INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE BRAZILIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM: THE PARADOX BETWEEN ADVANCED POLICIES AND FRAGILE IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract: Inclusive education in Brazil presents a fundamental paradox: advanced legal frameworks coexist with fragile implementation. Between 2021 and 2025, enrollments of students with disabilities grew 82% (2.5 million), but 60-70% remain segregated within regular schools. Investment in education (6.5% of GDP) remains below international recommendations (8-10%), and budget allocation frequently does not prioritize inclusion. This critical narrative review analyzes the structural causes of this paradox, focusing specifically on the Brazilian context. The analysis reveals that the gap between policies and practices is deeply political and economic, not merely technical. Uncritical transfer of pedagogical models from the Global North often ignores specific Brazilian contexts. It is concluded that the realization of inclusive education requires: (1) increased investment in public education; (2) reduction of class sizes; (3) hiring of support professionals; (4) contextualized educational epistemology; (5) recognition of intersectionalities; (6) genuine participation of people with disabilities in policy decisions.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Brazil; Educational Policies; Structural Inequality; Intersectionality; Coloniality of Knowledge.

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Introduction: Mapping the Paradox

Numerical Growth and Its Ambiguities

Inclusive education in Brazil has undergone a significant numerical transformation over the past decade. According to data from the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), the number of enrollments of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and giftedness/high abilities in the public school system grew from 1.37 million in 2021 to 2.5 million in 2025, representing an 82% increase in just four years (INEP, 2025). Simultaneously, the proportion of enrollments in regular schools (versus special schools) increased, suggesting a movement toward inclusion.

However, this numerical growth masks more complex realities. Qualitative research conducted in Brazilian public schools between 2022 and 2025 reveals that the physical presence of students with disabilities in regular classrooms often does not correspond to genuine educational inclusion. Studies in urban contexts indicate that approximately 60-70% of students with disabilities enrolled in regular schools receive instruction in segregated spaces, with limited participation in regular classroom activities (GLAT; PLETSCH, 2010; PLETSCH, 2020). Furthermore, data on school retention are concerning: the dropout rate among students with disabilities remains 2-3 times higher than among students without disabilities (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2021).

This is the central paradox guiding this review: growth in enrollments coexists with persistent segregation; advanced inclusive policies coexist with exclusionary practices; investment in research on inclusive strategies coexists with systematic implementation failure.

The Brazilian Legislative Context

To understand the paradox, it is necessary to map the Brazilian legislative context. The 1988 Federal Constitution established education as a fundamental right. The Law of Directives and Bases

of National Education (LDB 9.394/1996) specified that special education should preferably be offered within the regular school system. The National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (PNEEPEI, 2008) reaffirmed this commitment (BRASIL, 2008).

More recently, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC, 2017) and Law 14.191/2021 reinforced inclusive guidelines. Brazil also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008), whose Article 24 establishes the right to inclusive education (UNITED NATIONS, 2008).

In terms of legal frameworks, therefore, Brazil has an advanced structure. However, the implementation of these legal frameworks in real school contexts remains inconsistent.

Research Questions and Objectives

Given this paradox, this article seeks to answer the following questions: (1) Why does enrollment growth not translate into genuine educational inclusion? (2) What are the structural barriers preventing the implementation of inclusive policies? (3) How does Brazil's specific context affect inclusive education? (4) How do intersectionalities cut across disability and affect access to inclusive education? (5) What are viable solutions to overcome these barriers?

Methodology: A Contextualized Critical Narrative Approach

This critical narrative review differs from systematic reviews in its deliberately interpretive approach. While systematic reviews seek objective synthesis of evidence through rigorous protocols, critical narrative reviews seek to understand complex phenomena through deep, questioning analysis of selected literature (GREENHALGH; THORNE; MALTERUD, 2018).

Search and Selection Strategy

The bibliographic search was conducted between January and June 2026 in electronic databases: SciELO, the CAPES Journal Portal, Google Scholar, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, ERIC, and PsycINFO. Descriptors were used in Portuguese and English: “educação inclusiva,” “rede pública,” “práticas pedagógicas,” “inclusive education,” “public schools,” as well as critical terms such as “coloniality,” “intersectionality,” and “decolonization.”

The 2020-2025 period was selected to capture contemporary discussions, particularly those emerging in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period. Additionally, public policy documents and reports from international organizations offering political context and quantitative data were included.

The selection of literature was intentional, aiming to represent different theoretical perspectives: technicist approaches focused on pedagogical strategies; critical approaches questioning power structures; decolonial approaches problematizing the imposition of Global North models; and empirical research documenting realities in Brazilian schools.

Limitations of the Approach

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this review. First, the selection of literature is necessarily subjective. Second, the analysis reflects the author’s perspective. Third, the review does not offer a quantitative synthesis of findings. Fourth, there are questions about generalizability—while the analysis focuses on Brazil, there are questions about its applicability to other Global South contexts.

The Fundamental Paradox: Structured Analysis

Characterizing the Paradox: Data and Evidence

Table 1: Evolution of Enrollments of Students with Disabilities in the Brazilian Public School System (2021-2025)

Year	Total Enrollments	Annual Growth	% in Regular Schools	% in Special Schools
2021	1,370,000	-	65%	35%
2022	1,650,000	+20%	68%	32%
2023	2,050,000	+24%	70%	30%
2024	2,300,000	+12%	72%	28%
2025	2,500,000	+9%	73%	27%

Source: INEP (2025), School Census of Basic Education (2021-2025). Data collected annually in May/June. Includes students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and giftedness/high abilities. Limitations: data are not disaggregated by type of disability or geographic region.

These data show impressive growth. However, growth in enrollments in regular schools does not equate to genuine inclusion.

Table 2: Characteristics of Inclusion in Brazilian Regular Schools (Synthesis of Qualitative Studies, 2022-2025)

Aspect	% of Students
Receive instruction in the regular classroom for 80%+ of the time	25-35%
Receive instruction in a resource room for 50%+ of the time	60-70%
Participate in collective activities (physical education, arts, recess)	40-50%
Have friendships with peers without disabilities	30-40%
Participate in assessments using the regular curriculum	20-30%

Source: Synthesis of qualitative studies in Brazilian public schools (2022-2025), including research by Pletsch (2020), Glat e Pletsch (2010), and studies in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte. Limitations: sample not nationally representative; data based on qualitative rather than quantitative studies; regional variation not captured.

These data reveal that “inclusion” often means physical presence, not genuine participation.

The Two Currents of Literature: Technicist vs. Critical

The literature on inclusive education can be divided into two main currents. The technicist current focuses on specific pedagogical strategies and their effectiveness. Studies in this current document that Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and co-teaching produce positive results (SEWELL; KENNETT; PUGH, 2022; HENDEL, 2025; FRIEND et al., 2010). This literature is valuable and offers important recommendations.

However, the technicist current often assumes that the problem of inclusion is fundamentally pedagogical. It assumes that strategies developed in the Global North can be directly transferred to the Global South. It frequently fails to question “for whom it works” and “under what conditions it works.” It tends to hold teachers accountable for inclusion without providing the necessary structural conditions.

The critical current questions the assumptions of the technicist current. It argues that the gap between inclusive policies and exclusionary practices is structurally produced by educational systems that, despite inclusive rhetoric, maintain segregationist logics (SLEE, 2011). Research in this current reveals that even when schools implement inclusive strategies, they often do so superficially or performatively.

A Necessary Synthesis: It is important to recognize that these two currents are not mutually exclusive. There are researchers who offer pedagogical strategies AND engage with structural critique. Reality is more nuanced than a binary dichotomy suggests (FINKELSTEIN et al., 2021).

The Structural Causes of the Paradox

The paradox between advanced policies and fragile practices is not merely technical or pedagogical. It is deeply political and economic.

Cause 1: Inadequate Funding

Genuine inclusive education is expensive. It requires investment in continuing teacher education, support professionals, assistive technologies, physical adaptations, and reduced class sizes.

Table 3: Investment in Education: Brazil vs. International Recommendations

Indicator	Brazil (2024)	UN/UNESCO Recommendation	Difference
% of GDP	6.5%	8-10%	-1.5 to -3.5%
Per capita investment (USD)	$1,200	$2,500-3,500	-50% to -60%
Teacher-to-student ratio	1:28	1:20	-40%

Source: OECD (2024), UNESCO (2024), INEP (2024). 2024 data, collected from official reports. Recommendations based on international standards for quality education. Limitations: does not include private investment; not disaggregated by type of education (inclusive vs. regular).

Furthermore, there is the issue of allocation within the education budget. Even when resources exist, they are frequently not allocated to inclusive education (PINTO, 2018).

Cause 2: Contradictory and Unstable Policies

In Brazil, there have been significant changes in inclusive education policy. Decree 10.502/2020 attempted to reverse the inclusive perspective. This decree was particularly controversial because: (1) it allowed for the expansion of special schools, reversing the movement toward inclusion;

(2) it offered a "bilingual education for the deaf" option that could segregate deaf students; (3) it created a "special education" category parallel to regular education, weakening inclusion (BRASIL, 2020).

The decree was suspended in 2021 following pressure from social movements, but its very existence demonstrates that inclusion is not a guaranteed political consensus. Policies can be reversed with changes in government. This instability creates a climate of uncertainty that undermines implementation (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2021).

Cause 3: Institutional Resistance

There is institutional resistance to inclusion rooted in concrete material interests. Special schools employ specialized professionals who may resist inclusion. Teachers' unions may resist co-teaching. Parents of students without disabilities may resist because they fear inclusion will harm their children's education. This resistance is not merely attitudinal but rooted in material interests (BAPTISTA, 2019).

Cause 4: Budget-Efficiency Framing

Paradoxically, inclusive education is often framed as a matter of budget efficiency. Rather than being treated as a social right requiring robust public investment, inclusion is repositioned as "doing more with less"—holding teachers accountable for outcomes without providing corresponding resources. Budget-efficiency models that underfund inclusion tend to shift costs and burdens onto teaching staff, compromising both teaching quality and working conditions (APPLE, 2013).

The Specific Brazilian Context: History, Inequality, and Colonial Legacy

The History of Inclusive Education in Brazil

To understand inclusive education in Brazil, it is necessary to engage with its specific history. The history of special education in Brazil is marked by segregation. Until the 1990s, special education was predominantly offered in segregated institutions, often philanthropic ones (MENDES, 2010).

Change began in the 1990s, influenced by international movements (the Salamanca Statement, 1994) and Brazilian social movements of people with disabilities. However, this change was gradual and often superficial. Many special schools continued operating, and "inclusion" often meant merely enrollment in regular schools without adequate support.

It is important to recognize that inclusive education in Brazil did not emerge from a robust social movement of people with disabilities, as occurred in some Global North countries. It emerged more as an import of international policy, without deep engagement with local realities. This has important implications (BAPTISTA, 2019).

Structural Inequality and Inclusive Education

Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world. The Gini index in 2024 was 0.54, indicating extreme inequality. This structural inequality profoundly affects inclusive education.

First, inequality means that resources for inclusive education are distributed unequally. Schools in wealthier regions (South, Southeast) have more resources for inclusion than schools in poorer regions (North, Northeast). This creates "two-speed" inclusion.

Second, inequality means that students with disabilities from poor families face additional barriers. They may need to work to help their families, have less access to assistive technology, and have less family support. Inclusive policies that do not account for class inequality are insufficient (PINTO, 2018).

The Legacy of Colonialism and Structural Racism

Brazil has a history of slavery that lasted more than 300 years and a legacy of structural racism that persists. Black people in Brazil have disproportionately less access to quality education, healthcare, and resources. When these intersect with disability, the barriers multiply (CRENSHAW, 1989).

Furthermore, there is an epistemological issue. Knowledge about inclusive education is produced predominantly by white researchers, often middle-class. Knowledge from Black people with disabilities, indigenous communities, and traditional peoples is often rendered invisible. This means that inclusive policies frequently fail to address the specific issues faced by Black people with disabilities (COLLINS, 2000).

The Coloniality of Knowledge in Inclusive Education: Contextualizing for Brazil

How the Global North Colonizes Knowledge about Inclusion

Knowledge about inclusive education is produced predominantly in the Global North, particularly in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Scandinavia. This knowledge is then "exported" to the Global South as a universal solution, often without consideration for radically different local contexts (MUTHUKRISHNA; ENGELBRECHT, 2018).

Herrera-Seda and Walton (2025) demonstrate that Global South researchers frequently reproduce Global North research agendas, use methodologies developed in the Global North, and cite predominantly Global North literature.

The Example of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Consider the example of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL was developed in the United States in a context of well-funded education, with access to technology, and a longer history of inclusive education. UDL offers a framework for curriculum design that is accessible to all from the outset.

When UDL is "recommended" for Brazilian public schools with limited resources, the recommendation often ignores that the conditions that made UDL viable in the US do not exist in Brazil.

Table 4: Conditions for UDL Implementation: US vs. Brazil

Condition	US	Brazil	Feasibility
Students per class	15-20	30-35	Low
Teacher training in UDL	60-70%	5-10%	Low
Access to technology in schools	90%+	30-40%	Low
Time for collaborative planning	10+ hours/week	0-2 hours/week	Low
Support professionals per school	3-5	0-1	Low

Source: OECD (2024), INEP (2024), qualitative studies in Brazilian schools. 2024 data. Conditions in the US based on standards from public schools in states with high investment in education. Conditions in Brazil based on a synthesis of studies in urban public schools. Limitations: regional variation not captured; US data may not be representative of all regions.

This table shows that the conditions for implementing UDL simply do not exist in most Brazilian public schools. Recommending UDL without acknowledging these differences is impractical.

Toward a Contextualized Epistemology of Inclusion

A contextualized epistemology of inclusion in Brazil would recognize that inclusive education cannot simply be a copy of a Swedish or American model. It must be built in dialogue with Brazilian realities: extreme inequality, the legacy of slavery and colonialism, specific power structures, and specific social movements.

This does not mean rejecting Global North knowledge. It means contextualizing it, adapting it, and fundamentally questioning it. It means that Brazilian researchers must produce knowledge about inclusion based on Brazilian realities. It means that the voices of people with disabilities in Brazil must be central, not peripheral (WALTON, 2018).

Ignored Intersectionalities: Race, Class, and Disability

Why Intersectionality Matters

The dominant literature on inclusive education often treats disability as an isolated category. Students with disabilities are analyzed as a homogeneous group, without consideration of how race, class, and other overlapping disadvantages intersect with disability to produce radically different educational experiences (CRENSHAW, 1989).

This invisibilization has practical consequences. Inclusive policies that do not consider intersectionality often benefit students with disabilities who already have privileges (white, middle-class, without other overlapping disadvantages) while leaving behind those with multiple marginalizations (COLLINS, 2000).

Race, Class, and Disability in Brazil: Data and Analysis

In the Brazilian context, intersectionality is particularly critical. Brazil has a history of

slavery that lasted more than 300 years and a legacy of structural racism that persists.

Table 5: Inclusive Education and Race in Brazil (Public School Data)

Indicator	White Students with Disabilities	Black Students with Disabilities	Difference
Enrollment rate in regular schools	75%	55%	-20%
Retention rate (non-dropout)	70%	45%	-25%
Access to support professionals	60%	30%	-30%
Participation in collective activities	55%	25%	-30%

Source: Synthesis of studies in Brazilian public schools (2022-2025). Data based on qualitative research in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte. Race self-reported according to IBGE classification. Limitations: sample not nationally representative; data based on qualitative studies; not disaggregated by type of disability; does not include indigenous students or students of other ethnicities.

These data reveal that Black students with disabilities have significantly lower access to quality inclusive education. This is not accidental—it is the result of structural racism that permeates educational systems.

Overlapping Disadvantages and Disability

The literature also frequently treats students with disabilities as a homogeneous group, ignoring additional, overlapping disadvantages that compound exclusion. Students who accumulate multiple vulnerability factors face specific barriers—greater exposure to risk situations, pressure to conform to standards of "normality," and less access to support networks (KAFER, 2013). These issues are rarely addressed in the literature on inclusive education. Inclusive policies that do not recognize overlapping disadvantages remain incomplete.

Obstacles to Implementation: Pedagogical Strategies and Structural Barriers

What We Know About Effective Pedagogical Strategies

The 2020-2025 literature documents that certain pedagogical strategies produce more inclusive learning environments when implemented with fidelity in contexts with adequate resources. UDL offers a framework for curriculum design. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to adapt teaching. Co-teaching involves partnership between teachers (SEWELL; KENNETT; PUGH, 2022; HENDEL, 2025; FRIEND et al., 2010).

These studies are important and their recommendations have value. In contexts where they are implemented with fidelity AND where structural conditions support implementation, these strategies produce positive results.

Why Strategies Often Fail: A Realistic Analysis

However, the literature also documents that these strategies frequently fail when implemented in real contexts. It is important to be honest about the reasons.

Reason 1: Lack of Structural Conditions. UDL requires access to technology, planning time, and teacher training. Differentiated instruction requires deep knowledge of each student, planning time, and resources. Co-teaching requires the availability of a second teacher, coordination, and physical space. In resource-limited contexts, these conditions often do not exist (GARCÍA-BARRERA, 2022).

Reason 2: Difficulty Changing Mindsets. Teachers trained in the traditional teaching model need to fundamentally rethink how they teach. This requires not only technical training but a transformation of beliefs about learning, disability, and the capacity of all students. This transformation is possible, but requires time and ongoing support, and often does not occur through one-off training sessions (FLORIAN; ROUSE, 2010).

Reason 3: Lack of Systemic Support. Even when a teacher implements a strategy in their

classroom, if the national curriculum is standardized, if assessments are uniform, and if school management does not value inclusion, the strategy will be constantly undermined. Genuine inclusion requires systemic transformation, not just classroom-level change (BULI-HOLMBERG et al., 2023).

An Important Critique: Individual Accountability

There is a deeper and more concerning issue: the emphasis on pedagogical strategies can serve to hold teachers individually accountable for inclusion, while ignoring structural responsibilities. If inclusion fails, is it because the teacher did not implement UDL correctly? Or because the education system did not provide the necessary resources?

The technicist literature often implies the former. This is problematic because it holds teachers accountable for failures that are systemic. Teachers already work in precarious conditions, with low salaries (an average of R$2,500-3,500/month for elementary school teachers), inadequate training, and insufficient resources. Adding the responsibility of "making inclusion work" without providing the necessary conditions is unjust and counterproductive (NIEMINEN; PESONEN, 2022).

Structural Barriers: Funding, Policies, and the Pandemic

The most fundamental barrier to inclusive education is inadequate funding. Genuine inclusive education is expensive.

Table 6: Costs of Inclusive Education vs. Segregated Education (Estimates per Student/Year)

Model	Base Cost	Support Professionals	Assistive Technology	Physical Adaptations	Total
Segregated Education (special school)	$3,500	$1,500	$300	$200	$5,500
Integrated Education (segregated within a regular school)	$2,000	$800	$200	$100	$3,100

Inclusive Education (genuine)	$2,500	$2,000	$800	$500	$5,800

Source: Estimates based on cost-effectiveness studies (OECD, 2024; Brazilian studies). Costs in USD. Period: 2024. Includes professional salaries, technology, and physical adaptations, but does not include general school infrastructure. Limitations: estimates vary by region and context; indirect costs not included; not disaggregated by type of disability.

These data show that genuine inclusive education is approximately as expensive as segregated education, or even more expensive. However, investment in inclusive education offers greater benefits (better learning, better social integration, better preparation for adult life).

In Brazil, investment in education is historically low—about 6.5% of GDP in 2024, compared to 8-10% in developed countries. Furthermore, there is the issue of allocation within the education budget. Even when resources exist, they are frequently not allocated to inclusive education (PINTO, 2018).

Furthermore, there is the issue of contradictory policies. The COVID-19 pandemic offered an involuntary experiment on the fragility of inclusive education. When schools closed, many students with disabilities were left behind. Remote education was often not accessible. Students with disabilities experienced greater learning losses than their peers without disabilities (UNESCO, 2021).

Critical and Viable Recommendations: Structural Transformation

Recommendation 1: Increased Investment in Public Education

What it means: Increase investment in education from 6.5% to 8-10% of GDP, with specific allocation for inclusive education.

How to implement: (1) Tax reform that increases fiscal revenue; (2) reorientation of spending (reducing military spending and subsidies to specific sectors); (3) increased taxes on large fortunes and corporate profits.

Obstacles: Pressure for fiscal austerity; political resistance from groups that benefit from the status quo; competition with other priorities (health, infrastructure).

How to overcome: (1) Mobilization of social movements demanding investment in education; (2) evidence of return on investment (inclusive education produces long-term economic benefits); (3) reframing inclusion as an investment, not a cost; (4) precedents from countries that increased investment in education and saw improvement in educational indicators.

Key political actors: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, National Congress, education social movements, teachers' unions, organizations of people with disabilities.

Cost: Approximately 1.5-3.5% of additional GDP, or about R$150-350 billion/year in 2024.

Feasibility: Moderate. Requires political will, but is technically feasible.

Recommendation 2: Reduction of Class Sizes

What it means: Reduce class sizes from 30-35 students to 20-25 students, with a further reduction (15-20 students) when there are students with disabilities.

How to implement: (1) Hiring more teachers; (2) reorganizing physical spaces; (3) curricular reform to allow work in smaller groups.

Obstacles: Cost of hiring additional teachers; lack of physical space in many schools; resistance from administrators to change.

How to overcome: (1) Investment in school infrastructure; (2) training administrators on the benefits of smaller classes; (3) evidence that smaller classes produce better outcomes; (4) precedents from countries that successfully implemented class-size reductions.

Key political actors: Ministry of Education, state and municipal education departments, school administrators, teachers' unions.

Cost: Approximately R$50-100 billion/year to hire 200,000-400,000 additional teachers.

Feasibility: Moderate. Requires significant investment, but is feasible if prioritized.

Recommendation 3: Adequate Support Professionals

What it means: Ensure that all schools have access to a sufficient number of psychologists, speech therapists, interpreters, and education assistants.

How to implement: (1) Hiring specialized professionals; (2) training education assistants; (3) creating multidisciplinary teams in schools.

Obstacles: Hiring costs; shortage of specialized professionals in some regions; resistance from professionals to working in public schools (low salaries).

How to overcome: (1) Salary increases for education professionals; (2) professional training programs; (3) incentives to work in underserved regions; (4) precedents from countries that implemented multidisciplinary teams.

Key political actors: Ministry of Education, professional councils, universities, professional unions.

Cost: Approximately R$30-50 billion/year.

Feasibility: Moderate to low. Requires significant investment and a change in priorities.

Recommendation 4: Contextualized Educational Epistemology

What it means: Recognize that knowledge about inclusive education must be produced locally, in dialogue with specific Brazilian contexts.

How to implement: (1) Investment in Brazilian research on inclusion; (2) valuing knowledge produced by Brazilian researchers; (3) engagement with social movements of people with disabilities in Brazil; (4) incorporation of knowledge from indigenous communities and traditional peoples.

Obstacles: A knowledge hierarchy that privileges the Global North; lack of funding for research in Brazil; resistance from academic institutions.

How to overcome: (1) Funding policies that prioritize local research; (2) reframing local knowledge as valid and necessary; (3) partnerships between universities and communities; (4) precedents from countries that developed local epistemologies.

Key political actors: Ministry of Education, research funding agencies (CAPES, CNPq), universities, social movements.

Cost: Moderate (R$5-10 billion/year for research).

Feasibility: High. Requires mainly a change in mindset, not major investments.

Recommendation 5: Recognition of Intersectionalities

What it means: Recognize that race, class, and other overlapping disadvantages intersect with disability and affect access to inclusive education.

How to implement: (1) Specific policies addressing structural racism; (2) policies recognizing class inequality; (3) policies recognizing overlapping disadvantages; (4) collection of data disaggregated by race, class, and other vulnerability markers.

Obstacles: Political resistance to policies that recognize race; lack of disaggregated data; complexity of addressing multiple dimensions of inequality.

How to overcome: (1) Mobilization of social movements; (2) investment in data collection; (3) training administrators on intersectionality; (4) precedents of successful intersectional policies.

Key political actors: Ministry of Education, INEP, race and disability social movements, school administrators.

Cost: Low (mainly training and data collection).

Feasibility: High. Requires mainly a change in mindset.

Recommendation 6: Genuine Participation of People with Disabilities

What it means: People with disabilities must be at decision-making tables on education policy, not merely consulted.

How to implement: (1) Representation quotas in decision-making bodies; (2) funding for organizations of people with disabilities; (3) engagement with social movements; (4) accessibility of participation processes.

Obstacles: Institutional resistance to ceding power; lack of accessibility in current processes; lack of funding for organizations of people with disabilities.

How to overcome: (1) Legislation guaranteeing participation; (2) investment in accessibility; (3) change in institutional culture; (4) precedents of successful participation.

Key political actors: Ministry of Education, National Congress, organizations of people with disabilities, school administrators.

Cost: Low to moderate.

Feasibility: High. Requires mainly a change in mindset and accessibility.

Engaging with Counterperspectives and Limitations

Acknowledging Valid Arguments from Other Perspectives

Although this article is critical, it is important to acknowledge that there are valid arguments from perspectives that disagree.

Perspective 1: Pedagogical Strategies Matter. Some researchers argue that, even in resource-limited contexts, well-implemented pedagogical strategies can make a significant difference. There is evidence that teachers creating inclusive environments with limited resources achieve positive results. This argument is valid. Pedagogical strategies matter. However, they are not sufficient without structural conditions.

Perspective 2: Global North Models Can Be Adapted. Some argue that Global North models, when critically adapted to local contexts, can be valuable. This argument is also valid. It is not about rejecting Global North knowledge, but adapting it. The question is how to ensure that adaptation is genuine, not merely superficial.

Perspective 3: Efficiency Matters. Some argue that, even in public education, some degree of efficiency is necessary. Resources are limited, so it is important to use them well. This argument is valid. The issue is not letting efficiency become an excuse for not investing.

Limitations of This Review

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this review.

Limitation 1: The Author's Perspective. This review reflects the author's perspective, which is critical of the status quo. Different researchers could reach different conclusions.

Limitation 2: Focus on Brazil. While the analysis focuses on Brazil, there are questions about generalizability to other Global South contexts. Each country has its own history, context, and specific challenges.

Limitation 3: Lack of Voices of People with Disabilities. Although the article mentions the importance of participation of people with disabilities, it does not offer their voices directly. It would be stronger if it included testimonies or perspectives from people with disabilities.

Limitation 4: Qualitative Analysis. The review does not offer a quantitative synthesis of findings, as a systematic review would. This is a deliberate methodological choice, but it has implications for the type of conclusions that can be drawn.

Conclusion: Structural Transformation as a Necessity

Inclusive education in Brazil remains an unfinished project. Despite two decades of inclusive

policies, investment in research, and the development of pedagogical strategies proven to be effective, genuine educational inclusion continues to be the exception, not the rule. The paradox between enrollment growth (82% between 2021-2025) and persistent segregation (60-70% in resource rooms) reveals that physical presence does not equate to inclusion.

This article argued that this failure is not merely technical—the result of a lack of pedagogical knowledge or attitudinal resistance. It is, fundamentally, political and structural. The gap between inclusive policies and exclusionary practices is produced by educational systems that, despite inclusive rhetoric, maintain segregationist structures. It is produced by inadequate funding (6.5% of GDP vs. 8-10% recommended) that makes genuine inclusion impossible. It is produced by the uncritical import of Global North models that ignores Brazil's specific contexts (Table 4 demonstrates that the conditions for UDL do not exist in Brazilian schools). It is produced by the invisibilization of intersectionalities, meaning that inclusive policies benefit some while leaving others behind (Table 5 shows that Black students with disabilities have 20-30% less access).

Implications for Researchers

For researchers in inclusive education, this article offers several implications. First, the need for critical engagement with the assumptions of dominant literature. It is not enough to describe "what works"—it is necessary to question "for whom it works" and "under what conditions it works." Second, the need for localized knowledge production. Global South researchers must produce knowledge about inclusion based on local realities, not merely reproduce Global North research agendas. Third, the need for recognition of intersectionalities. Inclusive education cannot be treated as an isolated disability issue—it must engage with race, class, and other overlapping disadvantages.

Implications for Administrators and Policymakers

For administrators and policymakers, this article offers several implications. First, the need for robust investment in public education. Inclusive education is not a matter of "doing more with less"—it requires significant investment in infrastructure, support professionals, and assistive technologies. Second, the need for stable and consistent policies. Policy instability (exemplified by Decree 10.502/2020) undermines implementation. Third, the need for recognition of structural barriers. It is not enough to offer UDL training—it is necessary to provide the structural conditions that enable implementation (smaller classes, support professionals, planning time).

Implications for People with Disabilities

For people with disabilities, this article offers validation of experiences of segregation within regular schools. The data (Table 2) show that 60-70% of students with disabilities in regular schools receive segregated instruction in resource rooms. This is not an individual failure of teachers—it is the result of structural barriers. Furthermore, this article recognizes that the experiences of people with disabilities are not homogeneous. Black people with disabilities, poor people with disabilities, and people who accumulate other overlapping disadvantages face specific barriers that must be recognized and addressed.

The Way Forward

The path to genuine inclusive education is not technical. It is political. It requires overcoming the budget-efficiency framing that underfunds inclusion. It requires robust investment in public education. It requires an epistemology that values local knowledge. It requires recognition of intersectionalities. It requires genuine participation of people with disabilities. It requires political

commitment to social justice, not merely compliance with policies.

This path is not easy. But it is necessary. And it is possible. There are educators who, despite precarious conditions, create truly inclusive environments. There are social movements fighting for genuine inclusive education. There are researchers developing contextualized epistemologies of inclusion. There are people with disabilities who refuse to be rendered invisible and demand real participation in decisions about their lives and education.

Implications for Other Global South Contexts

While this article focuses specifically on Brazil, many insights may be relevant to other Global South contexts. Countries such as the Philippines, South Africa, and India face similar challenges: enrollment growth without genuine inclusion, uncritical transfer of Global North models, invisibilization of intersectionalities, and inadequate funding. The recommendations offered—increased investment, reduced class sizes, support professionals, contextualized epistemology, recognition of intersectionalities, and genuine participation of people with disabilities—can be adapted to other contexts. What is needed is critical engagement with local realities and political commitment to structural transformation.

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