

Special Education Policies in an inclusive perspective in Angola: context, advances and emerging needs (1979-2017)¹

Políticas de Educação Especial numa perspectiva inclusiva em Angola: contexto, avanços e necessidades emergentes (1979-2017)

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the universal thesis that every child has the right to education, including those with disabilities, the research leads us to an analysis of Special Education Policies from an inclusive perspective in Angola, believing that a whole set of multifaceted and contextual factors have implications for its practice. In order to analyze the course of the current Angolan special education policy, the contexts of the late Proclamation of Independence, civil war and extreme poverty in the country that influenced it on a large scale, its implementation is also impacted by the country's cultural diversity. The time frame of the study goes back to the year of implementation of special education (Decree no. 56/79, in 1979) and the creation of the first Special

1 Translated by Janete Bridon. E-mail: deolhonotexto@gmail.com. This text is the result of studies carried out in the research group *Observatório de Políticas Curriculares e Educação Inclusiva* [Observatory of Curriculum Policies and Inclusive Education] (OPEN), linked to the *Laboratório Observatório de Práticas Escolares* [Observatory Laboratory of School Practices] (OPE) and the Graduate Program in Education of the *Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina* (UDESC), and had the support of the *Programa de Estudantes-Convênio de Pós-Graduação* [Students-Graduate Program Agreement] (PEC-PG), from the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* [Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel] (CAPES), Brazil.

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Education Policy (Presidential Decree no. 187/17, in 2017). Based on a qualitative approach of documentary and bibliographic matrix, giving priority to United Nations (UN) documents that defend a focus on the promotion of Human Rights and authors that emphasize the recognition of differences, diversity and how local reality can influence educational policy (AINSCOW, 2001; SACRISTÁN, 2000; QUIROGA, 2010; ARTELES; KOZLESKI, 2019; among others), the results led us to assess that special education in Angola is conceived as a specific and differentiated area of education based on a medical model of disability. However, it was also evident in the political discourse, the intention to make the educational system increasingly more inclusive, despite the fact that practices reveal a long way to go so that the discourse assumed is closer to the practices.

Keywords: Education policy. Special education. Inclusive education. Angolan education.

RESUMO

Partindo da tese universal de que toda a criança tem o direito à educação, inclusive as com deficiência, a pesquisa remete-nos a uma análise das Políticas de Educação Especial desde uma perspectiva inclusiva em Angola, acreditando que todo um conjunto de fatores multifacetados e contextuais tenham implicações na sua prática. Com o objetivo de analisar o percurso da atual política de educação especial angolana, os contextos da tardia Proclamação da Independência, da guerra civil e da pobreza extrema do país que o influenciaram em grande escala, a sua implementação é também impactada pela diversidade cultural do país. O recorte temporal do estudo abrange o período que vai do ano de implementação da educação especial (Decreto 56/79, em 1979) ao da criação da primeira Política de Educação Especial (Decreto Presidencial nº 187/17, em 2017). Com base em uma abordagem qualitativa de matriz documental e bibliográfica, primando fundamentalmente documentos da Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU) que defendem um enfoque de promoção dos Direitos Humanos e autores que enfatizam o reconhecimento das diferenças, da diversidade e de como a realidade local pode influenciar na política educativa (AINSCOW, 2001; SACRISTÁN, 2000; QUIROGA, 2010; ARTELES; KOZLESKI, 2019; entre outros), os resultados levaram-nos a aferir que a educação especial em Angola é concebida como uma área específica e diferenciada da educação geral, fundamentada num modelo médico da deficiência. Contudo, ficou igualmente evidente no discurso político a intenção de fazer o sistema educativo cada vez mais inclusivo, apesar de as práticas revelarem um longo caminho por ser percorrido para que o discurso assumido esteja mais próximo das práticas.

Palavras-chave: Política educacional. Educação especial. Educação inclusiva. Educação angolana.

Introduction

Recognizing differences and diversity implies considering all the experiences, and attributes that contribute to making each person unique leads us to recognize what makes each person different, including learning difficulties, physical, psychological and sensory disabilities, the vulnerability of ethnic minorities and marginalized groups (BERGERON, 2008; SACRISTÁN, 2000; QUIROGA, 2010). The deconstruction of narratives and practices that perpetuate educational inequalities goes beyond guaranteeing access for all students to regular schools. As Ainscow (2001) argues, the inclusive school is the one that not only seeks to guarantee access for children with special educational needs² and accept their differences at school, but also the one that, in the same circumstance that teaches difference, also learns from it.

As in other countries, Angola is supported by agreements and official documents that resulted from worldwide debates for the recognition and assurance of education as a consecrated human right, as expressed in the Declaration of Human Rights, in 1948, in the Convention of Children's Rights, in 1989, and in the Salamanca Declaration, in 1994.

Therefore, talking about education in the Angolan context, fundamentally about special education in an inclusive perspective, requires highlighting its historical and cultural particularities, its multiethnicity, and the political, economic and social situation of its people. In terms of sovereignty as a state, Angola is a relatively new country that achieved its Independence in 1975, a period that was followed by an intense and bloody civil war that culminated in 2002. After achieving effective peace, one of the main priorities of the Angolan government, if not the main one, focused on the literacy of its people, creating policies of large scale access to schools, although, in many cases, in generalized conditions of precariousness. Within all education policies aimed at access to school, there are those that guide the process of school inclusion for people with

2 Although, in Brazil, the appropriate nomenclature for the target population of Special Education is present in the National Policy for Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (BRASIL, 2014), namely, people with disabilities, global developmental disorders and those with giftedness; in this text, considering the study to be related to the Angolan context, the term "special educational needs" appears at times because it is used in Angolan documents. In Angola, the term "special educational needs" designates, according to the Statute of the Special Education Modality, the exclusive demands of the subjects who, in order to learn what is expected for their reference group, needs different forms of pedagogical interaction or supports additional resources, such as adapted resources, methodologies and curriculum, as well as different times, during all or part of their school career.

disabilities. However, because of their cultural diversity, the glimpse of these claims face, in some cases, barriers due to beliefs strongly rooted in cultures of the supernatural. In Angola, the birth of a child with a disability is, in many cases, a source of embarrassment for the family because the disability is seen by a large part of the population as evidence of the forces of evil, usually causing an atmosphere of tension and family disharmony, which in many cases ends with one of the parties accused of guilt based on arguments established by supernatural practices (INEE, 2006).

The traditional belief of associating disability with the supernatural forces of evil, the non-existence of special education until before 1979, the intense 27-year civil war that would cause disastrous human and material damage, the lack of teachers and schools to guarantee educational inclusion, the lack of sufficient financial resources in the post-independence and post-war periods characterize the subsequent inclusion-oriented special education policies.

The pioneering implementation of special education in Angola dates back to 1979, four years after the Proclamation of Independence. It was implemented by Decree no. 56/79 (INEE, 2006), the date from which, theoretically, the minimum indispensable conditions were created, allowing the operation of Special Education schools, whose goal is to educate the population with disabilities. Under the management of the National Department of Special Education, which would later evolve into the National Directorate of Special Education, currently the *Instituto Nacional para a Educação Especial* [National Institute for Special Education] (INEE), it should be noted that the service was, and currently is, primarily for children with visual and hearing disabilities (INEE, 2006).

The defining event of special education from an inclusive perspective in Angola resulted from the Salamanca Declaration in 1994, in which Angola is a signatory for the purpose of promoting the goal of Education for All, examining the fundamental policy changes needed to favor the education approach. integrative, specifically enabling schools to serve all children, especially those with disabilities. As a result, Angola is forced to take important steps towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, having then implemented the Project 534/Ang/10 on Promotion of Educational Opportunities for the Rehabilitation of Vulnerable Children (INEE, 2006).

It is important to emphasize that, at national level, there is little research carried out in the field of special education. As a result, our objective with this research was to analyze the process of designing and implementing special education policies in Angola in the periods during and after the civil war. The cut-off presented in this text comes from the studies we have developed in our research group *Observatório de Políticas Curriculares e Educação Inclusiva* [Observatory of Curriculum Policies and Inclusive Education] (OPEN), linked

to the *Laboratório Observatório de Práticas Escolares*³ [Observatory Laboratory of School Practices] (OPE), and also from the research carried out in the scope of the Doctorate, called “*Políticas de educação especial na perspectiva da educação inclusiva em Angola: atuação e recontextualização na perspectiva de gestores educativos e escolares na província do Zaire*” [Special education policies from the perspective of inclusive education in Angola: performance and recontextualization from the perspective of educational and school managers in the province of Zaire].

The research was carried out from a qualitative approach based on consultation and document analysis, understood based on Gil (2008), and a brief review of the specialized bibliography for the object. Methodologically, the research is descriptive-analytic, which consists of analysis of national and international documents. Guidelines and concepts oriented to public education policies aimed at inclusion were analyzed. International documents were considered for the anchoring and foundation of all speeches present in national documents. Evidently, in the international discourse and documents, the United Nations (UN) agreements through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stand out, among them, greater emphasis on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action – Education for All, the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. For nationals, the National Policy on Special Education, the Amendment to the *Lei de Bases do Sistema de Educação e Ensino* [Basic Law of the Angolan Education and Teaching System] (LBSEE), the Accessibility Law, the Law on Persons with Disabilities, supported by other documents (ONU, 1948, 2006; UNESCO, 1994; ANGOLA, 2012, 2016b, 2017, 2020). For international documents, the main inclusion criterion consists of those to which Angola is a signatory or adopts them to support the current Special Education Policy and the right to education; for nationals, only official documents published in the *Diário da República* by the National Press of Angola were considered.

From international documents to reality in Angola: the context and advances

Historically, movements on special education and the integration of students with disabilities in educational systems are fundamentally demarcated

3 OPE is linked to the Graduate Program in Education at the *Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina* (UDESC).

from events of an international character, such as the Warnock Report (THE WARNOCK..., 1978) and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). The Warnock Report, prepared by the Investigation Committee, which included the participation of countries such as England, Scotland and Wales, was chaired by Helen Mary Warnock, on account of the denomination *Warnock Report*. This research group and researchers studied, from September 1974 to March 1978, the educational process of children and young people with physical and mental disabilities, and proposed the abandonment of the medical model in force until then in detriment of an educational model, in order to guarantee students with disabilities success and full integration into regular schools (MEIRELES-COELHO; IZQUIERDO; SANTOS, 2007).

From the Warnock Report, the concept of special educational needs was introduced for the first time, counting not only students with intellectual disabilities, but all those who, along their school journey, presented specific learning difficulties (THE WARNOCK..., 1978). According to Montero (1991), among the main general conceptions that serve as a starting point for the Warnock Report, the following stand out: no child will be considered as uneducable; education is an asset to which everyone is entitled; the purpose of education is the same for everyone; Special Educational Needs are common to all children; therefore, the abolition of the legal classifications of the disabled is recommended; however, the term “learning difficulty” will be used to describe students who need some special help, among others.

Another event considered by many researchers to be the most important document within the framework of special education and educational inclusion is the Salamanca Statement, which resulted from an international conference organized by the Spanish government in collaboration with UNESCO in 1994. One of its main objectives was to establish a policy and guide governments, international organizations, national support organizations, non-governmental organizations and other governing bodies through the implementation of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in the area of Special Educational Needs (UNESCO, 1994). The right of all children to education, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the right for all persons with disabilities to express their wishes regarding their education, is reiterated and reinforced by the Salamanca Statement, as all participating countries had to make a commitment to adapt the school to all children, regardless of their physical, social, linguistic or other conditions. This concept must include disabled or gifted children, homeless children or working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from disadvantaged or marginal areas or groups (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement also stands out for its

assumption that proven pedagogical principles, when correctly applied, lead to learning for all children, regardless of whether they have a disability or not, and that differences are now assumed to be normal. It is defended from that moment that it is learning that must adapt to the needs of each child (UNESCO, 1994).

In congruence with the impact of the Warnock Report and the Salamanca Statement, the UN was already launching the challenge of universal access to education for all school-age children. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is explicit in relation to that, stating:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (ONU, 1948, our translation).

With the recognition of education as a human right, it began to be considered as a basic need inherent and indispensable to the life of any human being and, because it is so important, it demands obedience to the principle of gratuity. However, while on the one hand we have this international theoretical-discursive source that should support an education policy and practice aimed at inclusion, on the other hand we have legal tools specific to each country that interpret international agreements according to particular political interests and ideological contaminations. As an example, educational inclusion assumes different forms in each country, the result of multiple factors, including those of an ideological, political, historical-cultural and social nature, among others. As stated by Werning *et al.* (2016), transferring education policies indiscriminately from an international conception to local implementation, especially when educational governance models and the sociocultural context follow a different dynamic, can have negative consequences.

Due to all the discrepancies between what is approved and advocated in theory and what happens and makes it happen in practice, international organizations have come through many meetings reinforcing the commitments of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1989, in New York City, United States, the UN launched the treaty on the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 28 of that Convention states that it is up to States parties to recognize the child's right to education and, in particular, aims to progressively ensure the exercise of this right on the basis of equal opportunities (ONU, 1989). Therefore, according to this article, member countries should

fulfill this commitment by ensuring that: primary education is compulsory and free for all; the organization of different secondary, general and vocational education systems is encouraged, making these public and accessible to all children and that they take appropriate measures, such as the introduction of free education and the offer of financial assistance in case of need; make higher education accessible to everyone, depending on their abilities, by all appropriate means; make educational and professional information and guidance public and accessible to all children; and take steps to encourage regular school attendance and reduce dropout rates.

Conjoined with Article 28 is Article 23 of the same Convention, which defends the recognition “that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community” (ONU, 1989, our translation). A full and decent life with a guarantee of dignity that any human being deserves must involve access to education under conditions of equality of opportunity and equity.

Following the timeline and the urgency to consolidate the right to education as a universal right in the praxis of education policies and action, the UN took another step with the treaty of the World Declaration on Education for All, signed in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, and in 2000, in the city of Dakar, Ghana, at the World Education forum.

The World Declaration on Education for All has as its main objective the satisfaction of the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults. Article 3 defends an education for all (children, youth and adults) and that equitableness and equity are provided through quality in learning, paying special attention to the basic needs of people with disabilities (UNESCO, 1990).

Starting from the analysis of the studied national reality, the Angolan educational policy is governed by the current *Lei de Bases do Sistema de Educação e Ensino* [Basic Law of the Angolan Education and Teaching System] (LBSEE), Law no. 17/16, of October 7 (ANGOLA, 2016c), amended by Law no. 32/20, of August 12 (ANGOLA, 2020), as the latter altered some provisions of the current Law. It is in this Law that the main general and specific objectives of education, the principles of education, the organization of the educational and teaching system, and its modalities are defined. According to this Law, education is understood as:

To the planned and systematized process of teaching and learning, which aims to fully prepare the individual for the demands of individual and collective life. The consolidation of peace, national unity, the promotion

and protection of human rights, the environment, as well as in the scientific, technical, technological, economic, social and cultural development process of the country are the main capabilities they hope to develop in the Angolan citizen (ANGOLA, 2016c, p. 3994, our translation).

In the current LBSEE, special education is a differentiated form of education. Differentiated education is defined in Article 81 of the same Law, as being “the specific way of organizing and carrying out educational processes, transversal to various teaching subsystems, adapted according to the particularities of the beneficiaries” (ANGOLA, 2016c, p. 4005, our translation). According to this Law, regardless of being a specific type of differentiated education, special education can be practiced, when necessary, at any level of education when circumstances demand adaptations specific to the student’s special needs.

Even before the Amendment to Law no. 32/20, which amends and makes some adjustments to Law no. 17/16, special education is considered, according to Article 83,

a modality of teaching that cuts across all teaching subsystems and is aimed at individuals with Special Educational Needs, namely students with disabilities, developmental or learning disorders and gifted students, aiming at their socio-educational integration (ANGOLA, 2016c, p. 4005, our translation).

However, with the adjustments made in 2020, the terms “special educational needs” and “developmental or learning disorders” are replaced by “person with disabilities” and “autistic”, thus, currently, special education “is a modality of teaching transversal to all Education Subsystems and it is aimed at people with disabilities, gifted students and autistic students, aiming at their socio-educational integration” (ANGOLA, 2020, p. 4429, our translation). Therefore, in line with the previous idea, the National Policy on Special Education defines as a target audience: a) Students with disabilities; b) Students with autism spectrum disorder; and c) Gifted students.

For the purposes of conceptual differentiation, it is important to point out that Angola has a special education policy established by Law, which is why it is clearly defined in the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System, known as the LBSEE. The same does not happen with inclusive education, but the current *Estatuto Orgânico do Instituto Nacional de Educação Especial* [Organic Statute of the National Institute of Special Education] defines it as:

An education and teaching system in which students with disabilities, autism spectrum disorders and giftedness attend general, public, public-private and private schools, with non-disabled peers, with an emphasis on skills, abilities and potentialities of the students (ANGOLA, 2021, p. 2140, our translation).

In order to ensure more specialized and specific attention to children with educational support needs, the Angolan government, through Presidential Decree no. 20/11, created the Statute of Special Education Modality, which defines as its social object and general objective from special education the assistance, guidance, monitoring, training and support for the socio-educational and family inclusion of children, young people and adults with disabilities (ANGOLA, 2011). This decree defined which should be the intervention areas of this teaching modality (Table 1).

TABLE 1 – SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERVENTION AREAS

Domain	Intervention area
Intellectual	Giftedness
	Intellectual disability
	Pervasive Developmental Disorders
Sensory	Visual impairment
	Hearing impairment
	Deafblindness
Neuromuscular and bone	Physical and motor disability
	Speech and language difficulties
	Cerebral palsy
Social and emotional maladjustment	
Multiple disabilities	

SOURCE: Statute of the special education modality (ANGOLA, 2011, our translation).

The same Decree, in its Article 8 (ANGOLA, 2011), defines the special equipment for compensating the student's disability, they are divided into two groups: on the one hand, the specific teaching material, which includes Braille books, large print books, audiovisual material, material in digital format and specific equipment for reading, writing, and calculating; and, on the other hand, individual or group compensation devices, these include optical and acoustic aids, adapted computer equipment, Braille typewriter, wheelchair, hearing aid and cane.

In terms of education policies, since its creation, the *Instituto Nacional para a Educação Especial* [National Institute for Special Education] (INEE) was linked and dependent on the Ministry of Education, until, in 2014, with the Presidential Decree no. 312/14 of 24 November (ANGOLA, 2014), with the approval of its first Organic Statute, enshrines itself as a legal personality with administrative, financial and patrimonial autonomy. However, regardless of this statute, the Ministry of Education, for all purposes, is responsible for pedagogical and methodological guidance and the establishment of some specific objectives. In other words, the conception, implementation and adaptation of education policies are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education's macrostructure.

Over the past 10 years, the Angolan government has shown itself to be more committed to looking at the problem of people with disabilities due to the situation of vulnerability and the risk of marginalization in which they find themselves (ANGOLA, 2012). From the point of view of this Law, a person with a disability is understood as:

Those who, due to a congenital or acquired loss or anomaly, of psychological, intellectual, physiological, anatomical or body structure functions, present specific difficulties that, in conjunction with environmental factors, limit or hinder their activities and participation on equal terms with other people (ANGOLA, 2012, p. 3256, our translation).

It is worth noting that its Articles 22 and 23 (ANGOLA, 2012) mention the right to education and teaching, and the right to culture and science, for every person with a disability. Regarding the right to education and teaching, the Articles emphasize that it is the responsibility of the State to adopt specific measures necessary to ensure the access of people with disabilities to education and inclusive education, through the allocation of adequate resources and instruments for learning and communication (ANGOLA, 2012). The same happens with the right to culture and science, which turns out to be the responsibility of the State to ensure access to the aforementioned rights, through the creation of specific conditions and availability of resources, overcoming all limitations.

Within the scope of the creation of the various conditions at the service of people with disabilities, the Law on Persons with Disabilities also provides that the State has the duty to define conditions of accessibility in projects and in the construction of public spaces, at the same time as the conditions of accessibility apply to premises and their surrounding spaces of the local and central public administration. They also apply to buildings, establishments and equipment

for public use and public roads (ANGOLA, 2012). It is noteworthy that these accessibility conditions should be a priority challenge for the Ministry of Education in the construction of educational infrastructure, regardless of whether it is a special or regular school, as regular schools face serious accessibility problems.

Although a Law on Persons with Disabilities was approved in 2012, the Republic of Angola adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on May 19, 2014. The Special Education Policy itself highlights the fact that the Convention is innovative in defining

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (ONU, 2006, our translation).

Furthermore, the adoption of this convention led the Angolan government to improve its administrative organization by promulgating the *Estatuto Orgânico do Instituto Nacional de Educação Especial* [Organic Statute of the National Institute of Special Education], through Presidential Decree no. 312/2014, of 24 November (ANGOLA, 2014), having expanded its administrative and financial and patrimonial autonomy, seeing its power of action stronger and counting on more attributions (ANGOLA, 2017).

In addition to all the importance that Presidential Decree no. 313/2014 represented, it had some inadequacies in some points, including its object and mission, which indicated that INEE's vocation consisted in the implementation and execution of the education policy regarding people with special educational needs, hence, in order to adapt it, it was revoked with the approval of Presidential Decree no. 63/2021, of March 12 (ANGOLA, 2021). In this Decree, "people with special educational needs" are replaced by people "with disabilities", "with autism spectrum disorder" and/or "with giftedness". On the other hand, INEE's vocation goes beyond implementation and execution, it is also its responsibility to draw up socio-educational measures that ensure full access to the target population and monitor the National Policy for Special Education aimed at school inclusion.

Two years after the creation of the law on people with disabilities, there was a need to create a legal instrument that could support the conditions of accessibility for people with disabilities. It was from this premise that, in 2016, Law no. 10/16, of July 27, was created: Accessibility Law. This law defines as

its object “the establishment of general standards, conditions and accessibility criteria for people with disabilities or with limited mobility” (ANGOLA, 2016b, p. 3138, our translation). The creation of these Decrees allowed the decentralization, to a certain extent, of the services of the *Instituto Nacional para a Educação Especial* [National Institute for Special Education] for the creation of Provincial Services, designated by the Provincial Office of Assistance to Students with Special Educational Needs. These offices, as executive services of the National Institute of Special Education, enjoy patrimonial and financial autonomy (ANGOLA, 2016a).

All of the aforementioned milestones lead to the highest point of the Angolan education policy in terms of special education and inclusion, which is the creation of a National Policy for Special Education Oriented to School Inclusion by Presidential Decree no. 187/17. According to this Presidential Decree, the *Política Nacional de Educação Especial Orientada para a Inclusão Escolar* [National Policy for Special Education Oriented to School Inclusion] is:

One of the instruments of the Education Policy of the Angolan government oriented towards school inclusion and aims to define guidelines and action strategies so that the Angolan education and training networks ensure the right of access, participation and permanence of students with disabilities in the National System of Formal Education. (ANGOLA, 2017, p. 3674, our translation).

Nevertheless, similarly to what happens in many countries, the medical-psychological model is what underlies all education policies and practices aimed at special education in Angola. As mentioned by Garcia (2006), the medical-psychological model of the person with a disability in the educational process focuses on taking the characteristics related to disability as representative of the student as a whole, that is, the subject is his/her disability and he/she must adapt to behaviors considered adequate by society.

It should be noted that the same law is theoretically oriented towards the inclusion and creation of a school open to diversity since, according to this policy, a school open to diversity is a regular school that fights to eliminate the barriers that hinder access, permanence and completion, which is currently a major challenge for Angolan society. Therefore, one of the valences of this article is the reflection on the special and inclusion. The deconstruction of inclusive education narratives and practices strongly anchored in the figure of the special student (with disabilities) is a necessary step to be taken so that diversity in its broadest sense finds its space.

This comprehensive diversity includes cultural and linguistic diversity, access to knowledge, socioeconomic status, gender, linked to intra- and interpersonal factors, special educational needs associated with those with disabilities or giftedness (ARNAIZ SÁNCHEZ, 2009; ARTILES; KOZLESKI, 2019), which would allow for inclusive education to emphasize one of the aspects of the democratic education approach, known as “relative equality”, which consists of minimizing social inequalities to ensure that everyone is seen and considered equal (LABAREE, 1997 *apud* ARTILES; KOZLESKI, 2019).

The philosophical foundations of special education in an inclusive perspective adopted in Angola are directly linked to the Salamanca Statement, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, National Laws on Accessibility and Persons with Disabilities, which leads this policy to have an eminently medical focus. As Machado (2009) argues, school practices that result from education policies should therefore question stereotyped and fixed representations of disability, considering that what we say about disability has enormous power to produce identities.

Emerging needs: the challenges of the Angolan education policy in view of the inclusion of all students

The current national education policy from an inclusive perspective marks an important step forward in meeting the challenges of education as a human right enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights. It should also be noted that just as the Angolan education policy invests efforts and resources to guarantee the principle of universality and the inclusion of all in education, much work still needs to be done to achieve minimum acceptable results. One of the first challenges that is considered fundamental, if not a sine qua non condition, is the fulfillment of the principles of universality and obligatoriness foreseen in the Basic Law of the Angolan Education and Teaching System:

The education and teaching system is universal, so that all individuals have equal rights to access, attendance and school success at different levels of education, provided that the criteria of each teaching subsystem is observed, ensuring social inclusion, equal opportunities and equity, as well as the prohibition of any form of discrimination (ANGOLA, 2016c, p. 3995, our translation).

Any initiatives on public policies aimed at inclusive education in Angola must first of all resolve the pending implementation of the principle of universality, as this is understood to be the first barrier to be broken. As highlighted by Gimeno Sacristán:

Joining, being, staying for a while in schools, in any type of school institution, is such a natural and everyday experience that we are not even aware of the reason for its existence, its contingency, its possible provisionality in time, its functions that fulfilled, fulfills or could fulfill, the meanings it has in people's lives, societies and cultures (SACRISTÁN, 2001, p. 11, our translation).

The naturalization of access, permanence and school success is, to this day, a challenge that even more advanced countries in the education sector have in mind as a goal to be achieved. That is why Angola, with all the problems inherent to the social life of families and public institutions, has the difficult commitment to guarantee the principle of universality so that this human right is provided as an indispensable element.

Administratively, Angola is divided into 18 provinces and 164 municipalities and has an estimated population of approximately 30,175,553 (INE, 2016). Of the 164 municipalities, special schools are present in 22 of these, representing only 13% of coverage and presence throughout the country (ANGOLA, 2017). The overall schooling rate of the school-age population is another challenge to be taken into account, because until 2017 the country had an education rate of 75.2%, that is, regardless of the issue of inclusion and meeting diversity, there is the challenge of ensuring school access for all school-age children (ANGOLA, 2018).

If, according to this important document, more than 20% of the population of school age is out of the general education system due to insufficiencies of schools and teachers, what can one think of special education and inclusive education? National data that reflect the access to enrollments of students with disabilities (Table 2) in different special schools in the country are not consoling. These numbers invite a reflection on the educational policy around inclusion.

TABLE 2 – STUDENTS ENROLLED BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Students enrolled by level of education	Year				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Students enrolled in special education initiation	4,629	2,668	4,365	2,861	1,775
Students enrolled in primary teaching of primary education	16,928	16,485	18,176	19,696	18,642

SOURCE: Angola National Development Plan (2018-2022) (ANGOLA, 2018).

Angola’s National Development Plan (2018-2022) is the second medium-term planning exercise carried out under the National Planning System in force in Angola. This document outlines the objectives inherent to the different spheres of the country’s social and political life in the medium term, including education.

The guarantee of compulsory and free primary education and the training of teachers with a profile adapted to the new curricula and methods of teaching and learning are part of the objectives aimed at education. According to this plan, among the priority actions for primary education aimed at special education in an inclusive perspective, are the training of interpreters in Angolan sign language; the training of teachers and administrators in matters of educational inclusion; the creation of inclusion classrooms in primary schools; and the operationalization of the psycho-pedagogical and professional office in schools (ANGOLA, 2018). The training of teachers is understood here as a key challenge to give solid follow-up to inclusive education policies. As Machado (2009) argues, pre-established concepts about children with disabilities need to be broken, as well as opening the school to them so that they can learn from them, but this must be done by ensuring ongoing teacher training to deal in the best way with the education of the youngest.

Even though teacher education is not the magic formula to ensure inclusion and eliminate all the difficulties found in the classroom, it promotes a different way of facing the whole process of teaching and learning, leading the teacher to question their practices (MACHADO, 2009). Another major challenge has to do with the exercise of the distribution of financial resources in expenses by function in the General State Budget for each year. Education, through the allocation of budgets over the last five years, demonstrates a gap between the commitment made from the political discourse to an increasingly inclusive education and the decisions taken. Table 3 shows a brief summary of the fiscal year of the General State Budget channeled to education over the last five years.

TABLE 3 – DISTRIBUTION OF EXPENSES PLANNED IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR BETWEEN 2015 AND 2019

Year	Sector				
	General State Budget	General education	%	Special education	%
2015	5,454,022,865,085,00 Kz*	486,432,111,515,60 Kz	8.92%	527,957,694,21 Kz	0.01%
2016	6,959,728,851,527,00 Kz	455,930,030,910,00 Kz	6.55%	33,658,234,00 Kz	0.00%
2017	7,390,046,964,055,00 Kz	499,846,286,656,00 Kz	6.76%	30,988,158,00 Kz	0.00%
2018	9,685,550,810,785,00 Kz	559,585,075,476,00 Kz	5.78%	368,466,555,00 Kz	0.00%
2019	10,400,865,675,100,00 Kz	628,769,320,451,00 Kz	6.05%	338,415,079,00 Kz	0.00%

SOURCE: Angola Ministry of Finance (ANGOLA, 2019).

* Kwanza – currency of Angola.

The table above reflects the extent to which the social sector of education is or is not a priority in Angola’s public governance policies. While acknowledging the effort that has been made in the post-war period, it should also be recognized that there is still a long way to go to ensure the desired results for Angolan education. Within this entire framework, special education and the educational inclusion process are visibly affected, as the implementation of inclusive education policies necessarily involves the creation of adapted and equipped infrastructure for multi functioning in the care of people with disabilities, the training of teachers and multi and interdisciplinary support teams for the target audience of special education and beyond. Coinciding with Gomes (2012, p. 688, our translation), “you do not educate ‘for something’, you educate because education is a right and, as such, must be guaranteed in an egalitarian, equitable and fair way”.

The mismatch that exists between the political discourse and the implementation of public education policies anchored in the guidelines of the United Nations System is due, in many cases, to the lack of a real portrayal of the diversities and complexities of the contexts in which international and national policies are conceived and approved (WERNING *et al.*, 2016). Although special education from a perspective has become global because it meets an equally global agenda, it is important to recognize that, when the analytical perspective descends to local levels, inclusive education adopts unique local knowledge (ARTILLES; KOZLESKI, 2019); on the other hand, inclusive education has become a reality in terms of laws and in the political discourse of governments and governors, but its implementation faces resistance in institutional practices and projects (HONNEF; COSTAS, 2012).

By way of conclusion

Special education from the perspective of inclusive education in Angola, understood from the political discourse and its praxis, is still constituted as a specific and differentiated modality of education, with its own space (special school) and teachers with or without prior preparation to serve people with disabilities. Special education is fundamentally based on a medical focus, giving priority, due to the training needs of the teaching staff, to teaching deaf and blind people or those with low hearing and vision, as it was conceived since its creation.

The *Política Nacional de Educação Especial Orientada para a Inclusão Escolar* [National Policy for Special Education Oriented to School Inclusion] does not distinguish special from inclusive education, making it appear to be equivalent and similar, while the concept of diversity mentioned in this policy is not defined and, even less, emphasizes the sociocultural context of Angola, a fact that makes it difficult to conceive and build a diversity that leaves no one out.

The political discourse on inclusive education is based on the lines of recognition of education as a human right according to international organizations, but their materialization reflects integration practices to some extent and exclusion in part. The national policy that consists in the implementation of a special school in each province, with the exception of a few that have more than one and the lack of support teams in regular schools, are an example of the distance between the good intentions assumed in the political discourse and the actual practice.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the research has limitations due to the difficulty in having access to documents governing the special education policy aimed at inclusion, as they are not available on public websites and due to the lack of national academic production for this area of knowledge, but the hard work in obtaining the analyzed documents, which is the basis of the creation and evolution of all special education in Angola, stands out, so it is suggested that more research in the area be carried out without discarding the need to deepen this one.

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Text received on 10/16/2020.

Text approved on 05/17/2021.

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