

## Affirmative Actions for Students with Disabilities in Graduate Programs: A Systematic Review of the Literature in Scientific Articles<sup>1</sup>

*Ações Afirmativas para Estudantes com Deficiência na Pós-Graduação:  
Revisão Sistemática da Literatura em artigos científicos*

*Acciones Afirmativas para Estudiantes con Discapacidad en Programas de Posgrado:  
Revisión Sistemática de la Literatura en Artículos Científicos*

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to investigate the inclusion of students with disabilities in graduate programs in Brazil, focusing on affirmative action practices and their implications. It is a systematic literature review conducted on Periódicos CAPES, SciELO, and Connected Papers, where 11 articles were selected to compose the analyzed sample. The main results indicated that, although there is an increase in the inclusion of students with disabilities, the effectiveness of these actions varies significantly among institutions, with challenges such as a lack of resources and attitudinal barriers. It was concluded that there is an importance in implementing broader and more specific policies to ensure the retention and academic success of these students.

**Keywords:** Access; Retention; Master's; Doctorate; *Stricto Sensu*.

**Resumo:** Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar a inclusão de estudantes com deficiência em programas de pós-graduação no Brasil, focando nas práticas de ações afirmativas e suas implicações. Trata-se de uma revisão sistemática da literatura realizada no Periódicos CAPES, na SciELO e no Connected Papers, onde foram selecionados 11 artigos para compor a amostra analisada. Os principais resultados indicaram que, embora haja um crescimento na inclusão de estudantes com deficiência, a efetividade dessas ações varia significativamente entre as instituições, com desafios como a falta de recursos e barreiras atitudinais. Concluiu-se a importância da implementação de políticas mais abrangentes e específicas para garantir a permanência e o sucesso acadêmico desses estudantes.

**Palavras-chave:** Acesso; Permanência; Mestrado; Doutorado; *Stricto Sensu*.

**Resumen:** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar la inclusión de estudiantes con discapacidad en programas de posgrado en Brasil, enfocándose en prácticas de acciones afirmativas y sus implicaciones. Se trata de una revisión sistemática de la literatura realizada en Periódicos CAPES, SciELO y Connected Papers, donde fueron seleccionados

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11 artículos para componer la muestra analizada. Los principales resultados indicaron que, aunque haya un aumento en la inclusión de estudiantes con discapacidad, la efectividad de estas acciones varía significativamente entre las instituciones, con desafíos como la falta de recursos y barreras actitudinales. Se concluyó la importancia de implementar políticas más amplias y específicas para asegurar la permanencia y el éxito académico de estos estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** Acceso; Permanencia; Maestría; Doctorado; Stricto Sensu.

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## Introduction

The National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Brazil, 2008) already established guidelines in the early 2000s to ensure access and retention of students with disabilities at all educational levels. However, only in 2012 was Law No. 12,711/12 implemented, which provides for quotas for admission to federal universities and federal institutions. Four years later, this law was complemented by Law No. 13,409/16, which regulates the reservation of slots for people with disabilities. Recently, in 2023, another complement was approved, Law No. 14,723/23, which states in Article 7º-B that federal higher education institutions “shall promote affirmative action policies for the inclusion of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Quilombola individuals, as well as persons with disabilities, in their stricto sensu graduate programs” (Brazil, 2023, emphasis added).

As can be observed, the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education, particularly in graduate programs, is guaranteed by laws and public policies aimed at promoting accessibility and equal opportunities. However, the practical implementation of these policies faces numerous challenges. According to Souza (2020), the right to education for people with disabilities is widely recognized, but the actualization of this right, especially in graduate programs, is still limited by the lack of comprehensive institutional policies and adequate resources.

The interest in researching this phenomenon is justified by the expansion of contemporary debates on the inclusion of students with disabilities in graduate programs and changes in Brazilian legislation establishing the rights of this minority to access and remain in master's and doctoral programs in Brazil. Furthermore, as this is a recent topic, there is still a scarcity of literature on the subject, deserving our attention.

This study aims to analyze scientific articles discussing the inclusion of students with disabilities in graduate programs. The research question posed is: What do the articles reveal about the admission and retention of people with disabilities in master's and doctoral programs?

## Methodological Procedures

A literature review, according to Costa and Zoltowski (2014), is a method that enables the enhancement, expansion, and organization of academic text searches. Its outcome cannot be presented merely as a chronological list or descriptive exposition of the topic or texts read. Instead, it should constitute a critical-reflective work of the analyzed material.

For this type of research, Costa and Zoltowski (2014) recommend establishing a clear research problem and objective to be achieved. Subsequently, they suggest following these steps: a) Selection of text types and search platforms, b) Choice of keywords or descriptors, c) Definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria, d) Scanning and storing results, e) Text selection based on abstracts, f) In-depth reading and data extraction from selected texts, g) Synthesis and critical analysis of the quality of the selected literature.

Following these steps, three search platforms were established: Periódicos CAPES, the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), and Connected Papers. The search descriptor "affirmative actions" AND "graduate programs" was used without applying a temporal filter due to the low number of texts found.

The inclusion criteria were: a) Scientific articles published in Brazilian journals, b) Research conducted in graduate programs (master's and/or doctoral) in Brazil, c) Studies on affirmative actions implemented in graduate programs, d) Involvement of persons with disabilities in the data collection. The exclusion criteria were: a) Studies related to other stages, modalities, or educational levels, b) Studies not addressing people with disabilities, c) Bibliographic studies and/or literature reviews.

Each platform's results were reviewed individually and later consolidated. During the "Pre-selection" phase on Connected Papers, SciELO, and CAPES, a table was initially created to note the title of each text, the reasons for exclusion after reading the title and abstract, and the links to seemingly eligible articles. Subsequently, the links to pre-selected texts were accessed for a full reading, eliminating more texts that did not meet the established criteria. The final selection was consolidated into a "General Table" for further analysis.

Thematic Analysis or Thematic Axes were employed as the data analysis methodology. Originally developed in the context of Psychology, this method is a way of addressing discourse and text in Education, without requiring prior theoretical grounding. This type of data analysis focuses on identifying and describing implicit and explicit ideas through comparisons of frequencies, similarities, and distinctions within the analyzed text (oral or written) (Alhojailan, 2012).

## Results and Discussion

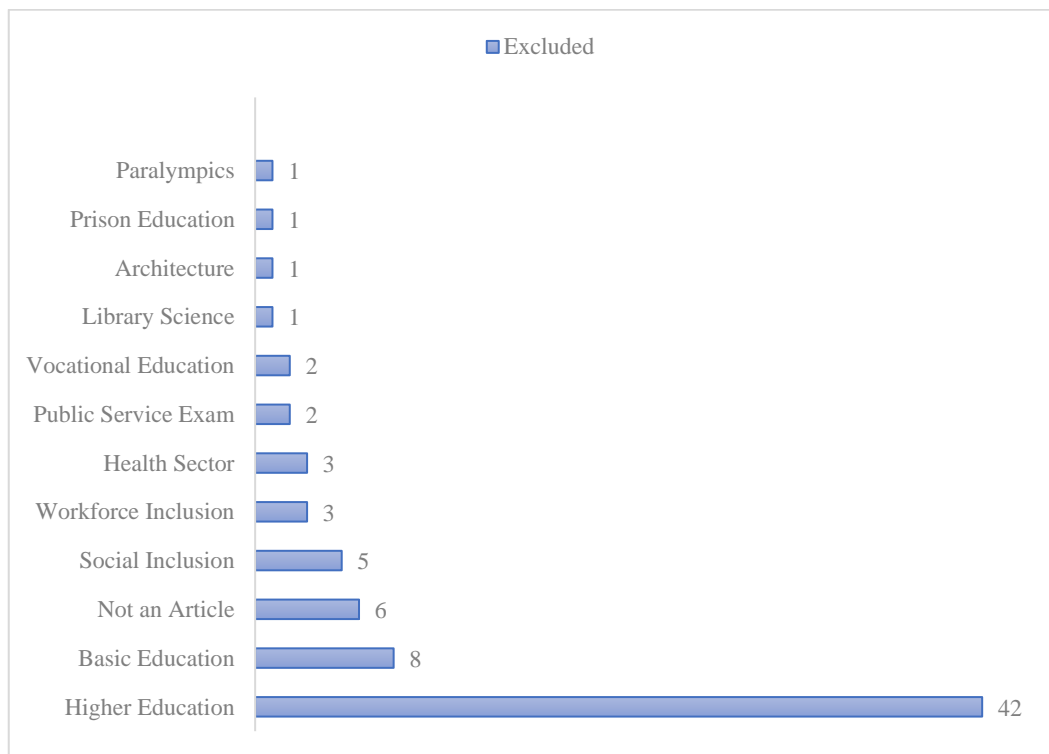
A total of 140 texts were initially identified with no filters or limitations: 45 articles in the CAPES Journal, 17 in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), and 78 in Connected Papers. We excluded 18 due to duplication, leaving 122 texts across the three platforms.

Of these, 75 were excluded for not addressing postgraduate studies. We created Graph 1 to highlight the reasons for exclusion. Most of these (42) dealt with affirmative actions, quotas, or access and retention in higher education at the undergraduate level. Six were excluded for not being articles, consisting of essays (2), an abstract (1), an interview (1), and dossiers (2). Another 11 discussed other educational modalities such as basic education (8), vocational education (2), and prison education (1). There were also 16 with distinct themes, such as those discussing social inclusion (5), workforce inclusion (3), health sector (3), quotas in public service exams (2), library science (1), Architecture (1), and the Paralympics (1).

This finding can be interpreted in various ways and raises several critical reflections. First, the predominance of texts in the field of Higher Education suggests a concentration of studies and discussions on the inclusion of people with disabilities in this education level. This may reflect a growing concern with accessibility and inclusion in this modality, as well as a potential gap in research on the presence and challenges of individuals with disabilities in postgraduate education.

These texts indicate awareness about the need for inclusion from the earliest educational levels, as well as the importance of preparing people with disabilities for the workforce and full participation in society. Moreover, the texts on public service exams and prison education raise questions about inclusion in specific and often marginalized contexts. The dispersion of texts across various themes beyond postgraduate studies may reveal both the breadth of the inclusion debate and the areas that require greater focus and development.

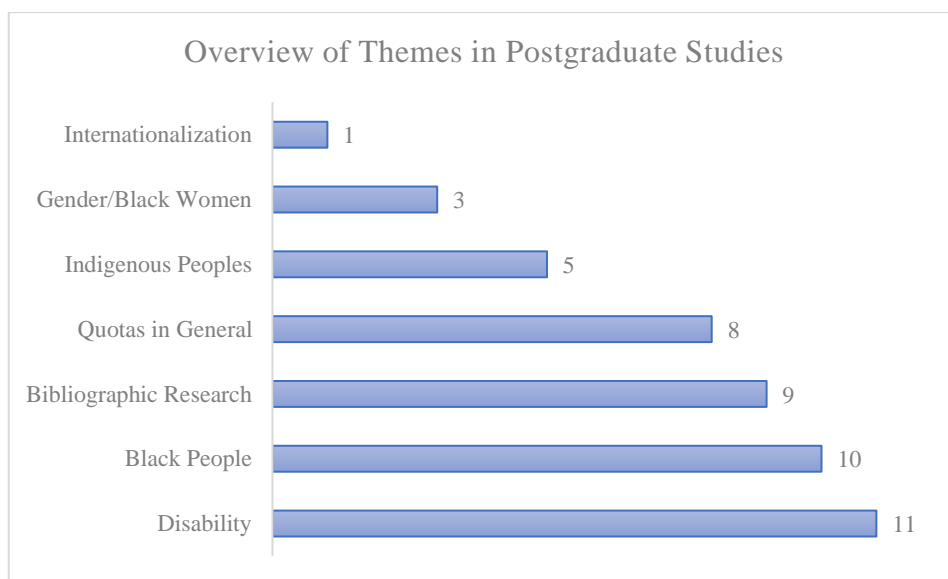
Graph 1 - Sample of the 75 texts excluded for not focusing on postgraduate themes.



Source: Organized by the Authors (2024), based on the Systematic Literature Review.

Thus, 47 texts focusing on postgraduate studies remained. Within this level of education, using the keyword "affirmative actions", several themes emerged. We located 11 articles (6 in CAPES, 4 in Connected Papers, and 1 in SciELO) that, at some point in the text, addressed the admission and retention of people with disabilities in postgraduate education. These will be analyzed in detail later.

Graph 2 - Index of types and themes of articles focused on postgraduate studies in Brazil.



Source: Organized by the Authors (2024), based on the Systematic Literature Review.

Exploring texts focused on affirmative actions in postgraduate studies, the discovery of works addressing other areas and themes, as shown in Graph 2, brings important reflections on the diversity and intersectionality of educational and social issues. The significant presence of texts on "disability" (11 texts) within the scope of postgraduate studies highlights the relevance and growing attention given to this topic.

However, the coexistence of themes such as "Black People" (10 texts), "Quotas in General" (8 texts), "Indigenous Peoples" (5 texts), "Gender/Black Women" (3 texts) suggests that discussions about inclusion in postgraduate studies cannot be viewed in isolation, and when combined, they focus more on ethno-racial issues (25) than on disabilities (11). The presence of "Bibliographic Research" (9 texts) and "Internationalization" (1 text) points to the complexity of the study field and the breadth and diversity of the subject itself.

Thus, of the 122 articles located on the two platforms, only 11 discuss some issue concerning people with disabilities. These will be the focus of our investigation. Table 1 presents articles from 2011 (1), 2016 (1), 2019 (2), 2020 (1), 2021 (1), 2022 (4), 2024 (1), showing an increase in research involving disabilities in postgraduate studies over the years.

Table 1 - List of Texts Included in the Analysis

Periódico da CAPES				
Year	Authors	Research Type	Techniques/Instruments	Research Location
2016	Branco e Leite	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Various federal universities
2019	Pereira e Rocha Neto <sup>4</sup>	Exploratory	Secondary data and questionnaires	Various federal universities
2022	Amparo <i>et al.</i>	Mixed-method	Document analysis and questionnaires	Various federal universities
2022	Andrade <i>et al.</i>	Qualitative	Focus groups	Various federal universities
2022	Dias, Pacheco e Mendes	Documentary	Document analysis	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) - Northeast Region
2024	Bergamaschi e Calazans	Documentary	Document analysis and questionnaires	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) - Southern Region
Connected Papers				
Year	Authors	Research Type	Techniques/Instruments	Lócus da Pesquisa
2011	Marrara e Gasiola	Theoretical Essay	Analysis of 5 Postgraduate Programmes	Various federal universities
2020	Venturini e Feres Júnior	Documentary Analysis	Analysis of documents and resolutions	Various federal universities
2021	Godoi e Silva	Quantitqualitative	Analysis of public notices f selection processes	Various federal universities
2022	Silva e Neto, Peralta e Gonçalves	Qualitative	Analysis of public notices f selection processes	Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) - Southeast Region
SciELO				
Year	Authors	Research Type	Techniques/Instruments	Lócus da Pesquisa
2019	Branco e Almeida	Exploratory	Satisfaction and Attitudes Scale of People with Disabilities (SASPD)	6 Universities (Federal and State) in São Paulo - Southeast Region

Source: Organized by the Authors (2024), based on the Systematic Literature Review.

We can observe that regarding the type of research, three of them are qualitative (Andrade *et al.*, 2022; Branco & Leite, 2016; Silva & Neto; Peralta; Gonçalves, 2022). Three are documentary (Bergamaschi & Calazans, 2024; Dias, Pacheco & Mendes, 2022; Venturini & Feres Júnior, 2020). Two are mixed-methods (Amparo *et al.*, 2022; Godoi & Silva, 2021). Two are exploratory (Branco & Almeida, 2019; Pereira & Rocha Neto, 2019), and another is described by the authors as a "theoretical essay" (Marrara & Gasiola, 2011).

Regarding the techniques and instruments analyzed, six made use of document analysis (Amparo *et al.*, 2022; Bergamaschi & Calazans, 2024; Dias, Pacheco & Mendes, 2022; Godoi & Silva, 2021; Silva & Neto; Peralta & Gonçalves, 2022; Venturini & Feres

<sup>4</sup> The Dissertation by Fabiana Santos Pereira (2019) was also analyzed in our Review of Dissertations and Theses.



Júnior, 2020). Three applied questionnaires (Amparo et al., 2022; Bergamaschi & Calazans, 2024; Pereira & Rocha Neto, 2019). Two analyzed specific postgraduate programs (Marrara & Gasiola, 2011; Peralta & Gonçalves, 2022). Only one used interviews with people with disabilities (Branco & Leite, 2016), one conducted focus groups (Andrade et al., 2022), and another applied the Satisfaction and Attitudes Scale for People with Disabilities (ESA) (Branco & Almeida, 2019). It is noted that document analysis, especially of public notices, is the most commonly used technique, followed by the application of questionnaires.

In relation to the research locus, there are studies (7) that covered universities from various regions (Amparo et al., 2022; Andrade et al., 2022; Branco & Leite, 2016; Godoi & Silva, 2021; Marrara & Gasiola, 2011; Pereira & Rocha Neto, 2019; Venturini & Feres Júnior, 2020). Four other studies focus on the Northeast Region (Dias, Pacheco & Mendes, 2022); the Southern Region (Bergamaschi & Calazans, 2024); and the Southeast Region (Branco & Almeida, 2019; Silva & Neto; Peralta & Gonçalves, 2022). These data demonstrate a diversity in the type of research, techniques, and the breadth of investigations on disability in postgraduate studies nationwide.

The concentration of research in the Southeast of Brazil may be attributed to several factors such as the greater presence of large university centers; it being a populous and economically developed region; better research infrastructure; more public policies encouraging research; geographic proximity and the density of higher education institutions that facilitate the formation of collaborative networks among researchers, among others. Only one of the 11 articles covers the Midwest of Brazil (Venturini & Feres Júnior, 2020), highlighting a gap in research in this region regarding postgraduate students with disabilities.

### Summary of Selected Articles

Marrara and Gasiola (2011), authors from the area of Law, published in the journal *Inclusão Social*, discussed "Diversity in Postgraduate Studies." The article predates the quota laws for higher education, thus reinforcing the need to implement this policy. The research was conducted at two federal universities: Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA) and Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB), and one state university, Universidade de São Paulo (USP), in the area of human rights. The goal was to analyze, discuss, and propose solutions for issues related to social exclusion and evaluate the implementation of affirmative actions and their relation to diversity and social development.



Branco and Leite (2016), published in the journal *Psicologia da Educação*, discussed "Accessibility Conditions in Postgraduate Studies." They conducted a qualitative research (a segment of a larger study) aiming to "analyze how students with disabilities who accessed strictu sensu postgraduate courses identify the supports and the barriers related to accessibility in their university units" (p. 37). They conducted interviews with five students from strictu sensu postgraduate courses from different university units in São Paulo to understand the impacts and challenges of affirmative action policies in democratizing access to higher education.

Pereira and Rocha Neto (2019), published in the journal *Educação Artes e Inclusão*, aimed to describe "Who are the Students in Postgraduate Studies in Brazil." It is an exploratory-qualitative research in which data were collected through questionnaires applied via the Sucupira Platform. The main objective was to identify the profile of postgraduate students and evaluate the effectiveness of inclusion policies for black, brown, indigenous people, and people with disabilities.

Branco and Almeida (2019), published in the journal *Avaliação*, addressed "Student Satisfaction with Disabilities in Four Public Universities in the State of São Paulo." It's an exploratory research of a quality-quantitative nature conducted via the Satisfaction and Attitudes of People with Disabilities Scale (ESA) applied to strictu sensu postgraduate students in Education or Special Education, self-declared with disabilities. The aim was to evaluate the satisfaction levels, expectations before and after entering postgraduate studies, and verify the attitudes of students with disabilities towards the accessibility conditions offered at the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) they attended.

Venturini and Feres Júnior (2020), published in the journal *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, focused on "Affirmative Action Policy in Postgraduate Studies." It was a documentary research conducted through document analysis of 737 programs that created affirmative actions. The objective was to outline a panorama of affirmative actions instituted in the postgraduate studies of public universities, between 2002 and 2018, identifying general characteristics of the policies, adopted modalities, main beneficiaries, and program profiles.

Godoi and Silva (2021), published in the *Revista de Direito*, discuss affirmative actions in postgraduate programs in the field of Law. It's a documentary research of a qualitative-quantitative nature, involving analysis of public notices and official documents. The aim was to evaluate the implementation of affirmative actions in selection processes in strictu sensu postgraduate programs, identifying general characteristics, beneficiaries, and results.

Amparo et al. (2022), published in the journal *Cadernos de Campo*, focus on the advancements and challenges of inclusion in postgraduate studies in the field of Anthropology. They investigate how students and teachers have approached the affirmative action policy at Universidade de São Paulo. A mixed-methods research was conducted, combining document analysis and questionnaires applied to 82 postgraduate students and 16 teachers. The objective was to map the challenges faced by quota students and propose improvements to inclusion policies in postgraduate studies.

Andrade et al. (2022), published in the journal *Educação e Políticas em Debate*, discuss affirmative actions in a Postgraduate Teaching Program. It's a qualitative research using focus group meetings with educators, leading to the "Commission for the Inclusion of the Quota Program in the Selection Notice" in 2020. The primary goal was to present a set of recommendations that could aid in the maturation of this discussion within the program and beyond.

Dias, Pacheco, and Mendes (2022), published in the journal *Perspectiva Filosófica*, focus on "Affirmative Actions in Postgraduate Philosophy Programs." This documentary research analyzed the implementation and results of a new scholarship awarding model in the Philosophy Postgraduate Program at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). Despite analyzing jurisprudences and focusing more on women, the goal was to promote ethno-cultural and socio-economic diversity among the students, using weighted average criteria for scholarship allocation.

Silva e Neto, Peralta, and Gonçalves (2022), published in the *Revista de Educação PUC-Campinas*, take a "critical look at programs in the fields of teaching and education." It is a qualitative, descriptive research with documentary research assumptions. They analyzed 11 selection notices for entry between 2022 and 2023 at Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho" (Unesp). The objective was to present an overview of affirmative actions during selection processes and evaluate the level of inclusion provided by these policies, identifying mechanisms of exclusion.

Bergamschi and Calazans (2024), published in the journal *Arquivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, focus on "Affirmative Actions in the Education Postgraduate Program at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul" from 2017 to 2022. The research utilized document analysis and questionnaires applied to graduates (17 respondents among whom was 1 deaf woman, the only one with a disability) of the program with the objective to highlight the movements that constitute affirmative actions, considering the selection processes, permanence, and the impact on the formation of the first entrants.

## Analysis of Research Results

To conduct a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the scientific articles, we categorized the 11 articles based on similarities and distinctions among the research findings. The texts primarily focus on affirmative actions in postgraduate studies in Brazil, addressing different aspects and perspectives. The main thematic axes identified include: a) About the Students, b) Implementation of Affirmative Actions, c) Socioeconomic Impact and Ethno-Cultural Diversity, d) Challenges and Limitations, and e) Future Perspectives.

### *About the Students*

All 11 articles analyzed study the profile of students benefiting from affirmative actions, highlighting that the majority are from racial minorities, such as black, brown, and indigenous populations, people with disabilities, or those from public schools. There is an emphasis on the socioeconomic diversity of the students, showing that many come from low-income families.

People with disabilities are mentioned in all texts when discussing quotas generally, but the number of studies specifically focusing on them is significantly smaller, specifically two (Bergamschi; Calazans, 2024; Branco; Almeida, 2019; Branco; Leite, 2016). In the first mentioned text, the authors administered a questionnaire to quota beneficiaries, among them one (1) deaf student; in the second, the authors conducted interviews with five students with disabilities; in the third, the authors applied a satisfaction questionnaire to nine participants with disabilities. However, it is noted that most studies aimed to broadly analyze affirmative actions, with only one focusing specifically on women (Dias; Pacheco; Mendes, 2022).

The article by Amparo et al. (2022) highlights that a significant portion of those opting for affirmative actions had never paid for education, reinforcing the predominance of low-income students. Bergamschi and Calazans (2024) emphasize the inclusion of groups such as transvestites and transsexuals, expanding the definition of diversity beyond racial and socioeconomic criteria.

The lack of postgraduate students from minorities is related to a series of historical, economic, and social factors (Pereira and Rocha Neto, 2019). Marrara and Gasiola (2011) believe that students with disabilities do not reach postgraduate levels due to the "reduced quality of Basic education offered by the State" (p. 23). The selection processes are elitist, meritocratic, based solely on intellectual attributes, and most quotas are for "black, brown, and indigenous" individuals (Venturini and Feres Júnior, 2020).

Regarding people with disabilities in postgraduate studies, the articles commonly identify physical, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers. While there is satisfaction with some accessibility initiatives, significant gaps are acknowledged. Furthermore, there is a need for more robust and specific policies to ensure the full inclusion of these students, as indicated by Branco and Leite (2016).

The analyzed studies highlight the complexity and diversity of the profiles of students benefited by affirmative actions in postgraduate programs. It is observed that although the majority of beneficiaries belong to racial and socioeconomic minorities, there is a lack of research focusing exclusively on specific groups, such as people with disabilities. The barriers faced by students with disabilities, both physical and pedagogical and attitudinal, point to the urgency of more inclusive and comprehensive policies in this area.

### *Implementation of Affirmative Actions*

The implementation of affirmative actions is generally described as a process involving institutional policies and specific regulations. All the articles agree that the introduction of affirmative actions was a significant step towards democratizing access to higher education and postgraduate studies.

There are four ways to implement affirmative actions: a) the university and programs jointly create them; b) the program creates them independently; c) the program creates them with external initiatives and bodies; d) the University Council implements policies valid for all postgraduate courses at the university (Venturini; Feres Júnior, 2020).

Federal universities adopt more affirmative actions than others (Venturini; Feres Júnior, 2020; Godoi; Silva, 2021). These authors focus on the analysis of selection notices, highlighting how public universities implemented affirmative actions in diverse ways, with some making more progress than others. Godoi and Silva (2021), however, emphasize that while most public institutions have adopted affirmative actions, there is significant resistance among private institutions to implement such policies.

Some measures are suggested for the selection process adapted to affirmative actions, such as special committees, exam readers, braille materials, and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) interpreters; a specific field in the application form where candidates can describe their specific needs for the selection process (Branco and Leite, 2016). Pereira and Rocha Neto (2019) focus on the importance of a socioeconomic questionnaire filled out by the candidate/postgraduate student themselves to both prepare the institution for the selection process and self-assess if the actions are having the desired effect.

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the university context can be conceived as a facilitator for removing methodological and communicational barriers (Branco; Almeida, 2019; Branco; Leite, 2016). The revision of criteria for scholarship grants in the program, in light of quota admissions, is a constant theme in the analyzed texts (Andrade et al., 2022; Dias; Pacheco; Mendes, 2022). More recently, in the research by Bergamschi and Calazans (2024), all entrants in reserved spots were awarded scholarships.

The analyzed articles note recognition of progress in affirmative action policies. Successful practices have been identified, as well as areas needing improvement. There is, according to Silva e Neto, Peralta, and Gonçalves (2022), a constant recommendation for greater investment in training and raising awareness within the academic community.

### *Socioeconomic Impact and Ethno-Cultural Diversity*

The impacts of affirmative actions are described as positive, increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity in postgraduate programs. Some authors are cautious and state that "there is still no consensus regarding the definition of social impact and that the analysis of this impact requires different types of data and sources of information" (Pereira; Rocha Neto, 2019, p. 121).

The studies show that affirmative actions have helped reduce access barriers for minority students, including people with disabilities, providing them with greater equality of opportunity as well as academic and professional advancement. Without affirmative actions, the education system can actually ensure the perpetuation of privilege among a historically privileged elite, making them necessary tools for minorities to compete on equal footing with others (Dias; Pacheco; Mendes, 2022).

Affirmative actions have the power to transform educational institutions, contribute to the formation of new citizens and leaders, and stimulate the production of responsive research (Marrara; Gasiola, 2011). This impact on research is cited by Bergamschi and Calazans (2024) when the authors state that the research of quota beneficiaries was mostly associated with their life trajectories and that some have even addressed their own intellectual and social activism. Therefore, Silva e Neto, Peralta, and Gonçalves (2022) propose that social injustices become a permanent topic of discussion in the academic environment.

Dias, Pacheco, and Mendes (2022) specifically discuss the impact of affirmative actions on scholarship grants, showing that socioeconomic criteria have become increasingly effective in equitably distributing scholarships. Marrara and Gasiola (2011) discuss how affirmative actions can increase the legitimacy of educational institutions by promoting diversity, which can result in more inclusive social development.

The affirmative actions promoted mainly by federal universities aim to facilitate the access and persistence of people with disabilities in higher education. The theme of affirmative actions for strictu sensu postgraduate programs has been progressively increasing, albeit slowly. Branco and Leite (2016) understand that although the main focus of their research is people with disabilities, their inclusion contributes to diversity within educational institutions.

Beyond inclusion within higher education institutions, Bergamschi and Calazans (2024) show that completing a master's degree enabled quota beneficiaries to ascend in the job market. Venturini and Feres Júnior (2020) argue that recognizing the problem and being willing to experiment with solutions go beyond the walls of the university, penetrating the political system. Meanwhile, Dias, Pacheco, and Mendes (2022) believe that applying socioeconomic criteria in selection processes and scholarship distribution reduces social inequalities.

The studies and authors referenced here highlight that although there is still a long way to go to reach a consensus on the social impact of these policies, the benefits are evident. The inclusion of minority students, people with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups not only democratizes access to postgraduate education but also enriches the academic environment with different perspectives and life experiences. This diversity has the potential to transform educational institutions, fostering the production of more inclusive research responsive to social demands.

### *Challenges and Limitations*

The analyzed articles recognize the existence of challenges in implementing affirmative actions, including political and institutional resistance, as well as limitations in the availability of financial resources. There is a common mention of the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation policies to ensure the effectiveness of affirmative actions.

The actions of educators are cited by some authors as a challenge. Branco and Almeida (2019) mention the unpreparedness of some staff (teachers) to deal with issues related to disabilities. For Marrara and Gasiola (2011) and Branco and Leite (2016), teachers need to review and adapt their methodologies to diversity. It is also necessary to discuss and implement academic and pedagogical reforms (Godoi; Silva, 2021), and teachers should be attentive to technologies to use them in classrooms (Branco; Almeida, 2019; Branco; Leite, 2016).

Bergamaschi and Calazans (2024) emphasize the importance of an intersectional approach that considers not only race, class, or disability, but also gender and sexual orientation, to combat structural racism and the coloniality of knowledge. Andrade et al.



(2022) point out that the lack of a sufficient number of scholarships is still a significant issue, limiting the potential impact of affirmative actions, as those entering through quotas often come from vulnerable socioeconomic situations.

There is no enforcement or control from CAPES or MEC over the adoption of these initiatives, leaving their implementation to the discretion of the HEI administrators. Thus, there is a discussion about ways to maintain records of quota beneficiaries and their socioeconomic statuses and conduct continuous evaluation of inclusion processes in postgraduate programs (Amparo et al., 2022; Godoi; Silva, 2021; Pereira; Rocha Neto, 2019). This would prevent what Venturini and Feres Júnior (2020) and Silva e Neto, Peralta, and Gonçalves (2022) denounce — that programs with higher CAPES ratings are those least promoting affirmative actions, aiming to avoid a drop in their score.

It is necessary to improve communication during and after the selection process and promote welcoming policies (Amparo et al., 2022). The authors mention the "Prepara-PPGAS" program as one of the possibilities for welcoming and communication. Created by volunteer students, it is an online preparatory course aimed at black, brown, indigenous, trans, and disabled people intending to participate in the selection process. Andrade et al. (2022) discuss the "Commission for the Inclusion of the Quota Program in the Selection Notice" created at the investigated university. Bergamaschi and Calazans (2024) reported conducting a "Seminar for Disclosure of the Notice" conceived by the Commission on Monitoring Affirmative Actions to publicize, present, and clarify doubts regarding the selection process.

Godoi and Silva (2021) denounce that in some notices, unfilled quotas were used in the free competition selection system. However, it is understood that works from 2023 onwards will discuss this distribution differently, as Law No. 14.723, dated November 13, 2023, establishes that in the case of unfilled vacancies, the remaining ones should be designated primarily to "[...] self-declared blacks, browns, indigenous, and quilombolas or people with disabilities and, subsequently, filled by students who have entirely attended high school at a public school" (Brazil, 2023, Art. 3, § 1).

Notably, the challenges and limitations of affirmative actions in postgraduate programs are diverse and complex, involving both institutional and political barriers as well as pedagogical and resource issues. Regarding people with disabilities, the literature analyzed notes a significant limitation in the availability of quotas and means to provide access. Furthermore, the articles indicate that there is a reduced number of students with disabilities enrolled in postgraduate programs, and it is a major challenge to promote retention actions for those who have already entered.



### *Future Perspectives*

The articles converge in highlighting the importance of continuing to expand and improve affirmative actions to promote greater democratization and inclusion in postgraduate education. There is also a consensus among the analyzed texts on the need for robust public policies that support and expand affirmative actions in postgraduate programs.

Amparo et al. (2022) suggest that continuous research and data collection on the impact of affirmative actions are essential to better understand their effectiveness and challenges. Pereira and Rocha Neto (2019) emphasize that overcoming institutional resistance requires promoting a cultural change within universities, valuing diversity as an essential component of academic excellence.

The need for universities to enhance their physical, technological, and pedagogical infrastructures to ensure all students have equitable access is cited by Branco and Leite (2016). The authors also argue that increasing awareness and training for university professors and staff to address the specific needs of students with disabilities is critical to fostering a more inclusive and understanding environment.

Silva e Neto, Peralta, and Gonçalves (2022) support continuous evaluation and monitoring. They suggest implementing systems for evaluating and monitoring affirmative actions to measure their effectiveness and identify areas needing adjustments or improvements. Additionally, they propose the creation of partnerships between universities, governments, and civil society organizations to promote inclusion and diversity in postgraduate studies more effectively and coordinated.

Marrara and Gasiola (2011) view affirmative actions as a direct mechanism against social exclusion since these same marginalized groups have long endured social distortions caused by past discriminations. They create new challenges, encourage the revision of behavior patterns, prompt rule changes, and spotlight marginalized groups. The authors use the term "positive discrimination" (p. 29) to refer to these distinct actions to promote inclusion in the academic environment.

A future perspective includes actions such as the one cited by Branco and Almeida (2019), where a postgraduate program provided four rotating Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) interpreters to assist a deaf student throughout her master's. In contrast, Bergamschi and Calazans (2024) report the absence of a Libras interpreter, which excluded a deaf student from many academic activities during her master's degree.

We conclude with the perspective that, in the future, public competitions may apply some of the same criteria being discussed today in postgraduate education. Amparo et al. (2022) and Bergamschi and Calazans (2024) believe that the presence of a minority professor

can provide diversity and contribute to changes in thought and behavior. Affirmative actions prove fundamental in reducing social, economic, and regional inequalities, indispensable for a true democratic social rule of law.

It is understood that the presence of a professor with disabilities, for example, in postgraduate education can contribute significantly to the academic environment in several ways. Firstly, it serves as a powerful example of overcoming barriers and inclusion, showing that people with disabilities can occupy prominent positions and be successful in their academic careers. They can bring a unique and valuable perspective to the classroom and the academic community as a whole. They can foster a more inclusive and accessible environment by identifying gaps, suggesting improvements, implementing policies, and proposing research. Lastly, they can promote cultural change within the university, as their perspectives can help overcome institutional resistance and provide a fairer and more equitable academic environment for all.

Future perspectives point to the need for robust public policies, constant evaluations, and the creation of strategic partnerships to ensure the effectiveness of these actions. Awareness and training for the entire university community, as well as the adaptation of infrastructures, are fundamental elements for the success of affirmative actions. Thus, the pursuit of a truly inclusive and democratic education should be relentless, ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have the opportunity to reach their full academic and professional potential.

## Final Considerations

This study aimed to investigate the inclusion of students with disabilities in postgraduate programs in Brazil, seeking to understand affirmative action practices and their implications. Throughout the research, it became evident that affirmative actions have significantly contributed to democratizing access to postgraduate education, although considerable challenges remain in implementing these policies.

The guiding question was: "What do the found articles discuss regarding the admission and retention of people with disabilities in master's and doctoral programs?" The results revealed that while there is growth in the inclusion of students with disabilities in postgraduate education, the effectiveness of these actions varies widely between institutions. The main obstacles include the lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and attitudinal barriers. The analyzed studies highlight the need for more comprehensive and specific policies to meet the demands of this population, emphasizing

the importance of an inclusive environment that goes beyond access, also ensuring the retention and academic success of these students.

However, this study has some limitations. The review was restricted to articles published on specific platforms and focused on Brazilian universities, which may not reflect the entirety of experiences and practices in other regions or contexts. Furthermore, the literature on the inclusion of students with disabilities in postgraduate education is still relatively scarce, indicating the need for expanded research. We recommend that future studies explore not only the effectiveness of inclusion policies but also the individual experiences of students, contributing to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding.

The contributions of this work are significant for both academia and public policy formulation. By highlighting the advances and challenges of affirmative actions in postgraduate education, this study provides a basis for reflection and continuous improvement of inclusive practices. Awareness about the importance of including people with disabilities in higher levels of education can foster a more diverse and equitable academic environment, promoting equal opportunities for all.

In conclusion, the inclusion of students with disabilities in postgraduate education is a crucial step toward building a more just and egalitarian society. This study reinforces the importance of affirmative actions and points to the need for a continuous and integrated commitment between educational institutions, policymakers, and society in general to ensure that all individuals have full and equitable access to higher levels of education.

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