

Training and Experience of Portuguese Special Education Teachers in the Context of Pedagogical Differentiation and Inclusion (Descriptive Study)

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Abstract: We address the issue of the challenges of training (initial, continued) and practical experience of the Portuguese teaching profession (special education), in the context of pedagogical differentiation and inclusive schools. We carried out a mixed methodology study with quantitative preponderance, of an exploratory, transversal, descriptive, explanatory and analytical nature, carried out in 2023. We constituted a sample of N=72 teachers from the 2nd and 3rd Education Cycles of two School Groups, in the interior area northern Portugal, applying a questionnaire survey (20 items), combined with data obtained from documentary observation, non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews with those responsible. The statistical treatment of the data (Chi-square, Fisher's test) from the survey and the content analysis of the interviews allowed the verifiability of the questions asked: Analyze 'Being an inclusive teacher' (profile) in pedagogical practice and engagement with students (SEN) in its teaching-learning process in two School Groups; Know the opinions of 2nd and 3rd cycle teachers, special education teachers and technicians from these Groups studying education and/or inclusive schools; Understand the teaching profession (identity) in the context of special education and its training (initial, continuing) with regard to school inclusion and inclusive learning; To know whether teacher training and the practical actions of the inclusive teacher imply better success for students in these School Groups; Determine whether the measures implemented by the Groups promote school inclusion, coexistence and training for citizenship. The results of the survey and interviews confirmed that teachers have skills referred to in the legal regulations, and the percentages of responses agreeing on the skills referred to by special education teachers show this relevance, mentioning whether: -specialized resource pedagogical differentiation strategies; -in collaboration with all regular teachers and leaders; -promote collaborative work with co-responsibility; -articulate with specialist technicians the differentiation of means, learning and assessment materials"; use specialized resources to implement learning; be a member of the learning support center and a teacher for all students at the school. Thus, the study confirms that teachers apply different practices when it comes to interacting with students and promoting inclusion, having training that improves with teaching experience.

Keywords: Teacher training; Special education; Inclusive school; Pedagogical differentiation; Inclusive practice.

Introduction

The term inclusion is analyzed based on rights, according to the literature, from its historical evolution and contextual framework responding to the inclusive movement of different scientific areas, entered into the life of schools and scientific publications (Ainscow, 2020). In the words of Rodrigues (2018) the inclusion is providing everyone with access to the best possible living and learning conditions. Now this educational, social and educational policy movement determines the right of everyone to participate in the educational process and in society, which is for everyone without distinction, and, therefore, acceptance and respect for what differs from each other. We agree that 'education' allows social cohesion and transforms diversity into something positive in the mutual understanding between people and groups and, thus, UNESCO (2008, cited by Rodrigues, 2014, p. 89) clarified "Inclusive Education can be conceived as a general guiding principle to strengthen education, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities". The school's mission is to know how to deal with differences and diversity, fighting against inequalities and any form of exclusion of students and, to this end, it must guarantee everyone an equal education, participation in learning and the educational community, so that education is seen by everyone. Thus, the aim of an inclusive school is to promote a differentiating pedagogy centered on the student, where all those involved in this process (guardians, teachers, family or educational community) seek strategies and pedagogical solutions to support all students with special needs, problems with adaptation and learning and making pedagogical practice more

flexible. (Rodrigues, 2016). In other words, finding ways and adopting new procedures that generate innovation and guarantee educational development for all students, with respect for Human Rights. Building the school, with more inclusive environments and practices, through a uniform and participatory understanding, with inclusive leaders and educational teams, to evaluate, reflect, plan, guide, collaborate, involve their educational communities, in a shared and dynamic vision of an inclusive school. It is necessary to protect the right of all children to education and ensure that it responds with quality, promoting values of peace, justice, human rights and gender equality (Ainscow, 2019; Arnaiz; De Haro & Azorín, 2018; Coelho, 2012; Santos, 2019).

In normative terms, Decree-Law no. 319/91, of 23/August begins to talk about special education, followed by Decree-Law no. 3/2008, of 7/January, which creates the concept of 'special education' until Decree-Law No. 54/2018, of 6/July with the respective amendment by Law No. 116/2019, of 13/September, which modifies this concept to an "inclusive school" (Portugal, 2018, 2019). Thus, Portuguese legislation on inclusion was guided by the best practices of schools, such that the Ministry of Education publishes a manual to support implementation and as an instrument for disseminating the practices of inclusive schools. (MEC, 2018). We corroborate the definition of UNESCO (2020), which uses the term 'inclusion' in the educational sphere and not, inclusive education, as the latter can refer us to something that is already concluded, finished, that is, that all the subjects in question, are already included.

In fact, teachers are decisive in the process of school inclusion of students with special educational needs (hereinafter SEN) and evaluation of pedagogical practices, and the way they view the teaching profession, from initial and continuing training, in relation to inclusive education is relevant, pedagogical differentiation only for students with SEN cannot continue to be considered good inclusion practice. It is necessary to manage the class as a dimension of professional teaching knowledge in the implementation of inclusive pedagogy with teacher attitudes towards difference and towards the curriculum (IGEC, 2016). The perspectives and ways of implementing inclusive education at school have had a great debate, so much so that the Portuguese Ministry of Education, through the General Directorate of Innovation and Curricular Development and the Directorate of Special Education and Socio-Educational Support Services, published manuals to support the practice of special education (DGIDC, 2011) alerting to analysis measures and indicators, specialized support units, resource centers for inclusion, curricular programs, etc. In other words, it is essential to train to include and promote inclusive practices, through teacher training in a school context (Fonseca, 2022; Silva & Leite, 2015).

It is a fact that teachers play a determining role in the training of new generations and in socio-educational transformation, and it is up to them, from training (initial and continuing) and then through teaching experience, to develop the process of inclusion in the school context (Sousa, 2017). This issue is associated with today's challenges in schools, together with other aspects, for example the effects of the pandemic, the flow of migration, conflicts and technological advances that perspective educational functions through equity, diversity and inclusion (Gonçalves, 2018). Hence, the teaching profession is faced with increasingly complex demands and expectations under the pressure of quality and academic success (good results) alongside the needs to meet well-being and citizenship (Pereira, 2018). Now this implies a broader teaching professionalism, intensification of work in favor of diversity and pedagogical differentiation, in a logic of 'accountability' and cultural plurality. Therefore, it is necessary to value the profession and teaching experience of the teacher (special education), knowing that training (initial, ongoing) does not happen only through courses, knowledge and accumulated practices, but fundamentally, through work of critical reflexivity on their own practices and permanent (re)construction of a personal identity.

On the other hand, we identified skills of special education teachers, in light of current legal regulations, with significant contributions to the construction of an inclusive school, knowing that in the current school they must assume a dual role, as a specialized resource/Pedagogue and consultant (collaborative work, mediator) of the educational community, being a "bridge builder" and attentive to the needs of students (Rodrigues, 2016, 2017). In these duties, we define the direction of their functions to: provide direct support to students, promoting personal autonomy, socio-emotional skills and development of areas of competences of the 'Profile of students leaving compulsory education'; develop collaborative practices with regular education teachers in para; define pedagogical differentiation strategies; reinforce learning; identify multiple means of motivation, expression and representation of learning; implement innovative, interdisciplinary intervention methodologies, structured teaching strategies, operationalization of additional measures, in addition to the implementation of the annual transition plan; support the organization of the transition process to post-school life; intervene in bilingual education; promote inclusive learning assessment; etc. The special education teacher in an inclusive school is required to have skills, personal and professional values, attitudes, knowledge and abilities to know how to do and build a more inclusive school, where the main focus is the student (Ainscow, 2009; Ferreira, 2019).

The purpose of our study, resulting from academic research work (Canteiro, 2023), focuses on whether the specialized training of teachers in special education responds to the principles and demands of inclusive school/education, as well as the way in which they build the concept of inclusion, both in initial training in its

articulation with theoretical-practical knowledge, and in the experience acquired in the practices developed and in continued training for the challenges of inclusive schools, based on current legislation (Coelho, 2012). In other words, we intend to know whether training (initial and continuing), practical experience and the perception of teachers in their profession, with regard to inclusion, has an impact on the teaching-learning process of students and on educational action and processes (Ferreira, 2015; Lapa, 2021; Rocha, 2021). This purpose was consolidated in our bibliographical research/State of the Art in the construction of the theoretical-conceptual framework on (special) education versus inclusive education teacher as a key element in this inclusive process for students with SEN, requiring reflection on practices (Hansen et al., 2020). We have established the following objectives: - Understand the relevance of (initial) teacher training, their teaching roles within the scope of special education and their pedagogical practice in inclusive contexts; - Determine whether training (initial, continuing) enables teachers to develop school and inclusive education; -Analyze whether the school facilitates the process of inclusion of SEN students, providing educational means and resources based on pedagogical differentiation and flexible curriculum, with the teacher having the skills for this intervention; - Find out whether the School Groups under study encourage civic and citizenship education in students, which are key educational goals in/for inclusion.

Therefore, in 2022 (April, May), we carried out an exploratory, cross-sectional, descriptive and explanatory study, using a mixed/hybrid methodology regarding the attitudes of teachers and education technicians in relation to inclusion. Attitudes related to the conceptions of school/inclusive education are present in the practical actions of teachers (Ainscow & Messiou, 2016). In this sense, (initial) teacher training can be a contingency to produce these attitudes, but in most cases, they are built through professional experience (Almeida, 2019; Inês; Seabra; Pacheco, 2021). In other words, teachers' pedagogical practices for inclusive teaching are associated with their qualifications and the school social environment (Neto et al., 2018). The results resulting from the survey and interviews confirmed that teachers have skills referred to in the legal regulations (Portugal, 2019), and the percentages of responses agreeing on the skills referred to by special education teachers show this relevance, mentioning whether: -specialized resource for pedagogical differentiation strategies; -in collaboration with all regular teachers and leaders; -promote collaborative work with co-responsibility; -articulate with specialist technicians the differentiation of means, learning and assessment materials"; use specialized resources to implement learning; be a member of the learning support center and a teacher for all students at the school. That is, the teachers under study demonstrated what is mentioned by Borges (2020), Madureira and Leite (2019) and Salazar (2021) that the special education teacher must be understood as a specialist, with dual functions: specialist in planning and intervention for students with specific problems, specialist in inclusive pedagogy, collaborator with all teachers and other professionals, to build learning environments where all students participate and experience successful situations in terms of personal, social and academic development.

The methodological structure of the text consists of three points of approach: the first point is intended for the theoretical-conceptual framework for clarifying concepts, the reference to legislation and certain studies that served as our basis, especially that of Regina Canteiro (2023); the second indicates empirical methodology carried out with the questions, sampling process, characterization of the subjects under study and data collection techniques; and the last to the analysis, treatment and explanation of the results.

1. State of the Art: From regulatory legal regulations to Teacher training and action

When we refer to special education we refer to inclusive education, because for inclusion to materialize it is necessary to mobilize various actors and sectors, such as the political, social and institutional sector and, fundamentally, understand the role and action of the teacher in these inclusive contexts (Almeida, 2019; Alves, 2019). Therefore, we question the relationship between the training of Special Education teachers (skills) and the essential principles that an inclusive school requires. The analysis of the approach to SEN in the initial teacher training curriculum is an indicator of the underlying principles and training models that have been defended, for more than three decades, by including these skills in future teachers to deal with children/young people with SEN (Neto et al., 2018). In this way, the concept of inclusion must ensure education for all and to this end it is important that the teacher has good professional performance, with regard to the educational act and its practices and pedagogical relationship and in the application of teaching methodologies and strategies that facilitate the access and learning success for all students (Canteiro, 2023). Training for inclusion is not desirable, because in its true sense, training prepares or deepens the teaching of all students (Silva, 2013). In this sense, all training is for inclusion, and it is not desirable to talk about specific training for inclusion. This is an enormous challenge for all education professionals and technicians, as inclusive education advocates education for all, promotes the success of everyone in general and of each person in particular and, therefore, is based on the rights of equal opportunities and not discrimination (Correia, 2013). In other words, inclusive education produces changes in the values of education, which implies developing new educational restructuring policies.

Regulations regulating Special Education and Inclusion

The principle of inclusion arises with the Salamanca Declaration that proposed “*Principles, Policy and Practices in the area of Special Educational Needs and respective Framework for Action*”, resulting from the UNESCO World Conference in 1994, which substantiates the requirement for schools to integrate all children, regardless of their personal, psychological, physical, linguistic or social conditions, as at school all students learn together (DGIDC, 2011). This gives rise to a student-centered pedagogy and “education for all” or, in other words, the “*Inclusive School*” following the guidance of inclusive education, receiving quality care, suited to their needs and in equity. Thus, the notion of inclusion becomes a human, affective-emotional and social dimension that distinguishes it from the concept of integration and creates a new school model in a sense of community among all (Rodrigues, 2017). Later, in 2007, a summit was held, within the framework of the Portuguese presidency of the European Union, in which the Ministry of Education with the European Agency for the Development of Special Education held a parliamentary hearing “*Young Voices: Meeting Diversity in Education*”, in which young people expressed their ideas about inclusive education, defending their rights and making essential criticisms, as members of society. In other words, the concept of inclusion goes beyond SEN, as it assumes the existence of heterogeneity between individuals, considered as a positive factor, generating a more enriching and beneficial educational environment for everyone. Hence, a school that practices an inclusive policy and culture constitutes the great challenge in the educational system and focuses on a differentiating education/pedagogy, which creates opportunities for meaningful and personalized learning, in a context rich in experiences and interactions (Duck & Murrillo, 2018; Silva & Leite, 2015).

Subsequently, Decree-Law No. 3/2008, of January 7th, was published, revoking Decree-Law 319/91, of August 23rd, which had the purpose of regulating Special Education, with that diploma appearing within the scope of education. inclusive, to respond to the diverse characteristics and needs of students, with specialized support (Rodrigues, 2018). The regulation also provides for the creation of “reference schools” to meet specific needs (deafness, blindness or low vision, autism and multi-disabilities), defining the stages of the process of referring the student to special education services, from referral to the assessment of the student's problem (based on the International Classification of Functioning – ICF) to the preparation of a Technical-Pedagogical Report based on the assessment carried out, in addition to the Individual Educational Program (IEP), if the existence of educational needs is confirmed special needs (NEE) of a permanent nature. The following educational measures were adopted: personalized pedagogical support; individual curricular adjustments; adjustments to the enrollment process; adjustments to the evaluation process; specific individual curriculum (CEI) and support technologies and also introduces an Individual Transition Plan (PIT) to prepare the student for post-school life (CEI students who are 15 years of age or older) (IGEC, 2016). This legislation has positive points that promote inclusion, such as the creation of specialized units to deal with various problems in regular schools, allowing some students to be removed from special schools (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2018).

Already in this century, Decree-Law n° 54/2018, of 6/July, established the new Legal Regime for Inclusive Education (Portugal, 2018), replacing the previous diploma promoting principles and standards that guaranteed inclusion, as a process that aimed at diversity of the needs and potential of each and every student, through increased participation in the learning processes and in the life of the educational community (n° 1°, art.º 1). This provides an inclusive orientation that reinforces the right of each student to an education suited to their potential, expectations and needs, in a range of responses planned within the scope of a common and plural educational project that promotes participation, progress and equity (MEC, 2018). That 2018 diploma considers “*Inclusion as a value transversal to the entire school that aims to educate all its students based on their differences, be they gender, ethnicity, disability in the learning process*” (Portugal, 2018), because in its article 3, it determines a set of principles and guidelines for an inclusive philosophy based on: Universal Educability; Equity; Inclusion in access or participation; Personalization (multilevel approach); Flexibility (curricular, school spaces/times); Self-determination: (needs, interests and preferences, cultural and linguistic identity); Parental involvement (right to participation and information); Minimal interference. F. Pereira (2018) considers that that diploma abandons a restricted conception of support measures by taking a broader view of the school as a whole, in the multiplicity of its dimensions and the interaction between them, in a range of responses, actions, strategies and measures organized into 3 levels of intervention: universal; selective and additional.

The Training of Teachers (Initial, Ongoing) to Work in Inclusive Contexts

If we promote reflexivity in (future) teachers in situations of pedagogical practice, we build one of the purposes of the teaching profession through which consistent changes are generated in inclusive contexts. Let us analyze the pertinent question arising from the literature ‘*Is there training for inclusion?*’

Initial training for inclusion has been defended in multiple opinions, recommendations, and national and international technical reports. However, it always appears as a need for the system and teachers, with the latter being responsible for its implementation. At an international level, documents from UNESCO and the OECD

highlight the need to encourage the use of planning methods based on students' needs and interests, raise teachers' awareness of the importance of collaborative work, promote changes in attitudes towards difference and demand strategies suited to each student through reflection on practice (Santos, 2019). In fact, in initial training, the inclusion of students with SEN should constitute a transversal orientation of the curriculum (Madureira & Leite, 2019), integrated into general pedagogical themes (teaching pedagogy, curriculum, professional ethics, articulation with families), but also in the didactic approaches of each disciplinary area, developed and deepened in situations of initiation to professional practice and based on a critical attitude of the educational reality, through research.

Effectively, the training (initial and continuing) of teachers, associated with teaching experience, is oriented towards the construction of professional knowledge, in this case in particular, towards the construction of professional teaching knowledge, as schools do not become inclusive by transporting thought and special education practices for regular teaching contexts (Ainscow & Messiou, 2016, p. 54) since these good intentions of individualized measures in the group/class context imply the transposition of special education procedures to the classroom context regular, tending to maintain and/or accelerate existing differences. That is, from our perspective, inclusion requires pedagogical skills (curricular and didactic concepts) and professional skills suitable for teaching and solid professional knowledge in its various dimensions (Canteiro, 2023).

Evidently, the initial training (and ongoing training actions) of teachers and the inclusion of students with SEN in diverse contexts must constitute a transversal orientation of the curriculum (Ferreira, 2019; Fonseca, 2021), integrating specific (psycho)pedagogical themes, articulated with the participation of families, but also in the didactic approaches of each subject area, developing and deepening situations of pedagogical practice, based on a reflective attitude and critical questioning of the reality of students with SEN (Arnaiz; De Haro & Azorín, 2018). In the case of continuous training, from an inclusion perspective, there is a tendency to focus on the characteristics of deficiencies or problems, neglecting the essential aspects of planning, which has to be done from the perspective of each child and the class in which they are inserted, in order to not create disruptions in the normal functioning of the group/class (Santos, 2019). Therefore, continued training, designed from an inclusion perspective, tends to suffer from the same problem: focusing on the characteristics of the disability or problem, neglecting the essential aspects of planning the intervention, from the perspective of the child, but also of the class, in which it is inserted – an intervention that is useful for the development and learning of the child (SEN), without creating disruptions in the normal functioning of the group (Almeida, 2012; Lapa, 2021).

Initial training has not adequately developed the practice of strategies to achieve inclusion, and it is essential that teachers who work in the area of EE have specialized training, through training actions (Silva, 2015). In this sense, it is not enough to have national and European legislation, since the response to the problems, which are complex, implies changes in terms of pedagogical practice and teachers' attitudes, in the organization and management of the school with the collaboration of agents and actors. educational (Teixeira, 2019). When debating this issue related to teacher training and action, we argue that the acceptance of differences depends, in part, on the conceptions they have about the curriculum and the teaching strategies they opt for. To be effective, intervention strategies will have to be thought out, planned and reflected upon within the scope of curriculum management in inclusive classes, leaving specialized processes and techniques to special education (Silva, 2011; Trindade & Rosa, 2019). Teachers and their training for inclusion are the essential focuses of our study, giving importance to the skills they must possess to materialize this inclusion of students, including analyzing the training needs of teachers in this paradigm of inclusion and inclusive school. In this sense, the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in inclusive education become equally relevant and, therefore, our study allowed us to identify some noteworthy aspects to improve teacher training for inclusion, which can be deepened and analyzed in future research, with a wider population.

2. Empirical Methodology: Design, Techniques and Procedures

We carried out a mixed and/or hybrid methodology study, with a quantitative preponderance, with an exploratory, transversal, descriptive, explanatory and analytical content, with the intention of knowing whether the articulation of the training (initial, continued) of teachers and their teaching experience constitutes a preponderant condition for their actions and pedagogical practices with regard to inclusive education. In other words, we wanted to know the role of the special education teacher in the school inclusion process. We established the following research questions: Que1 -What is the relevance of being an inclusive teacher involving students (SEN) from two Portuguese School Groups (Torre de Moncorvo -AETM and Vila Nova de Foz Côa -AEVNFC), in their teaching-learning process; Que2- Know the opinions of regular teachers of the 2nd and 3rd cycles of Basic education, Special Education teachers and support technicians from those School Groups on inclusive education/school; Que3- Understand the exercise of the teaching profession (identity) and the training (initial, continuing) of teachers with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN; Que4 -Analyze whether teacher training and the practical actions of the inclusive teacher imply better learning and student

success in the School Groups under study; Que5: Understand whether the measures implemented by the two School Groups promote school inclusion (attitudes/values and citizenship training).

Sampling and Procedures

The study context of the teachers, selected for convenience (N=72) due to their availability, belonged to School Groups in the northern interior of Portugal, in the District of Guarda:

*-Torre de Moncorvo School Group (AETM) with around 503 students (school year 2021-22), with pre-school up to the 12th year of schooling, professional courses and CEF's. Its educational offer covers: Pre-School Education, 1st/2nd and 3rd CEB, Secondary Education, CEF, Vocational and Professional Courses and also includes the Learning Support Center, Psychology and Guidance service, Student Support Office and Family, establishes socio-educational partnerships and protocols with various local entities.

*-Vila Nova de Foz Côa School Group (AEVNFC) with 490 students presents an educational offer from Pre-School to the 12th year of schooling, integrating Socio-educational Support services such as: School social action, Specific Tutorial Support, School Library, Student and Family Support Office, Psychology and Guidance Service and has socio-educational partnerships and protocols with various local entities and organizations.

From the sample of N=72 teachers from the 2nd and 3rd Cycles of Education, Special Education, technicians and psychologists from the 2 School Groups mentioned, we applied a questionnaire survey (Hill & Hill, 2000) with 20 items (the first 8 items are sociodemographic variables - characterization and the rest are response types on a nominal scale and intervals), whose data were associated with information from: documentary observation (analysis of the Groups' Educational Projects, documents guiding their action and mission in terms of inclusion and students with SEN); non-participant or natural observation (records); and semi-structured interview with the two directors responsible for the School Groups, in a total of 13 open questions (relating to teaching learning/pedagogical practices in inclusive terms, inclusive education in schools, teaching in special education, the multidisciplinary team and legislative diplomas, promotion from civic and citizenship education, to pedagogical support and resources at the curriculum level, inclusive teacher profile).

We comply with ethical and legal procedures, such as confidentiality, anonymity and confidentiality of participating subjects and their data, following the established protocol and in accordance with the General Data Protection regulations and the Ethics Committee of the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco /Portugal, that is, we took all necessary scientific and ethical measures and precautions throughout the study. We prepared the term of free acceptance of the subjects submitted to the study, requesting the respective authorizations to carry out the research, based on informal contacts with the School Groups, which allowed us to officially prepare the authorization for the study and establish the Term of Free Acceptance of the participating subjects.

3. Analysis of the Results Obtained

We carried out statistical treatment on the data obtained by the questionnaire survey (Chi-square test of independence and Fisher test) and a content analysis by categories of the interviews and, subsequently, we carried out the verifiability process of the questions formulated (Que) (Canteiro, 2023). The Chi-square assumption that there should be no more than 20% of cells with expected frequencies less than 5 was analyzed. In situations where this assumption was not met, the Chi-square test was used using Monte Carlo simulation. We analyzed these differences using standardized adjusted residuals. The significance level to reject the null hypothesis was set at $(\alpha) \leq .05$.

We found that a high percentage of teachers (93.1%) had already worked with students with special SEN needs and, therefore, they all responded affirmatively to the question "Do you consider that the Teacher should remain up to date, flexible to changes in the performance of duties". The importance of professional development, makes teaching more flexible, exists on the part of the teacher, recognizing the work and the appreciation and commitment that students demonstrate (Neto et al., 2018). The items that received the highest percentages of agreement were: "Inclusion is a process that aims to respond to a diversity of needs of all students" (98.6%); "Considers tutoring and support important" (98.6%); but there was a large percentage of teachers (97.2%) who considered "The training of Special Education teachers is very important for the Inclusion process" which reveals the importance given in the literature to special education teachers (Inês; Seabra; Pacheco, 2021). The biggest concern of teachers is to make education more accessible to all students, respecting the differences and specificities of each one, whether within the classroom and in tutorials, or with special education teachers in their pedagogical action, as the It is important to make the student feel integrated into the educational system (Salazar, 2021).

Furthermore, almost half of the teachers surveyed (48.6%) 'Totally agree' with the item "The focus of Inclusion focuses on the classroom, where the teacher looks for solutions for teaching and learning" and a little more than half (52.8%) only 'Agrees' that "Inclusive Education advocates education for all and that it promotes

success for everyone in general". Furthermore, 44.4% of regular teachers and special education teachers rate collaborative work as 'Very Good' and 31.9% only as 'Good', which coincides with the researched literature (Canteiro, 2023). Collaborative work implies change, which depends on the way teachers view their teaching work and, therefore, collaborative work is done together with the sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledge of know-how (Silva, 2013). The comparison of items related to inclusion in both Groups (AETM=97% and AEVNFC=98%), does not reveal statistically significant differences ($p > .05$), as teachers have equal perceptions regarding inclusion in their diversity process. But regarding the item "Training of Special Education Teachers for the Inclusion process" there is a small difference between the Groups (AETM=98% and AEVNFC=91%).

In relation to the item "Considers that Tutoring and Support are important" there is a difference (AETM=99% and AEVNFC=96%) and in the item "Considers that the focus of inclusion focuses on the classroom... teacher seeks solutions for teaching learning" there are significant differences (AETM=44% and AEVNFC=58%). (43.8%), in contrast to School B (58.3%). Regarding the item "Do you consider that Inclusive Education advocates education for all, promoting the success of all in general" there was a discrepancy (AETM=48% and AEVNFC=63%), with teachers (without gender differences) susceptible to change and to the way of looking at inclusion.

Regarding the item "Do you consider that the focus of Inclusion focuses on the classroom, where the teacher seeks solutions for teaching and learning", there were gender differences (teachers 'Agree'=45.1% and teachers 'Agree'=45.1% and teachers 'They agree'= 57%), but agree that it should be the teacher who finds solutions for educational practice in the classroom (Prata & Santos, 2019; Trindade & Rosa, 2019).

Therefore, the responses regarding inclusion, depending on the teachers' academic qualifications, revealed statistically significant differences, that is: teachers who invested in their professional development through postgraduate and/or master's degrees, consider it important to "Achieve Training actions to improve their knowledge about Inclusion" (84.6%) and those with a degree revealed a low value for those (60.9%). But in the items "The training of Special Education teachers is very important for the Inclusion process", "Does tutoring and support consider important" and "Inclusion is a process that aims to respond to a diversity of needs of all students" the answers are the same (98%) for teachers with postgraduate and master's degrees and graduates (Canteiro, 2023). Thus, the training received by teachers was sufficient to successfully implement inclusive education, but teachers with a Postgraduate or Master's degree agree significantly more with the statement (Fisher's test value, $p = .019$) and depending on the gender of the teachers, does not reveal statistically significant differences ($p > .05$), as well as for the item "Do you consider that Inclusive Education advocates education for all and that it promotes success for all in general" they responded 'Agree' (teachers=52.9%; teachers=52.4%).

'Licensed' teachers agree (50.0%) on the item "Consider that the focus of Inclusion focuses on the classroom, in which the teacher seeks solutions for teaching and learning", while teachers with postgraduate degrees and/or master's degree has a lower percentage (45.2%). As for the item "Do you consider that Inclusive Education advocates education for all and that it promotes the success of everyone in general" the Licensed teachers 'Agree' (54.3) that inclusive education should be for everyone without exception and those of Postgraduate -Graduate and master's degrees (51%).

One of the guiding principles of Inclusive Education is the personalization of teaching, which presupposes student-centered educational planning, in order to meet their needs, potential, interests and preferences as provided for in Decree-Law n°54/2018 (Portugal, 2018). We can deduce that the pedagogical strategies and practices applied in the classroom promote targeted inclusion for students and promote the success of each one. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) between teachers from the two Groups regarding inclusion, with and without students with special educational needs, does not reveal statistically significant differences ($p > .05$). However, we highlight that for the item, "Inclusion is a process that aims to respond to a diversity of needs of all students", the responses of the Group teachers are close (No=99%; Yes=98.5%), such as for the item "The training of Special Education teachers is very important for the Inclusion process" (No=99%; Yes=97.0%), and "Do you consider tutoring and support important" (No=100%; Yes=98.5%), and for the item "Do you consider that the main promoter of Inclusion is the Teacher?" the answers were (No=100%; Yes=59.7%), which is a much lower percentage.

In the item "Do you consider that Inclusive Education advocates education for all and that it promotes success for all in general" there were (53.7%) of teachers who do not have students with SEN and (40.0%) of teachers who accompany students with SEN. Furthermore, the respondents consider, with $\chi^2(8) = 16.055$, $p = .038$, that there is a significantly high proportion of contract teachers who do not express an opinion (S/opinion) and of teachers (pedagogical zone table) who completely agree with the queried statement. However, the comparison of responses regarding inclusion, depending on length of service, does not reveal statistically significant differences ($p > .05$). However, teachers with a length of service of up to 10 years and more than 20

years of service 'Agree' (100.0%) that inclusion is a process that responds to the diversity of all students. On the other hand, in the item "The training of Special Education teachers is very important for the Inclusion process", teachers with up to 10 years of service responded affirmatively (100.0%), while teachers with 11 or more years of service responded (95.2%) and teachers with more than 20 years of service (97.2%). Regarding the item "Do you consider tutoring and support to be important", all teachers with 10 or more years of service consider the existence of tutoring and support to be important for students with academic difficulties and SEN (Lapa, 2021).

We can deduce that the teacher with more or less time of service is interested in understanding the students and adapting to the needs of each one, so that they can develop new potential, and, for this, the teacher must know the student, the way of learning and relate. Therefore, the answers to the items related to inclusion, depending on the length of service of the participating teachers, there were no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$). Regarding the item "Do you consider that the focus of Inclusion focuses on the classroom, in which the teacher seeks solutions for teaching and learning" the teachers in the study with more than 20 years of service said 'Agree' (55.6%) such as in the item "Do you consider that Inclusive Education advocates education for all and that it promotes success for everyone in general", they also said 'Agree' (58.3%). In this way, we can say that the teacher has a very important role in inclusion as they serve as an example for their peers and students in regular classes (Duck & Murillo, 2018; Sousa, 2017).

The literature confirms that the teacher has a fundamental role in the development of inclusive learning but must understand/know the attitudes and practices in the classroom, given the diversity of students (Fonseca, 2022). In fact, it is useful, as mentioned in the legislative guidelines, to have a good teacher-student relationship in the classroom, oriented towards the need for motivation and understanding, which is necessary to establish and which will contribute to the improvement of teaching and inclusion fairer/satisfactory (DGIDC, 2011; MEC, 2018).

Therefore, the survey data on perspectives on inclusion allowed us to understand that inclusion means "involving", "understanding" "accepting" "encompassing" the way of being in our society, community, because it is of a human, emotional and effective dimension that involves the full meaning of inclusion. The data allows us to understand the way teachers from the 2 School Groups under study act, their perception of inclusive education and the way they approach working within the classroom with SEN students and students from other countries, who they need support to overcome the difficulties inherent in learning (Trindade & Rosa, 2019). To understand inclusion in the classroom and its promotion of academic success, it is necessary for those involved in the students' educational process to actively participate in order to find solutions that optimize resources and support (Borges, 2020; Neto et al. al., 2018; Santos, 2019). In fact, the results of the survey allowed us to identify training needs so that in the future teachers can have more favorable attitudes regarding the adoption of more inclusive practices (Salazar, 2021; Sousa, 2017). It is very notable for the teaching profession, as the literature says, the mobilization of new ideas and interventions for inclusion, so that pedagogical practices are more positive.

With regard to the content analysis of the 13 questions of the semi-structured interviews, carried out with the directors AETM (has been in the position for almost 2 years and has been teaching for 18 years) and AEVNFC (has been in the position for 7 years and has been teaching for 28 years). The categorical analysis of the interviews was crossed with the questionnaire data, which allowed us to affirm that the pedagogical dimension, namely classroom organization/management and collaborative work with other professionals is little valued in continuing education, probably because it is understood that these Teachers have already acquired knowledge in initial training and from their professional experience (Arnaiz; De Haro & Azorín, 2018). However, in our opinion and in the case of special education, conditions must be created for reinvestment in these dimensions of inclusive teacher action, with a focus on pedagogical practice (Prata & Santos, 2019). Assessment seems to be a dimension emphasized by teachers in initial training (excessive focus on individual assessment), to the detriment of the transversal approach to the assessment problem, with a special focus on the ethical-social dimension and contexts (Almeida, 2019). There are gaps in the ethical-emotional and relational dimension of teaching work, which are central to inclusive education.

4. Discussion and verifiability of the questions asked.

We used triangulation of data from the applied data collection techniques, so that we could verify the verifiability of the questions formulated in our study, whose interpretation was supported by theoretical-conceptual foundations (grounded theory) related to supporting bibliographical research. Let's look at the verifiability of the questions formulated based on the analyzed data:

Que1- In these School Groups there are many students who are not successful at school, and the causes are disparate and complex, as they determine measures and responses, within the scope of pedagogical differentiation or inclusion. It is not just about multiple deficits, aspects of vulnerability and socio-economic conditions of families in this area of the country, students' difficulties in their academic performance or gaps in learning that can lead to situations of academic failure and, therefore, inclusion must provide each and every student has access to possible learning. Teachers from these Groups expressed in their responses the same idea that inclusion guarantees access to education with better learning, with the director of AEVNFC highlighting the importance of teachers in inclusive educational policies, as well as the person responsible for AETM who highlights the role of the teacher as a link in teaching-learning and in relation to motivation and interaction with their students (Silva, 2013).

Que2- Teachers' opinions reflect the way of being at school, stating that it should be for everyone (Ainscow, 2020), but those interviewed consider pedagogical practice and teaching-learning to be inseparable from the inclusive model, despite there still being a large It is a difficult path to take because for them, school and social inclusion is an act of understanding the process of training for active citizenship of students, respecting the 'Other', recognizing differences and enabling coexistence between all. In other words, knowing how to deal with difference and diversity, fighting against inequalities and any form of exclusion of students.

Que3- The responding teachers view teaching and learning as essential in an inclusive school environment, just as those responsible for the Groups are all aware of the importance of an inclusive school, showing willingness to learn, improve their abilities in order to face new challenges and, therefore, Inclusive teachers and inclusive educational policies are essential (Alves, 2019; Fonseca, 2022). Teachers agree that training (initial, continued) for the inclusion process is very important, that is, in the words of Madureira and Leite (2019) it will be necessary to promote in future teachers the attitude of questioning and reflecting on pedagogical situations, which are one of the purposes in the teaching profession and for changes in practices in inclusive contexts, with the participation of educational agents being essential.

Que4- The data obtained in the questionnaire on teacher training led respondents to opt for 'Agree' (84.6%), as they consider that training is extremely important for professional development, in improving their knowledge about inclusion, knowing that the teacher as a supervisor plays a leading role in inclusive teaching practices, becoming an agent of inclusion, as he includes diversity and differences. This idea is also given by the interviewees and confirms the literature, which highlights the importance of teaching work (continuous training), so that students can achieve educational success.

Que5 - Interviewees from School Groups value civic, social and citizenship values, mobilizing techniques and strategies to instill in students (SEN) a set of useful themes and learning, knowing that difficulties are general in the face of special educational needs in many students. Furthermore, teachers provide educational resources and admit reflexivity 'in/about' their practices and their social attitudes towards inclusion, as, like S.J.T. Almeida (2012) and M. P. Ferreira (2015), teaching experience goes beyond mastery of concepts and theories, enabling the teacher to face specific inclusion situations.

In addition to what we mentioned, the data from the interviews determine the attention given by teachers to the development of skills, especially 'reflection on pedagogical practices in EE'. However, there are no indicators that allow us to infer the existence of concerns focused on questioning the role of the EE teacher for inclusion (since everything indicates that the information is very focused on the student and less on interactions). It seems, however, that teachers intend to create more opportunities for collaboration and development of other personal and social skills, essential to inclusive educational practice, although this analysis is somewhat inferential, since the interviewees do not provide much specific data. The triangulation of results seems to support the idea that the pedagogical dimension, namely 'classroom organization and management and collaborative work' with other professionals, is little valued in the training process, probably because it is understood that these teachers acquire the knowledge and know-how in initial training and then from professional experience. However, the specialized approach to EE should, in our opinion, create conditions for reinvestment in these dimensions of the EE teacher's action, with a focus on inclusion. 'Evaluation' seems to be a dimension emphasized in training (initial, continued), particularly through case studies, however, a possible excessive focus on individual assessment can be questioned, to the detriment of the approach to the transversely of the assessment problem, especially impact on ethical-emotional, relational issues and inclusive contexts.

In the data analysis, we highlighted some difficulties faced by teachers in terms of pedagogical practice with SEN students, for example: the lack of training of teachers and education professionals in the scope of

inclusive education; the limitations of students and their families in an inclusive school; prejudice, the physical space of the school that often does not meet the needs of these students, in addition to some shortage of support material (Rocha, 2021). It is obvious that there are changes occurring, but very slowly, mainly with regard to teacher training at its various levels and not just in relation to initial training, which reproduce pedagogical difficulties from the perspective of special and inclusive education, which are partly due to a series of flaws in the training process, as they do not receive specific training focused on special and inclusive education. What we found was that teachers have knowledge constructed and acquired for pedagogical practice from different contexts: learning from peers, pedagogical support center, from students, etc.

From the discussion of the data, we deduced, with the support of the literature, that the teacher plays a determining role in the formation of new generations and in the socio-educational transformation, being his responsibility, from his training (initial and continued) and, later, through the teaching experience when developing the inclusion process in the school context (Sousa, 2017). This issue is associated with today's challenges in schools, together with other aspects, for example the effects of the pandemic, the flow of migration, conflicts and technological advances that perspective educational functions through equity, diversity and inclusion (Gonçalves, 2018). Therefore, the teaching profession is currently faced with increasingly complex demands and expectations under the pressure of quality and academic success (good results) alongside the needs to meet well-being and citizenship (Pereira, 2018). Now this implies a broader teaching professionalism, intensification of work in favor of diversity and pedagogical differentiation, in a logic of 'accountability' and cultural plurality. Therefore, it is necessary to value the profession and teaching experience of the teacher (special education), knowing that training (initial, ongoing) does not happen only through courses, knowledge and accumulated practices, but fundamentally, through work of critical reflexivity on their own practices and permanent (re)construction of a personal identity (Artiles; Kozleski & Waitoller, 2011; Trindade & Rosa, 2019).

Therefore, teachers are decisive in the process of school inclusion of students with special educational needs (hereinafter SEN) and evaluation of pedagogical practices, and the way in which they view the teaching profession, from initial and continuing training, in relation to inclusive education is relevant. (Lapa, 2021; Sousa, 2017) Pedagogical differentiation only for students with SEN cannot continue to be considered a good inclusion practice. It is necessary to manage the class as a dimension of professional teaching knowledge in the implementation of inclusive pedagogy with teacher attitudes towards difference and towards the curriculum (IGEC, 2016). The perspectives and ways of implementing inclusive education at school have had a great debate, so much so that the Portuguese Ministry of Education, through the General Directorate of Innovation and Curricular Development and the Directorate of Special Education and Socio-Educational Support Services, published manuals to support the practice of special education (DGIDC, 2011) alerting to analysis measures and indicators, specialized support units, resource centers for inclusion, curricular programs, etc. In other words, it is essential to train to include and promote inclusive practices, through teacher training in a school context (Fonseca, 2022).

In fact, the School Groups under study apply article 7 of Decree-Law 54/2018, of July 6, adopting measures to support learning and Inclusion', which aim to ensure that "all students have equity and equal opportunities for access to the curriculum, attendance and progression in the educational system, regardless of the modalities and paths of education and training". (Practice Support Manual, 2018, p. 29) and, therefore, these measures fit into a multilevel perspective that it adopts: universal, selective and additional measures. Therefore, teachers in these School Groups apply measures to support learning, supported by protocols with external entities (partners) in order to obtain skills that are extremely important for the learning of students with NE. These areas are speech therapy, psychomotricity, educational psychology, as well as the creation of information and communication technology resource centers – CRTIC, which as a whole "constitute a national network of prescribing centers, which provide support products for the Ministries of Education, within the scope of the Support Products Allocation System", under the terms established in article 7 of (Dec. Law no. 93/2009, of April 16, page 60, amended by Decree Law no. 42/2011, March 23, page 60). Those responsible for the Groups and teachers are well aware of the difficulties they face in their daily lives, aiming for better human and material resources that are suitable for better EE and inclusive education. This constitutes a challenge and a 'problem' that moves away from the pathological view of differences, so the educational approach must be oriented towards the search for heterogeneous strategies associated with different interests, motivations, abilities and learning rhythms, focusing on the diversity of students in educational processes (Ainscow, 2020; Arnaiz; De Haro y Azorín, 2018). The need to adopt diversity in education increasingly receives political concern and attention at European level. We recognize that teachers and non-teaching staff (operational assistants, employees in general) do not feel prepared or supported to implement inclusive teaching, nor teaching students with SEN (Hansen et al., 2020).

Some Concluding Ideas

From the above, we can state that the teaching profession and teacher training in inclusive contexts, there is an effort in today's teachers to implement inclusive practices, to improve their teaching actions and, consequently, the learning and success of students, of in order to make the school truly inclusive, more flexible, more dynamic, for everyone (Borges, 2020; Fonseca, 2022). It is essential, in terms of the context of practice and training of teachers for inclusive education, to develop collaborative work with regular teachers, teachers/technicians specializing in special education and other professionals (psychologist, speech therapist, social worker, etc.), creating a multidisciplinary team, which better meets the inclusion needs of students with disabilities in the classroom, looking for strategies to achieve this inclusion with pedagogical support and human and technological resources, teaching materials and physical accessibility that adequately serves all students.

According to the Practice Support Manual for Inclusive Education (MEC, 2018, p. 4), inclusive education/school must incorporate “variables such as ethics, relating to values and principles, aiming to combat discriminatory attitudes and create a fairer society”, in addition to the implementation of “educational policy measures that use a holistic approach to the entire educational system and coordinated action between the various actors and quality educational practices, with respect for diversity”. In other words, a school is only a school when it guarantees the best learning for all students, with measures for inclusion. In this sense, Decree-Law No. 54/2018 (Portugal, 2018) sought greater acceptance on the part of schools, teachers and educators in the application of existing resources, as provided for in paragraph 1 of Point 1 in which the principles/norms “guarantee inclusion, as a process that aims to respond to the diversity of needs and potential of each and every student, through increased participation in the learning processes and in the life of the educational community”. This diploma establishes regulations relating to the basic/secondary education curriculum and the profile of students upon leaving compulsory education, driving changes at the organizational level and educational process.

In fact, the collaborative action of teachers generates directionality in their functions to (Canteiro, 2023): raise awareness of the educational community towards inclusive education; update and share knowledge; advice to teachers on the implementation of inclusive pedagogical practices; ensure that the school, in general, adopts behaviors that facilitate inclusion; promoting spaces for reflection and training for the entire educational community; support and articulate inclusion policies, developed at school; encourage and collaborate in the management processes of classroom environments; optimize collaborative learning; adapt resources and materials to the needs of each student; evaluate learning and adaptations of the evaluation process; hold other teachers co-responsible; establish relationships of trust; create a good working climate among all educational agents; mobilize, monitor and implement success-promoting measures; involve and guide teachers in the design of structuring documents supported by an inclusive vision; implement and reinforce mechanisms for the active and effective involvement of those in charge of education, technicians and other resources; participate as a member of the ‘Multidisciplinary team to support inclusive education’ and a learning support center; guide the entire educational community (leaders, teachers, families, students, technicians); inspire problem solving, security, trust and empathy; communicate with scientific and pedagogical rigor and transparency; encourage participation and collaborative teamwork; involve and coordinate with those responsible for education and community services and promote training for the entire educational community. Thus, according to the literature, special education teachers must build interpersonal relationships with active listening and respect, integrating everyone's ideas. Your teaching action in general must be rooted in the ecological foundations that underpin early intervention in childhood, with family-centered practices (Alves, 2019). Therefore, the study showed with its results that this teacher, due to his specialized training, reveals some identification skills, regarding the monitoring and implementation of inclusive practices, cultures and policies.

If we turn to Borges, (2020) who highlights three dimensions of intervention for special education teachers, there is a congruence between his analysis and our results, such as: guidance and pedagogical work with students; collaborative work and consultancy with teachers; inclusive policy guidance and definition; partnerships with the school (especially leaders) and with the community. The predominant qualification of teachers is a bachelor's degree, although there were many teachers with postgraduate or master's degrees; with a predominance of more than 20 years of teaching service, some of them holding some leadership role, coordinating the curriculum department, class management, coordinating multidisciplinary support teams and coordinating special education. Many of these study teachers underwent specialized training (short-term actions, continuous training), as a specialized resource for pedagogical differentiation strategies, collaboration with all teachers, dynamization of collaborative work with co-responsibility, being a key element for "all school students", including the multidisciplinary team and support center and also a trainer and sensitizer for the educational community (Canteiro, 2023).

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