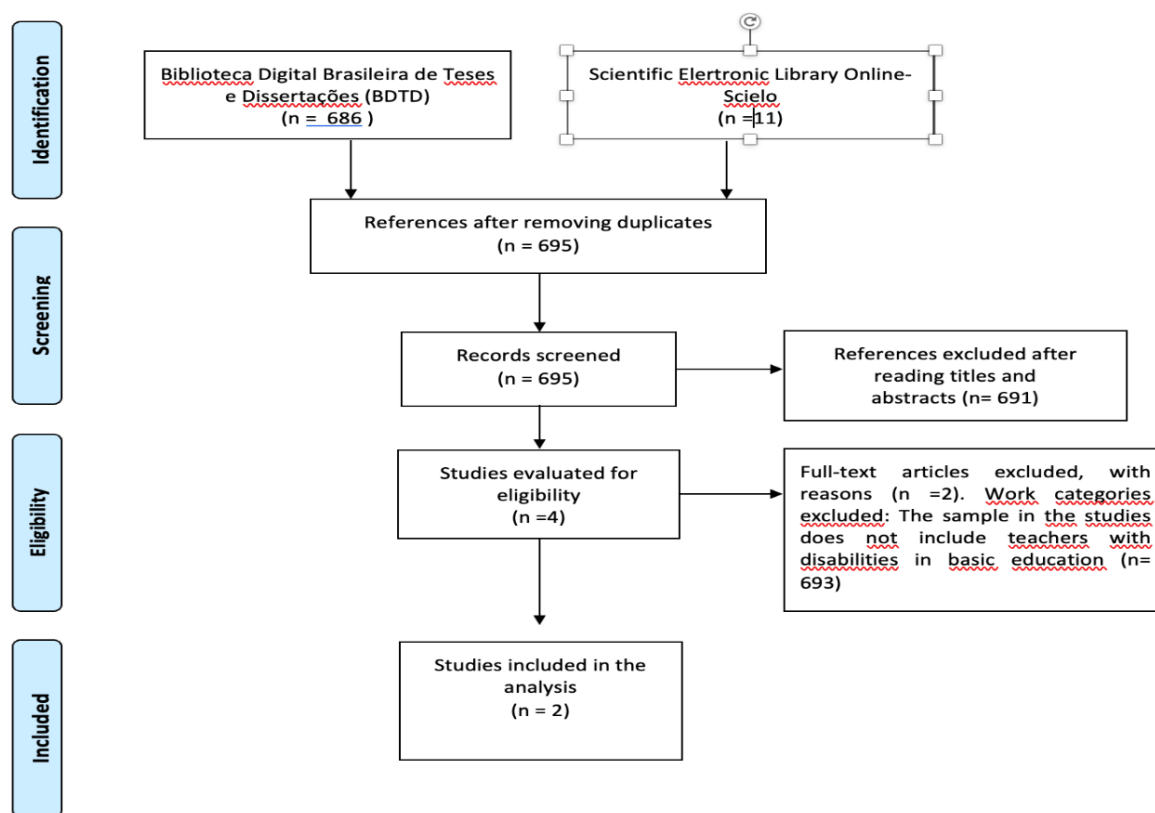
The criteria established by PRISMA were used to select the articles. A check for duplicate references was initially performed, resulting in excluding two articles from SciELO, totaling 695 studies for the next stage. Next, the titles of the previously selected works were read. We used the criterion of eliminating records whose titles clearly indicated that the focus was on teaching work with students with disabilities, whether in primary or higher education, as well as studies which mentioned specific disabilities other than physical disabilities, both involving students and teachers. This initial exclusion stage was essential to ensure that

only the studies most relevant to the specific research topic (being physical education teachers with physical disabilities working in basic education) were considered for the next analysis stages. Thus, 83 studies were excluded in this phase, composed of 76 from the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) and 7 from SciELO, totaling 612 for the next stage.

The next step involved reading the abstracts. Following the inclusion criteria established and described above, 608 studies were excluded, including 2 articles from SciELO and 606 theses/dissertations from the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD). It is worth noting that most of the studies excluded at this stage (98% of the studies, corresponding to 595 works), were eliminated because they focused on the work of teachers with students with disabilities, and did not specifically focus on the experience of teachers with physical disabilities. It is also important to mention that all studies found in the SciELO database were excluded up to this stage.

Next, 04 studies were selected for full reading in the final stage, but 2 of these studies were excluded because the works involved the narrative of students with disabilities regarding inclusion in higher education. Finally, the investigations conducted resulted in identifying one dissertation and one thesis which strictly aligned with the criteria of this study. Therefore, even though we identified 697 potential references for analysis, only 2 studies met the established criteria. This fact highlights the scarcity of research specifically aimed at teachers with physical disabilities working in basic education in Brazil. This underscores the relevance and need for this systematic review, highlighting the significant gap in the literature and the urgency of further research on this group of professionals, whose experiences and challenges are still insufficiently explored. In addition, this result points to the invisibility of these subjects in their professional activities. We present a flowchart of the selection of articles as a way to graphically illustrate the process in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Flowchart for selecting relevant articles



Note: n = number of studies; Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

Results and discussion

The systematic review resulted in selecting a corpus consisting of two essential studies, each fully meeting the pre-defined inclusion criteria. Detailed characteristics of these selected studies are presented in Table 1, providing a basis for subsequent analysis and discussion of the findings in the context of the inclusion of teachers with physical disabilities in the educational system.

Table 1 - Characteristics of studies selected for systematic review

Author/Year	Dissertation / Thesis	Study title
Santos (2013)	Dissertation	Teachers with disabilities in the city of Vitória: lives which compose stories
Brito (2014)	Thesis	Challenges of inclusion: Experiences of educators with disabilities or deafness

Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

The following paragraphs will descriptively present the results of the studies found in the systematic review. The studies cited below are presented in chronological order, without relevance criteria.

In Santos' dissertation (2013) entitled "*Professores com deficiência no município de Vitória: vidas que compõem histórias*", the life trajectories of professionals with disabilities in teaching and working in the Municipal Education Network of Vitória (Brazil) are investigated. This is a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews, aiming to learn the trajectories of professionals with disabilities working in the municipal education system of Vitória through their life stories. Interviews were conducted with four teachers with disabilities: two with physical disabilities and two blind. The analysis of the narratives followed the predominantly Vygotskian socio-historical perspective. The author proposed four categories for analyzing the narratives: life events which influenced their profession choice; difficulties faced due to disability in personal and professional life; daily performance at school; and students' perception of the educators' disability. As a result, the author highlighted the importance of historical analysis to understand "labeling of disability" around the subject, as well as the historical legacies of the educational context. Despite being trained in an environment of low inclusion, teachers with disabilities demonstrated their potential in a network of possibilities (Santos, 2013).

The second study selected in the systematic review is Brito's thesis (2014) entitled "Challenges of inclusion: experiences of educators with disabilities or deafness". This study investigated the influences of family, school, and professional contexts on the development of educators with disabilities or deafness. The objective was to verify the perspective of the subjects themselves on episodes which marked their educational trajectory, choice of a teaching career, and professional practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers (three who were deaf, three with visual impairment, and two with physical/neuromotor disabilities) working in Basic or Higher Education in the regions of Curitiba and the Coast of Paraná. Data analysis identified experiences in three contexts: Family, School, and Work, highlighting experiences which enhance and hinder the development and educational success of the interviewees. The author used content analysis for interpretative synthesis based on the data obtained, literature review, and the researcher's professional experience. The importance of attitudes which encouraged independence and autonomy was highlighted, in addition to the interviewees' suggestions for inclusive policies. The results indicated the influence of contexts on developing people with disabilities, especially in their professional activities, and the need to institutionalize inclusive actions and to better publicize the real capabilities of these people (Brito, 2014).

Based on the studies reviewed by Santos (2013), it was found that the number of studies on teachers with disabilities between 2003 and 2013 was minimal, totaling only six studies, none of which were at the doctoral level. Based on research conducted between 2003 and 2013, Santos' dissertation (2013) presents studies related to the life stories of these teachers as a result of a literature review in order to emphasize the

need for more research involving teachers with disabilities in practice. The analysis was performed using the CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) thesis database and other research sources, such as virtual libraries. The author reports (in the aforementioned study) that five dissertations and one postgraduate monograph were found. A descriptive table of the studies mentioned by the author is presented below.

Table 2 – Results from the study by Santos (2013)

Author/Year	Dissertation / Monograph	Study title
Barros (2003)	Dissertation	Faces and counter-faces of educators with disabilities
Jungues (2005)	Dissertation	The professional trajectory of teachers with disabilities working in the education system of Curitiba and the metropolitan region
Lemos (2008)	Dissertation	Training and practice of blind or low vision educators in Manaus
Oliveira (2008)	Dissertation	Construction of knowledge and imaginary meanings in the life trajectory of a blind literacy teacher
Klaumann (2009)	Dissertation	The professional trajectory of teachers with disabilities working in the education system of Curitiba and the metropolitan region
Cardozo (2009)	Monograph	Inclusion of disabled teachers: a study in the municipal network of Rio de Janeiro

Source: Santos (2013).

Although the selected studies addressed different aspects, the analysis of the studies revealed an intrinsic relationship between teachers' physical disabilities and critical challenges which permeate professional trajectories, namely: a) barriers faced by people with disabilities in the job market; b) the challenges inherent in the ability to teach, considering physical limitations; c) the stigma and prejudice experienced in the workplace. A qualitative assessment aligned with the relevant themes allowed us to explore the complexity of these issues, taking into account the particularities and the context experienced by each educator.

Barriers faced by people with disabilities in the job market

As outlined by the Statute of Persons with Disabilities (Brazilian Law No. 13,146/2015), barriers are defined as any impediments which restrict or impair the full social participation of persons with disabilities. These barriers are multifaceted, including urban, architectural, transportation, communicational, attitudinal and technological challenges, often emerging and intertwining within the workplace context, as elucidated in previous studies (Simonelli & Camarotto, 2011; Simonelli et al., 2020).

Effective communication and understanding of the functional capabilities of people with disabilities are particularly essential to dismantle deep-rooted prejudices and discriminatory attitudes, which can lead to social segregation and ableism, meaning "prejudiced attitudes that hierarchize individuals based on the adequacy of their bodies to an ideal of beauty and functional capacity" (Mello, 2016, p. 3266).

In the study by Santos (2013), the author highlights that understanding the historical construction of the professional identity of people with disabilities is crucial to deciphering the barriers they face. The analysis offered in the study provides a perspective on how 'labeling of disability' is rooted in historical perceptions, both in Brazil and internationally, and how these perceptions continue to negatively influence the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market.

Deficiencies in urban planning and transportation systems are often attributed to inefficient public management and are also critical, as they affect the mobility of people with disabilities from their homes to their workplaces, creating additional barriers (Simonelli & Jackson Filho, 2017). This reality is exemplified in the study by Santos (2019), in which a wheelchair-bound physical education teacher working as a personal trainer faces such mobility challenges. The barriers presented are not isolated, but are part of an interconnected system that perpetuates exclusion and limits the social and professional participation of people with disabilities. The works of Simonelli and Jackson Filho (2017) and Simonelli et al. (2020) corroborate this view, highlighting how the negative impacts extend beyond the professional context, affecting social interactions and daily routines, and reinforcing the need for integrated strategies to combat these systematic obstacles.

According to the provisions of the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, or Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law No. 13,146, of July 6, 2015), disability is defined as a long-term condition resulting from congenital or acquired factors, manifesting itself in physical, mental, intellectual or sensory challenges. When interacting with environmental and social barriers, this condition can limit or prevent the full and effective participation of the individual in society on an equal basis with other citizens.

The challenges inherent in the ability to teach considering physical disability

The physical representation of teachers and its implications for perceived credibility and effectiveness is an area which requires further exploration when these characteristics intersect with the presence of physical disabilities. This gap in knowledge becomes even more relevant in light of evidence suggesting that students' perceptions of teacher competence can be substantially influenced by the physical appearance of educators. A study by Melville and Maddalozzo (1988) illustrates this dynamic, in which two groups of high school students were randomly assigned to watch one of two nearly identical versions of a physical education class, delivered via video. The main variable manipulated was the physical condition of the teacher, alternating between a healthy and fit appearance and an artificially altered condition to appear overweight using a costume which simulated obesity. Analysis of the students' perceptions revealed that the perceived credibility and effectiveness of the teacher were considerably reduced when he or she was seen as being overweight. This points to a significant correlation between the physical image of the educator and the effectiveness of the learning process.

On the other hand, the dynamics between perceptions of teaching competence and the presence of physical disabilities in teachers are complex and multifaceted. Bryant and Curtner-Smith (2008) addressed this issue through an innovative study in which elementary school students were randomly assigned to attend one of two swimming lessons, both taught by the same instructor. In one lesson, the instructor did not have a disability, while in the other, they used a wheelchair to simulate a physical disability. Contrary to conventional expectations, students reported greater learning in the classroom led by a teacher in a wheelchair, suggesting that the presence of a disability may not only challenge but potentially enhance the perception of effective teaching. This finding opens the way to rethinking the presumed limitations associated with physical disability in the educational context and reinforces the importance of more deeply exploring the impact of educators' physical conditions on students' learning experiences.

Brito's (2014) study illustrates how the prevailing sociocultural view can restrict recognition of the abilities and potential of educators with physical disabilities, not only affecting the perception of their teaching capabilities, but also influencing the inclusion or exclusion process in the educational and professional environment. This limited approach, which only sees constraints rather than possibilities, shapes both family reception and hiring policies, highlighting the need for a paradigmatic shift towards genuine appreciation of the individual competencies of teachers with disabilities.

Stigma and prejudice experienced in the workplace

In a history marked by both professional and social marginalization, people with disabilities have faced a social protection regime which, despite being well-intentioned, often slides into paternalism and guardianship, contributing to perpetuate stigmas and discriminatory practices (GARCIA, 2014). However, adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations (UN) in 1948 marked a turning point, recognizing and extolling human diversity as a global value. This milestone has guided development of social and legal structures which aim to ensure equal rights, including equal participation in the labor market (Freitas, 2015).

In addition to the conceptions widely discussed in the academic literature on work, people with disabilities introduce new values that deeply resonate with their individual identity. These emerging perspectives not only highlight work as a means of subsistence, but as a crucial vector for overcoming stigma, directly addressing perceptions of disability, and as a platform for effecting positive change in society. This approach reflects an ongoing effort to redefine the social image of people with disabilities, highlighting their contributions and resilience (Galvão et al., 2018).

In the study by Santos (2013), it was evident that the teachers with disabilities who were investigated swam against a segregating current, arising from social prejudice, and proved their potential in a vast network of possibilities that was opened to them; this is corroborated by the findings in another study (Santos, 2019) which reports the persistence of prejudices, even if often subtle, in the workplace.

Silva (2006) argues that prejudice emerges as a contemporary phenomenon rooted in social relations that stigmatize and prevent awareness of alienation within a discriminatory social structure. This prejudice is shaped and perpetuated through socialization processes, deeply reflecting the culture and historical legacy of society. Crochík (1996) complements this view, highlighting that the interactions of prejudiced individuals are mediated by categories that classify people, supporting stereotypes to the detriment of individual experience. Such a dogmatic stance obstructs the possibility of authentic knowledge about the other, limiting the capacity for critical review of preconceived premises.

Buscaglia (1997, p. 80) expands this understanding, noting that prejudice, whether in relation to race, color, religion, socioeconomic status, or even physical and mental differences, exerts a significant and determining influence on family behavioral dynamics. This analysis highlights the need to address prejudice as a central element in discussions about inclusion and diversity, pointing to the importance of educational strategies and public policies that aim to deconstruct these ideological barriers.

Final considerations

This study shows a scenario in the reality of teachers with physical disabilities in Brazil in which despite the normative advances and inclusion principles promoted by international and national organizations, significant challenges still persist. The barriers identified, whether physical, communicational or attitudinal in nature, reinforce the need for more effective commitment on the part of all spheres of society to remove obstacles to the full participation of these professionals.

The study further highlighted the relevance of physical image and stigma associated with disability in perceptions of competence, as well as in the social and professional inclusion of teachers with disabilities. The findings suggest an interaction between the physical presence of the educator and the perceived quality of teaching, highlighting the need for educational policies which value diversity and promote inclusive pedagogical practices.

The review also underlines the weight of prejudice in social relationships, whose influence shapes the professional and personal trajectories of people with disabilities. Stereotypes and limiting categorizations emerge as significant barriers to inclusion, requiring ongoing deconstruction through education and the formulation of more inclusive public policies.

In turn, a gap in the literature found on the experiences of teachers with physical disabilities in the teaching profession reflects a critical area of research that has yet to be explored. The few studies that exist highlight the need for greater academic attention to the topic. It is essential to broaden the scope of research to fully understand the life stories of these educators and how they intertwine with educational policies and pedagogical practices.

Finally, this study reiterates the call for a joint effort to recognize, understand, and address the barriers that limit teachers with physical disabilities, thus guaranteeing the right to equal opportunities and highlighting the importance of truly inclusive education that celebrates diversity in all its forms. We consider the relevance of studies found in the listed research, since it is possible to think about other possibilities for teaching action based on these studies and propose more inclusive debates which imply more emancipatory and less exclusionary movements.

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