Accessibility and inclusion in higher education: experiences and challenges to the permanence of people with disabilities

Acessibilidade e inclusão no ensino superior:
experiências e desafios à permanência de pessoas com deficiência

Accesibilidad y inclusión en la educación superior:
experiencias y desafíos para la permanencia de las personas con discapacidad

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Abstract: The theme of accessibility in higher education is becoming more prominent as the number of people with disabilities in universities increases. Among the possible approaches that address the dimensions of accessibility and inclusion and reaffirm the right to education for all, we consider that the perspectives and experiences brought by people with disabilities need to gain space, visibility, and understanding in the scientific community and in society. We intend to reflect on how accessibility happens and how its absence imposes borders and limits to the access and permanence of people with disabilities to higher education. To do so, we collected narratives of people with disabilities, thus relying on oral sources methodology, as a possibility of understanding and thinking about the inclusion of these students. The analysis point to some advances, however, there are still many challenges imposed on people with disabilities in their experiences in higher education.

Keywords: Accessibility. Higher Education. People with disabilities. Experiences. Visibilities.

Resumo: A temática da acessibilidade no ensino superior começa a ganhar destaque na medida em que se eleva o número de pessoas com deficiência nas universidades. Dentre as possíveis abordagens que tratam as dimensões de acessibilidade e inclusão e reafirmam o direito à educação para todos, consideramos que as perspectivas e experiências trazidas pelas pessoas com deficiência necessitam ganhar espaço, visibilidade e compreensão no meio científico e na sociedade. Propomos refletir sobre como se dá a acessibilidade e como a sua ausência impõe às pessoas com deficiência fronteiras e limites ao acesso e à permanência no ensino superior. Para tanto, utilizamos narrativas de pessoas com deficiência com a metodologia da fonte oral, como possibilidade de compreensão e de se pensar a inclusão desses estudantes. As análises apontam alguns avanços, mas ainda há muitos enfrentamentos impostos às pessoas com deficiência em suas experiências no ensino superior.

Palavras-chave*: Acessibilidade. Ensino Superior. Pessoas com deficiência. Experiências. Visibilidades.

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Resumen: El tema de la accesibilidad en la enseñanza superior eadquiere cada vez más importancia en la medida que aumenta el número de personas con discapacidad en las universidades. Entre los posibles enfoques que abordan las dimensiones de accesibilidad e inclusión y reafirman el derecho a la educación para todos, consideramos que las perspectivas y experiencias aportadas por las personas con discapacidad necesitan ganar espacio, visibilidad y comprensión en la comunidad científica y en la sociedad. En este artículo, pretendemos reflexionar sobre cómo se produce la accesibilidad y cómo su ausencia impone fronteras y límites al acceso y permanencia de las personas con discapacidad a la educación superior. Para eso, recolectamos narrativas de personas con discapacidad, apoyándonos así en la metodología de fuentes orales, como posibilidad de comprender y pensar la inclusión de estos estudiantes. El análisis apunta a algunos avances, pero sin embargo, todavía hay muchos desafíos impuestos a las personas con discapacidad en sus experiencias en la educación superior.

Palabras clave: Accesibilidad. Educación superior. Personas con discapacidad. Experiencias. Visibilidad.

Introduction

Approaches around the presence, participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in different social circles have grown and become increasingly more necessary. According to the UN, there are around a billion (VASSIE, 2018) people with disabilities in the world. Recent data suggests that 45 million such people live in Brazil (OLIVEIRA, 2021), including all types of disabilities. This portion of the population faces, in their daily lives, countless situations that invalidate their statuses as citizens, such as the right to come and go with autonomy and safety, the right to be in or occupy the diverse spaces in society, whether in jobs, access to quality education, sports, healthcare, among many others. It is clear that progress has been made and that, although we still have a highly exclusionary society, inclusion has been gaining ground as a social and political movement, in part due to the presence and strong action of people with disabilities regarding their demands. It is worth mentioning that the historical invisibility of people with disabilities in society was built on exclusionary and segregationist bases, supported by religious and medical discourses, among others.

Among the possible research guidelines that address the dimensions of accessibility and inclusion and reaffirm the right to education for all, we believe that the perspectives and experiences brought by people with disabilities need to gain space

and visibility in society, in science, and in various fields of knowledge, beyond the medical and healthcare approaches. Therefore, we propose an analysis based on social history, because it focuses on the visibility of the most vulnerable, marginalized groups, which can provide us with clues to understand relevant historical, social and political issues present in our society. In this sense, we sought to explore accessibility in higher education through the experiences of people with disabilities, using oral sources, since "interviews always reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known events: they always shed new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of non-hegemonic classes" (PORTELLI, 1997, p. 31).

Using lived experiences as a research methodology has been employed in several different areas and approaches. At the university level, we have the example of the *Observatório da Vida Estudantil (*Observatory of Student Life), a research group that operates at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) and the Federal University of the Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB), which aims to:

> describe the challenges encountered and the learning achieved by these young people in their formative processes, guided by the meanings they derive from their own experiences and from the context in which the research is developed: the academic environment (SAMPAIO, 2011, p. 14).

It is worth noting that experience, as noted by English historian E. P. Thompson, can be a category for comprehending and analyzing society and the construction of knowledge, because "experience gives colour to culture, values and thought" (1981, p. 112).

The theme of accessibility in higher education has become prominent in academy as the number of people with disabilities in universities increases. According to the Census of higher education in Brazil (BRASIL, INEP, 2021), 63,404 students with disabilities, global development disorders or high abilities were enrolled in 2021. However, the increase in this number represents a small part of the population with disabilities in Brazilian society, which, according to the 2010 Census, amounts to 46 million people. Therefore, as teachers and researchers, it is necessary to question the reason for the non-admission and/or permanence of these students. Such questions are the guiding points of this paper. Our goal is not restricted to thinking about technical standards for accessibility, but rather to reflecting on how their non-adequate implementation imposes and limits to the access and permanence of people with disabilities to the university environment. Moreover, we seek to show the participation,

or lack thereof, of students with disabilities in activities related to the undergraduate courses which take place in environments outside the university such as supervised internships, academic events, programs like the *Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação à Docência* - PIBID (Teaching Initiation Scholarship Program) and the *Programa de Residência Pedagógica* – PRP (Pedagogical Residency Program). How has access to these environments taken place? What are the conditions of permanence in these spaces? We understand that accessibility happens through the elimination of urban, architectural and transportation barriers, but also in the "elimination of barriers in communication and information, dealing with the need to remove the obstacles to the expression, reception and understanding of messages and information" (FIGUEIREDO, et al, 2011, p. 193).

The methodology adopted in this analysis brings forth theoretical references from the theme of accessibility and higher education, through the perspective of Disability Studies, which constitutes a disciplinary field of sociological and political research on disability first founded in the 1980s, in the United States, aiming to promote social models to approach the theme, stimulating scholars and researchers to write about the experience of disability. In the same direction, we adopted oral sources and the perspective of social history for the proposed analyses.

The interviews, analyzed here from the perspective of oral sources, derive from research in which the main theme was accessibility. They were collected throughout the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, regarding the experiences in the city of Uberlândia - Minas Gerais, which, more than once, appeared in the mainstream media as a model city for accessibility.

Among the themes of the semi structured interviews, one was evident: access to education. That leads to further reflection. The interviewees live in the city of Uberlândia and either study or have studied the Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU). Their names will be preserved and substituted for pseudonyms, while their gender identification remains.

We will thus analyze some experiences that compose the school life of the interviewees, as well as the conditions of access and permanence in the university mainly from the perspective of architectural barriers, but also indicating the difficulties in relation to other barriers, such as attitudinal barriers, for example.

From policies for basic education to higher education

Over the past three decades in Brazil, regulations, plans, policies, treaties, and resolutions have been issued and published to guarantee the right to citizenship and the inclusion of people with disabilities, especially in the educational system. Most of these legal milestones originated from the struggles and claims of social movements and people with disabilities. Gradually, they have been incorporated by society. Incidentally, Mendes (2022) indicates that the contribution of social movements resulted in public policies that allow us to think about parameters for inclusive education.

In this sense, we must note that the Federal Constitution of Brasil from 1988 is one of the main parameters, especially when, in article 208, it determines that "The duty of the State towards education shall be fulfilled by ensuring", among other things, "specialized schooling for the handicapped, preferably in the regular school system", as per subsection III.

The *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* - LDB (Law of Lines of Direction and Bases of the Education) from 1996 reaffirms this purpose in the historical context of inclusive education and establishes in article 4:

> the State's duty to provide public education: III - free specialized educational assistance to students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, and high abilities, transversal to all levels, stages, and modalities, preferably in the regular school system.

This legislation regulates and guarantees specialized educational care, although it does not indicate how this should be accomplished and does not establish deadlines for its fulfillment. In any case, it determines the State's obligation to include everyone in the educational process at all levels of education

Another important regulatory landmark is the 2008 Política Nacional de Educação Especial - PNEE (National Policy on Special Education), which also points to the perspective of Inclusive Education and aims to keep up with the advances in knowledge and social issues to build policies. However, in 2020, a change to the PNEE was proposed by the Bolsonaro government, which was considered a setback in inclusion by social movements, since it allowed families to choose other educational spaces, such as special schools, instead of regular schools for students with disabilities. Although the decree has been repealed, we understand that it favors segregation rather than the inclusion of students in regular schools, which also reveals a project and a political understanding of people with disabilities.

Thus, we consider that "situating school inclusion through accessibility leads to an understanding that places it as a strategy to brings subjects to participation" (KRAENER; THOMA, 2018, p. 560), including them not only in the educational process, but also in other social spheres, such as working life.

Reflecting on accessibility in higher education and the experiences of the interviewees guides us back to the experiences and confrontations of these students throughout their educational path, which begins in basic education. Thus, we bring forth narratives that lead to a set of analyses and understandings about the process of which they were part since their first years at school. When asked about the inclusion process, the interviewee reveals that

> We have to start from the beginning, right? First, education, yes? Without education we get nowhere and it's what's missing from the world, education. [...] we have to start in childhood, right? From there, change happens. Like, I was raised to, when sitting on the bus, if an elderly person came in you would give them the seat, so you grow up with that, you end up doing that automatically [...] it starts in school, in kindergarten, showing kids how it is like.

It is important to note that the interviewee, João, relates school education to the education he received at home, which can be associated with respect for elders and empathy for people or certain situations, and that this empathy is something that should be learned since childhood. In this excerpt from the narrative, the interviewee makes an analogy between the awareness about the reservation of spaces for the elderly in public transportation and the awareness that needs to be built regarding accessibility and inclusion through education. That is, the presence and the experience of people with disabilities in education can collaborate with this awareness process.

The inclusion of people with disabilities in school spaces, as seen, does not happen regularly nor meet the demands and specificities of these students. Therefore, it is necessary to build effectively accessible spaces. This is what another interviewee, Maria, reveals

> My difficulties were the door, the toilet and the desks also didn't have a handrail, sometimes I had to be outside. They would find a small desk and put it where I could see between the outside and the door, because there were no accessible desks either.

The interviewee reports the difficulty of moving around the school and of using certain spaces such as the bathroom or the classroom doors without the necessary adaptations, preventing her from entering and forcing her to stay outside the classroom, following the classes on an improvised desk. Unfortunately, this account is not an exception nor old, but comes from a lived experience in the year 2015 and portrays the complete lack of inclusion, with only integration, given that:

> Through school integration, the student has access to schools through a range of educational possibilities, from their insertion in regular education classrooms to education in special schools (...). In situations of school integration, not all students with disabilities fit into regular education classes, as there is a previous selection of those who are suitable for insertion (MONTOAN, 2003, p. 13).

Integration results in segregation of students with disabilities, unlike inclusion, which has radical, complete, and systematic school inclusion as a rule. All students, without exception, must attend regular education classrooms. In integration, the student adapts to the school, yet in inclusion, the opposite happens: the school must adapt to the needs of the student.

Another existing factor connected to the school perspective is the route from home to school. In this sense, the interviews reveal the numerous confrontations and problematize the routes and services used by students to get to school. The interviewee Maria recounts the difficulty she encountered during a moment of her school life:

> When I started High School, I hurt my foot and I was using Porta a porta, but the vans didn't have an elevator, they were regular school vans. But they were picking up people with special needs, so they didn't pick up wheelchair users because of the seats. So, I often had to wake up early, like 5 a.m., to go to school by bus, because the buses were always full, and I had to be there at 7 a.m. [3]

The report leads us to understand how this young woman had to deal with the adversities related to locomotion due to a sprained foot and the inadequacy of the transportation provided by the municipal government for her care. At that moment, Maria wanted to be accommodated because, for a period of time, she needed a wheelchair, which did not happen. She had to work hard in her locomotion efforts, using public transportation to have access to school, even though there was the possibility of transportation offered by the city government, however, it was not adapted.

Beside all these barriers in locomotion and architecture, the interviewee reported experiencing embarrassing situations of exclusion with her classmates, revealing, in this case, the existence of attitudinal barriers: "many times, the boys wouldn't pick me for group assignments; I had to do my work alone or the teacher would have to tell them to invite me to be part of the group".

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[3] Porta a porta (Door to Door) is the name of the transportation program for people with disabilities created by the Uberlândia City Hall. It serves students from different school modalities who register and go through regular screening processes by presenting documents to prove their enrollment, medical reports, and other socio-economic documents.

In face of these events, Maria chose to stop her studies at that moment. We must ask ourselves, however: was it an option or an imposition of society that made it impossible for her to continue her studies? We can see the various situations that a student with disabilities may face during his or her school career, which results in these students dropping out and in difficulties for their insertion in other spaces, including the job market. For school inclusion to actually happen, we need to pay attention to the barriers that exist on a daily basis for students in disadvantaged situations and put into action legislation that contemplates accessibility, considering all of its dimensions: architectural, attitudinal, pedagogical, communicational, and, more than ever, technological.

The difficulties and confrontations of students with disabilities in basic education can be observed, even if briefly, by the narratives presented so far, and then we can ask: how is the insertion, access and acceptance of these students in higher education?

Experiences in Higher Education

The process of inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education can be observed from a set of regulations that had repercussions in the possibility of admission and access of this group. As landmarks of this process, we may cite Decree 3.298/99, which regulates Law 7.853 of October 24, 1989, on the *Política Nacional para a Integração da Pessoa Portadora de Deficiência* (National Policy for the Integration of the Disabled Person), which ensured the full exercise of the individual and social rights of people with disabilities. Similarly, there are the Directives 1679/99 and 3284/03, on accessibility requirements for people with disabilities, aiming to instruct the processes of authorization and recognition of courses and accreditation of higher education institutions (MENDES, 2022, p. 315). This legislation is not exclusive and unique, but it is an example of inclusion policies and measures implemented due to several battles of the movements and the recognition by the society of the social rights of people with disabilities. However, we observe that its effectiveness still seems insufficient and does not satisfactorily meet the demand of this group of students.

The presence of people with disabilities in different spaces, including in higher education, drives and provokes changes, adaptations, and transformations. It is expected that they occur and enable an increase in the number of students, as well as promote their permanence in universities. In this sense,

> Higher education has also undergone important structural transformations, such as, for example, the implementation of the quota system for students from public schools, black students and/or students with disabilities. This new scenario requires efforts to ensure the permanence, with quality, of these social segments in Brazilian universities. After all, "access to higher education does not guarantee access to knowledge" (FIGUEIREDO et al, 2011, p. 188).

Quotas made initial access to universities possible for students with disabilities. However, this was only the first step. There are other issues that were clearly not effectively solved to favor the permanence of these students in university life: starting with the basic and indispensable, such as access to all physical spaces. Beyond architectural issues, it is necessary to consider that, at the university, the education of graduates in different areas of knowledge suitable for professional work needs to be considered in terms of inclusion, because

> demands complex transformations in the structure and functioning of the university and, consequently, in the way of thinking and acting of its professors. From a higher education model that, historically, educated future professionals based on selection and competitiveness, now, with inclusion, we propose welcoming all students, meeting their learning specificities and providing them with the necessary accessibility (POKER; VALENTIN; GARLA; 2018: 128).

By analyzing the students' narratives and their experiences, we may question how this inclusion and access to higher education happens and, thus, we understand that basic education schools need to effectively implement accessibility policies, but so do universities. In her thesis *Políticas de inclusão na educação superior: ecos da acessibilidade arquitetônica na UFU* (Inclusion policies in higher education: echoes of architectural accessibility at UFU), the researcher Freitas (2021) points out that people with disabilities are occupying their spaces and questioning accessibility based on their experiences:

> As a person with a motor disability and a wheelchair user, as well as a worker at UFU, I face several obstacles – the so-called architectural barriers – when moving around the Santa Monica Campus; obstacles that make it difficult, or even prevent, autonomy during the commutes. Such situation led me to some questions about the space (place) and the accessibility that are presented in this campus (2021, p. 16).

Beyond her experience, Freitas discusses accessibility at UFU from a Foucauldian logic of heterotopias, which consists in thinking of the space of this university as something built from power relations, thus, it does not enable a homogeneous access system that reaches all people, including those with disabilities.

From this perspective, we can observe, by going back to the interviews, that both Amanda, Maria and Carla reported occasions, within the University, which show the lack of accessibility and inclusion. It is worth noting that all three were students at UFU, in different courses. When asked about how accessible her course was, Amanda reports that:

> So, my Campus, of all UFU campuses, is one of the oldest. I don't know if you've been to Educa, but the situation there is quite different from other campuses, because it seems that resources don't get there like in other campuses. People said that it is the last to receive things. So, the lateral sidewalk to get in into UFU was all broken, full of potholes, because there's a big tree there and its roots break the sidewalk. It's been like this for all the years I studied there. They never fixed this sidewalk, and it was used by elderly people, children, people with disabilities, because they have a project on disabilities, right, AFRIDI, for the elderly, right? So, this has always been a problem, we always complained about it. In the case of the Educação Física [Campus] building, we can't get in through the main doors because of the stairs, so we had to walk around it and go in through the gym doors.

The Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) has four campuses located in the city of Uberlândia: Santa Mônica, Umuarama, Educação Física, and Glória. According to Freitas (2021), the Santa Mônica Campus, in comparison with the others, is the one that houses the largest number of students with or without disabilities.

The campus Amanda mentions in her report is the Educação Física Campus, where, throughout her undergraduate studies, she faced the lack of accessibility that, to some extent, limited her access and participation in an inclusive and integral way to her course. The architectural barriers mentioned ranged from the entrance to the campus to the internal structures, including the elevator and the access to classrooms, as she claims in her recollection:

> I felt there were some limitations there regarding accessibility, the sidewalk full of holes was dangerous and the wheels of my wheelchair can get stuck, it's happened several times already. I nearly fell because of that, of these issues. The restrooms aren't too bad, but the classroom doors, if my chair was bigger, it wouldn't fit through them. Because the building is older, it has two floors, and there was no elevator and no condition to install one there and then, right when I started, they didn't understand that I had to go up to the second floor, right? So, several times my colleagues had to take me up to the second floor, they picked me up, lifted my chair up, because our classes took place up there. This was probably around the first semester.

The observations regarding mobility issues inside the campus to which Amanda refers are everywhere: classroom doors, lack of elevators or platform, holes in the sidewalks, and the fact that she had to rely on the help of classmates to reach the second floor of the building where the classrooms were located. Faced with these confrontations, the interviewee reveals that she sought out the responsible authorities.

> So, after my second semester I went there I talked to the coordination and I told them "either you get me an elevator or you place all my classrooms on the ground floor, because going up every day is a lot of unnecessary work." Then they started placing my classrooms on the ground floor. But still, Educa is very limited, there are a lot of ramps, sometimes I can't go up alone. So, it was a lot of effort, a lot more than in schools. So, it was a lot of effort, a lot more than in schools. For me to graduate, unbelievably, it was very complex, but in the other campuses, in general, it was easier because I had a lot of classes at Santa Mônica, and it was easier there than in Educa. It was a lot harder in Educa.

Amanda's narrative and experience indicate, among other elements, that architectural accessibility was one of her main demands. However, this should be solved even before the arrival of a person with disability, because, according to Sassaki (2009), accessibility, when designed on the principles of universal design, benefits everyone, including people without disabilities.

The difficulties and reports of experiences related to the simple access to a building, room, or other public spaces do not cease. In this direction, the interviewee Carla also experienced a similar situation, at another campus of the Federal University of Uberlândia:

> I'm going to give another example that I experienced at UFU. I had an English proficiency test, right? For the PhD process. It was going to take place at a specific location, I didn't remember where, but OK. When I enrolled, I wrote down that I needed an adapted place because I'm a wheelchair user. I got there for the test and what happened? The elevator was broken, it didn't work. So, my husband went with me, right? And he's a real fighter. So, he called someone and said "Look, the elevator" and the man said "oh, we can help her go up the stairs." I said: "No". I said: "No, sir. What do you mean you help me? Are you going to carry me up? That's absurd! What if I fall down? What if I get hurt? I want an adapted place to take my test," "Oh, it's that yesterday we tested that elevator and it worked, but today it isn't working." Then I said: "so you're going to solve it because I came here to take my test. And my time is running out because the test is about to start. I want a solution." So, they solved it: they put me somewhere else in another building. But it was so embarrassing, right? You get somewhere to take a test and they want to carry you up to the room in a wheelchair, I said: "No way, I want a real place." So, I experienced that at UFU!"

The embarrassment that the interviewee reports is more than a reason for empathy and solidarity: it is a reason for the implementation of public policies and political pressure so that everyone has access to public spaces and, even more importantly, autonomy within a space of academic education. Another fact that draws attention to her narrative is the attempt to solve the problem of the elevator not working by carrying the student and her chair.

The precariousness of accessibility in Brazilian universities is not restricted to the institution mentioned in the interviews. When dealing with the inclusion and accessibility of students in undergraduate courses, describing the reality of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) and focusing on the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Sciences (FFCH), a group of researchers analyzes, in *Acessibilidade e Vida Universitária* (Accessibility and University Life), the daily life of students with disabilities in different situations and their paths to the university:

> practically, the entire physical structure of FFCH/UFBA causes dependence for the locomotion of people with disabilities [...] Thus, environmental factors can exert a remarkable influence on the levels of activity and participation of people with disabilities, due to the fact that, in these spaces, physical obstacle, as well as other types of obstacles, can be found (FIGUEREIDO et al, 2011, p.197).

We observed that the commute from home to the university and the absence of an adequate physical structure can directly interfere with the access of students with the most varied disabilities. We understand, from the interviews, how environmental factors can hinder the presence of these students in higher education institutions. Disability is one of many ways to experience life and cannot be a limiting factor or prevent the right to enjoy it in its entirety. To exemplify this condition, Débora Diniz (2007, p. 8), points out that "as any lifestyle, a blind person needs favorable social conditions to carry on his or her way of living life" and indicates that visual impairment does not mean suffering nor the existence of a type of biological sentence, but there are, yes, "social contexts that are not very sensitive to the understanding of bodily diversity".

As undergraduate courses receive more students with disabilities, the students who stay and, despite the lack of accessibility, finish the course, often look forward to graduate courses and, when they get there, they continue to face similar difficulties, with rare exceptions, as reported by Amanda when she mentioned how it was to be the first person with a disability to enter the Master's Program in Education at the Federal University of the Triângulo Mineiro:

> It's happening right now at the master's program, because they had never had a student with a disability. It was the first time. So, when I got there, where the classes are, it is a sports court at a gym. So, there's the gym when people do sports, there are the trampolines. At the very back, there's the classroom where we had our classes, with a lab and all. The first time I got there, everything was made of gravel, there was no concrete, it was a process of five months, right, in which I took the exam, I went through the selective process. So, when the classes started and I got there, I saw a concrete sidewalk that they had adapted. They improved the restroom and also installed a lower water fountain. So, from the first time that I went there to when I started, I was really

surprised, because I wasn't expecting it. The coordinator was always very worried about it, she would often ask me: "how are you doing? Are you missing anything? Do you need anything else? They refurbished the ramp." There used to be a ramp there, but it was unpainted, nobody really used that ramp. So, they painted it, improved it, put some railing around the corners. So, that was a place where I realize that when you're in one of those places, everything changes, the place needs to adapt to you.

We should observe the effort made by the course and the institution to include the newly admitted student, who, according to her, was the first person with a disability in the Program. The interviewee observes that, between the time she took her exam in the selection process and the start of classes, minimal measures were taken, such as the construction of a cemented walkway that would allow her to move around the space, the placement of a water fountain at a more adequate height, and other adaptations that could meet her demands. The example cited by the interviewee is one of the few in which we observed a quick adaptation that allowed inclusion.

From now on, the text and the analyzes will be based on the experiences of one of the authors of this paper.

Experiences in/of permanence: the author's case

As a disabled woman, I was History students at the Federal University of Uberlândia, in the Santa Mônica Campus, and my experience was not vastly different from those narrated by the interviewees. I joined the course in 2017 and for countless times, I faced the relocation of classrooms due to lack of accessibility. I also did not have the opportunity to visit all the educational spaces of my course, such as the *Centro de Documentação e Pesquisa em História* – CDHIS (Center for Documentation and Research in History), an important cultural and training center for historians, due to the lack of accessibility in the building until I finished my degree in 2022.

The first year at university is full of novelties for the new students, dreams, wishes, desires, and projects. It is no different for people with disabilities, who expect to participate intensely in academic life. Therefore, some of the training activities that occur during the undergraduate course are technical visits and fieldwork, offered by some subjects during certain semesters. Particularly in the History course, this includes getting to know different cultures, places, subjects, major museums, and cultural equipment of historical and social relevance, often in other states of the country. Going on a trip with friends from my college class seemed very distant, so distant that, on the first trip taken by my class, I did not

consider my participation and did not expose my wish participate. So, not surprisingly, there were no questions about my absence in discussions about the fieldwork or my non-participation in the trip, either from the professor in charge or from the class. It seemed natural that I would not participate, given my condition.

It draws attention to the fact that more than architectural barriers, we often face attitudinal barriers, i.e., "attitudes or behaviors that prevent or hinder the social participation of people with disabilities on equal terms and opportunities with others" (Art. 2, IV of the Brazilian Inclusion Law). These are perhaps the most complex and the most difficult to eliminate.

Later, when the class was to do another fieldwork, with a trip to the city of Rio de Janeiro, the feeling of belonging came to me. That was my class, I belonged to it. Just like my friends and other classmates, I also saw myself as a student in the course and, because of this, I did not think it was fair not to show my desire to participate. When I made the decision to express my desire to participate and feel included, I imagined that it would not be simple, but I did not consider it fair not to have the chance to be in that formative process with my classmates. To make my inclusion in the activity possible, there were many challenges: accessibility to transportation, access to the museums that would be visited, accommodation, and logistics within the visited city. Thus, committees were created among the students to help organize the trip, and one of them was the accessibility committee. The fieldwork was carried out despite many mishaps, the biggest one being accessible transportation, given that for that moment, it was a car that made wheelchair handling more feasible since the bus in which my colleagues traveled had no adaptation. How not to consider a wheelchair-bound student when conducting fieldwork?

Also reflecting on my experiences within higher education, between the years 2018-2020, I was part of the *Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação à Docência* – PIBID (Institutional Program for Teaching Initiation Scholarships) of History/Geography as a volunteer. Besides the issues related to the commute from home to school, which includes public transportation with unkept elevators, as well as streets and sidewalks with no architectural structures for inclusion, the school also lacked proper accessibility. All classrooms could only be accessed through the stairs leading to the second floor. Thus, in between many discussions with the PIBID supervising teacher and the program coordinator, we decided to stay in the school despite the difficulties, in order to use such difficulties in access as a teaching-learning opportunity for the students and as a way to push for the adaptation of the school. The activities that I participated in were done outside the classroom, such as in the library

and the video room, among other spaces that were perceived as diverse classroom possibilities, not only for the students but for other teachers as well. With my presence, the school started some work regarding accessibility, including the installation of an elevator. The work went on during the whole period that I was in the school as a PIBID student and, in the last week of my presence there, I could finally get to know the classrooms and go around on the second floor. However, by the end of the activities, the elevator was no longer working, and I had to be carried along with my wheelchair. Thus, we understood that having an elevator without the proper maintenance is not accessibility, and this is also true for the idea of false accessibility through access ramps that do not appear to meet the standards of the norms and legislations.

Other activities that deserve to be highlighted are the supervised internships, which are mandatory curricular components within the undergraduate course and that also offer opportunities to reflect on the permanence of people with disabilities in higher education. During the internship period, academic life raises some questions. I reflect now from the perspective of a future teacher with disabilities: are the schools prepared to receive not only students with disabilities but also teachers with disabilities? Would, for example, the bathroom in that school be accessible for the whole school community? Does that teacher's room allow access for a teacher in a wheelchair? And what about access to the office, the library, the sports court?

Understanding the importance of my presence in these environments, I was able to question these spaces and their possibilities, not only for this moment, but for the future of other people with disabilities. I reiterate that the presence of people with disabilities in multiple spaces contributes to the perception and formulation of policies for inclusion. Therefore, the policy of quotas for people with disabilities in universities is extremely important and its expansion is necessary.

The quota policy should enable and expand access, but the conditions for permanence need to be reevaluated, since

> The conditions for access and permanence of students with disabilities in higher education do not imply only the construction of physically accessible spaces, but also pedagogical resources (books, equipment, instruments, etc.), information for the technical-administrative community, instructions and/or training for professors and institutional support. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a change in the modus operandi of an institution in its traditional way of doing teaching, research, and extension, as well as in the infrastructure offered to the entire faculty, as well as to the student and administrative community. (POKER; VALENTIN; GARLA, 2018: 129)

From the perspective of a professor of an undergraduate course, I observe not only the architectural and physical limitations but also the pedagogical ones, regarding equipment and other instruments, as well as a lack of teaching and technical-administrative training to serve students with disabilities. My most direct contact with the theme of inclusion and accessibility came from receiving and assisting, in the classroom, students who entered higher education, amidst so many challenges to remain and succeed in their education. Some of the questions I asked myself were: how to include these students in the course? How to foster interaction with the class and enable them to do all the activities without bordering on ableism? These concerns brought me back to what bell hooks mentions when she states about the dangers of objectifying the disabled student by turning them into a "native informant," placing an unfair responsibility on their shoulders (HOOKS, 2013, p. 62). It is up to the professor to intervene and make it clear that experience does not make them an expert. In this aspect, I question: do professors feel safe and prepared to work with these students who require significant adjustments to their classes? What kind of training and what kind of contact with issues related to inclusion would the professors have? How to approach, within the curricular components, inclusion in a broader spectrum and in different courses? [4][5]

Besides the physical spaces that must be able to welcome people and their diversity, we must also highlight that the theoretical content must include the theme of people with disabilities and their history, both in basic education and in higher education. As a historian and a person with a disability, I have felt for several times the lack of theoretical content that covered the themes of inclusion, disability, and the struggles of this group.

It is important to say that there are several attempts to do so, even if isolated, as I was able to observe in the course plans of subjects such as History and Work, Social Movements, and Supervised Internships IV and V, whose professors incorporated theoretical discussions from the perspective of inclusion because of my presence and of the arrival of other students with disabilities on the History course. Other subjects, such as Educational Psychology, Didactics and LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language), which come from other areas of knowledge and are offered in the History course, have been addressing the theme of inclusion for a longer period of time.

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[4] Brief observations from the other author.

[5] Gloria Jean Watkins is the given name of bell hooks, which is a pseudonym adopted in honor of her great-grandmother Bell Blair Hooks. She is a professor, writer, essayist, feminist theorist, and anti-racist activist. In her works, bell hooks addresses how subjective dimensions are related to structural issues such as racism, capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy.

In the case of the Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, there are also broader policies, from the performance of the *Divisão de Ensino, Pesquisa, Extensão e Atendimento em Educação Especial* – DEPAE (Division of Teaching, Research, Extension, and Care in Special Education), which offers LIBRAS interpreters for academic boards and events in the institution, and also provides monitors for students with disabilities registered in the division, pedagogical support services, among others, which I could count on. Furthermore, the *Pró-Reitoria de Assistência Estudantil* – PROAE (Student Assistance Office), through public notices, gives specific scholarships to help people with disabilities. Finally, it is remarkable that efforts have been made, albeit slowly, for the inclusion and permanence of people with disabilities in universities, but the barriers that remain may hinder this access and even cause the student with disabilities to drop out. As can be seen, there is much to be done and much to be transformed.

Conclusion

First of all, analyzing the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education provides an opportunity to make these experiences visible, not only from a medical or healthcare perspective, but from the perspective of social insertion, the right to exercise citizenship, the right to freedom to come and go, and the right to leave the silence. Such an approach may contribute to the development of a more inclusive and less ableist society and, from the perspective of historical analysis, we must understand the theme as another movement that reveals important constitutive processes of society and that, like different feminist approaches, the black movement, the indigenous movement, it has much to contribute to society, while allowing us to reconstitute the historicity of the actions of people with disabilities in society.

The interviews used in this analysis revealed confrontations, challenges, and overcoming within the access to formal education and the permanence struggles, considering the architectural, attitudinal, and educational barriers that limited, if no compromised, the effective participation of these students in different activities of their learning process.

The narratives allow us to observe that the fact that a person with a disability, among people without disabilities, is occupying different public spaces can cause significant changes in the possible accessibility. In this sense, Amanda, once again inspires us with her perception:

> There's a question of people too, because all my friends from the master's program now had no previous contact with people with disabilities. Most graduated at Educa, some at Fisio. So, in their course, they had very little

> contact with people with disabilities. They had it in a few adapted subjects and such, but having a classmate, a colleague with a disability, they changed completely, so now when they walk around with me, they say: "look at that ramp, look at how bad it is." Because they conditioned themselves to look at that, when they go out with me, they say: "look, you can't go up through here or maybe we could complain about this place because it is an adapted." They fight for me to be in places with me.

We can observe the development of awareness, empathy, decision, and political action from people without disabilities regarding accessibility and inclusion. The actions that contemplate attitudinal accessibility are extremely important in this process. But the fight is collective and must not be restricted to people with disabilities or to those who have a relationship with them. It is necessary to implement and expand actions and public policies that allow the effective accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities, wherever they want to be.

Approaching this theme from a social perspective, using oral sources, puts us in front of an emotional and empathetic analysis of the issue and we realized how accessibility can influence and even determine the paths, the decisions, and the life of a person with a disability in different areas such as education, work life, parenthood, self-esteem, among others. Sometimes, it was painful to hear the reports and even more challenging to work on the theme as a person with disabilities. The physical spaces in the academy were not always adequate for my permanence, but my desire to be included, to become a professional in History, and a researcher/teacher that is committed to society led me to follow this path. May access and permanence be fully and effectively made possible by public policies and not just a result of the individual effort of people with disabilities.

> I hope that all of you, everyone here in this room, can share a little bit of your story. Because I think our lives clearly summarize why we so desperately need this kind of space. Our lives are illustrations of disability, of intersectionality, and there is a wealth of knowledge for us to learn and use. And many of us don't tell our stories. If we don't tell our stories, who will? If we can't share our stories with each other, who can we share them with? (MINGUS, 2018[6])

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[6] Source: https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love/.

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