

## Accessibility of Students with disabilities to remote teaching in State Universities of Bahia\*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Healthy crisis, resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, generated social distancing actions to minimize the risks of virus infection, impelling basic and higher educational institutions to offer emergency remote teaching (ERT). Among the challenges of ERE, institutions needed to elaborate alternatives for teacher education, availability of digital tools, data network expansion, and accessibility for students with disabilities. In this regard, this investigation aimed to analyze the guidelines from the universities that make up the state educational system in Bahia, concerning the approach of issues related to accessibility of students with disability to remote teaching, in graduation courses. The guidelines were collected on the websites of each institution. It is, therefore, about documentary research, with a qualitative approach, which allows an analytical-interpretive perspective on the content of institutional guidelines. The results reveal that the four state universities from Bahia address accessibility in the documents concerning remote teaching, with the greatest emphasis on the methodological and digital dimensions. Only the Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia made a document with specific guidelines available, which also contemplates the dimensions: communicational, instrumental, attitudinal, and digital. It can be concluded that higher education institutions can elaborate educational policies that ensure the accessibility right of students with disability to face-to-face or remote teaching and to places, contents, and learning tools.

### Keywords

Higher education – Accessibility – Remote teaching – Inclusive education.

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## Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization recognized Covid-19 as a pandemic, and from then on, it was characterized as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. In this sense, social distancing measures have become necessary in various sectors of society to reduce the spread of the Sars-Cov-2 coronavirus, characterized by its high transmissibility and lethality.

Although the guidelines for the population to maintain social distancing had a worldwide reverberation, Brazil faced its problems. That is because of its politically tense scenario, resulting in the refusal of public managers to adhere to the guidelines and the evidence recognized by the scientific community. This political tension had repercussions in various sectors of society, including causing concern about the necessary steps to reduce contagion, morbidity, and mortality through social distancing.

In education, educational institutions have been urged to resort to remote work as an alternative to interrupting face-to-face activities. This new reality has required educational communities to review work routines and methodologies, introducing and enhancing digital resources and academic technologies.

This scenario would be very enriching if the Institutions had the necessary time for institutional adjustments and new learnings for those involved in the educational process. However, due to the urgency imposed by the pandemic, the change in the working conditions was abrupt, and the necessary time for the maturation of the needed pedagogical practices was not ensured. Thus, while professors were required to familiarize themselves with “new” technological tools, they were also asked to develop different pedagogical practices.

Within this reality, it was still necessary to consider the context experienced by the students, who also had to reorganize themselves to get access to electronic equipment and internet providers. They had to deal with other issues, such as anxiety caused by the pandemic context, illness of family members, and specific needs, whether or not they were disabled.

In higher education, this new scenario required efforts from the university community to ensure the necessary infrastructure for academic work continuity, students’ monitoring, and the needed training for professors so they could reorganize their pedagogical practice. Therefore, challenge and effort summarize what educational institutions experienced in the first two years of the 2020s.

Examining how higher education institutions adapted to continue supporting students with disabilities during this period helps us understand this historical moment and inform the role of digital technologies in inclusive teaching in post-pandemic higher education.

This research analyzed the guidelines issued by public universities to ensure accessibility to remote teaching for students with disabilities. To determine the data scope, the study of the higher education institutions that make up the state system of Bahia was narrowed down, which means that it encompasses UEFS (Universidade Estadual de Feira

de Santana), UESB (Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia), UESC (Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz) and UNEB (Universidade do Estado da Bahia).

It should be noted that the accessibility concept is related to the guarantee of access conditions, safe, and autonomous use of goods and services by people with disabilities, and reduced mobility. These conditions guarantee fundamental rights for all citizens, including the right to life, liberty, equality, and security, as set out in Article 5 of Brazil's Magna Carta. From the perspective of higher education, ensuring accessibility means guaranteeing students with disabilities participation in the various aspects of academic life.

It is important to note that in Bahia, State Decree No. 19,529/2020 defines the suspension of classroom activities in basic education and higher education. Thus, by the state government order classes in the state school system were suspended on March 17, 2020. From that date onwards, higher education institutions in the state system began to organize themselves, resorting to remote working to protect health and life. It should also be noted that although these preventive measures have been taken, the Ministry of Health<sup>4</sup> data shows that Brazil has registered 38,743,918 cases of Covid-19 with 711,380 deaths. These numbers reflect the proportion and severity of this disease on a national scale.

This article is organized into two sections to discuss this issue in addition to the introduction and final considerations sections. Initially, the concept of accessibility assumed in Brazilian legislation and considered in this investigation is situated, focusing on it as a right of people with disabilities. Then, the methodology used in this investigation is presented, and finally, the conceptions of remote teaching and the accessibility guidelines issued by each institution are analyzed.

## Understanding accessibility

According to Article 3 of Federal Law No. 13.146, of July 6, 2015, also known as the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, accessibility is understood as the

[...] the possibility and condition of being able to safely and autonomously use spaces, furniture, urban equipment, buildings, transportation, information, and communication, including their systems and technologies, as well as other services and facilities open to the public, for public or private use, both in urban and rural areas, by people with disabilities or reduced mobility. (Brasil, 2015, p. 1).

It can be seen that the accessibility concept proposed by the legislation also involves services aimed at people with disabilities. That is why the research focus is specifically on this community, which has been excluded from access to higher education for a long time. Understanding that if conditions are not ensured for their effective inclusion in teaching mediated by digital technologies, these students could once again be excluded from the learning process.

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**4-** Data recorded up to April 2024, as informed by the Coronavirus Brazil website (<https://covid.saude.gov.br>).



Thus, the educational field understands that accessibility guarantees conditions for people with disabilities or other specific educational needs to access knowledge autonomously. Sassaki (2009, p. 2) warns that “if accessibility is (or has been) designed under the principles of Universal Design for Learning, it benefits all people, whether or not they have any kind of disability”. In this sense, the author indicates six accessibility dimensions:

[...] architectural (without physical barriers), communicational (without barriers in communication between people), methodological (without barriers in methods and techniques of leisure, work, education, etc.), instrumental (without barriers in instruments, tools, utensils, etc.), programmatic (without barriers in public policies, legislation, norms, etc.) and attitudinal (without prejudices, stereotypes, stigmas and discrimination in society’s behavior towards people with disabilities). (Sassaki, 2009, p. 1).

Based on this concept, methodological accessibility refers to the absence of barriers to teaching methods and techniques in Education. This means guaranteeing access for all students, the constitutional right to equal access to education (Art. 206 - I), and guaranteed quality standards (Art. 206 - VII).

From this perspective, Souza, Silva and Pimentel (2014, p. 4) understand that making the curriculum accessible is an “effective means of breaking down barriers that may obstruct individuals’ access to a full academic life, enabling access to learning and, consequently, the development of students in the academic sphere.”

According to Pimentel and Pimentel (2017, p. 94), the “suppression [of accessibility conditions] hurts the principles of equality and freedom that are typical of human rights.” Therefore, ensuring accessibility conditions is related to guaranteeing the right to access, and participation of people with disabilities in all social spaces and processes, including educational processes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thus, in remote teaching, it is necessary to guarantee the construction of a pedagogical proposal capable of meeting all students’ specific needs, including those with disabilities. In this sense, teaching resources and multimedia content need to be available during the development of synchronous classes and asynchronous activities. It may eliminate barriers to the full participation of all students and guarantee the conditions for autonomous access to the curriculum. However, when deaf students are enrolled, it is essential to have a translator-interpreter of Brazilian Sign Language and accessible resources for monitoring synchronous activities. Such actions constitute conditions of digital accessibility that must also be ensured through software and applications, such as Assistive Technology Resources<sup>5</sup>, as a condition for favoring participation in synchronous and asynchronous activities.

Freire, Paiva and Fortes (2020, p. 956) affirm that “digital accessibility becomes essential in this context, to enable all students, including students with disabilities, to have equal access to learning”. As part of the results of a study carried out in the context

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**5-** Assistive Technology includes products, equipment, services, and methodologies that aim to promote the participation of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in society.

of the Covid-19 pandemic in 141 higher education institutions, the authors highlight “the preparation of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), accessibility of multimedia content, specialized professionals (such as translators-interpreters), accessibility of digital books and Assistive Technology resources” (Freire; Paiva; Fortes, 2020, p. 956).

It is important to state that the concept of disability assumed in this study is in line with the one brought in by Law 13.146/2015, which understands disability as the result produced by the interaction of the person with some impairment, whether of a physical, sensory or intellectual nature, facing the environment barriers where they live.

Art. 2: A person with a disability has a long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which, in interaction with one or more barriers, may restrict or lack their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other people. (Brasil, 2015, p. 1).

Thus, the focus of an inclusive society must be on eliminating barriers that can prevent people with impairments from interacting in their context. Therefore, Educational institutions need to ensure both physical and knowledge accessibility.

## **The research methodology**

In this investigation, the methodology used was documentary research, with a qualitative approach to data collection and processing. This allowed an analytical-interpretative perspective on the content of the guidelines regarding accessibility for students with disabilities to remote teaching.

Documentary research is research based on primary sources, i.e. sources that have not yet been analyzed. According to Ludke e André (1986), documents are a rich source of information and can provide evidence about the issue under investigation. Institutional documents are also important for understanding the policies of a given institution.

Regarding the objectives, this research is exploratory. It provides familiarity with the proposed problem considering it is a recent discussion and still little explored within higher education institutions.

The data for this study were collected on each institution’s website for guidelines and regulations, which were created and published during the Covid-19 pandemic. The specific focus was on guiding documents on accessibility for students with disabilities in this teaching format, considering the period that face-to-face classes were replaced by remote teaching.

Although the sample encompasses the state universities in Bahia, this study did not aim to compare the distinct realities of the institutions. Instead, the analysis preserves and acknowledges the unique characteristics of each university. According to Macedo (2018, p. 18), this perspective of not neglecting the singularity and specificity of the realities under study is part of what Macedo calls the Contrastive Method. Contrastive analysis differs from hierarchical comparisons, which approach different realities through a colonizing lens, establishing dual relationships of similarities or differences, with the explicit intention of valuing, validating, or generalizing. from a contrastive perspective, while



relational understandings are possible, they occur from a heterarchical (Macedo, 2018, p. 18) and open point of view. In this approach, no relations of superiority are established; rather, attention is carefully directed to the details that shape the singularization processes of different realities, contexts, and cultures.

If we aim to comprehensively approach realities, envisioning them as relational yet singular social and cultural constructions, what we must develop as an understanding involves approximations through identification, analytical complementaries, distancing through marked and contested differences, or even hybridizations. This entails constructing alternative differences through the generative manner in which relationships take place. (Macedo, 2018, p. 30).

In this regard, the discussion of the data collected in this study focused on the interpretative understanding of institutional documents. The documents were selected using the descriptor “remote teaching” or “emergency remote teaching” and the institution’s name. The documents considered for analysis included resolutions approved during the pandemic period from 2020 to 2022, and also news articles and guidelines for professors. Thus, remote learning was the inclusion criterion for document analysis, while the return to face-to-face teaching was the exclusion criterion. The documents selected include those described in Table 1 below.

**Table 1-** Documents produced by state universities in Bahia selected for analysis

| UNIVERSITY | DOCUMENTS ANALYZED  |
|------------|---|
| UEFS       | CONSEPE Resolution no. 131/2020;<br>Note from PROGRAD on March 24, 2020<br>Announcement from PROGRAD on March 30, 2020<br>Suggestions for virtual learning environments and assessments to support teaching activities and other online possibilities |
| UESB       | Guidelines on accessibility in emergency remote teaching at UESB (2020)<br>CONSEPE Resolution no. 22/2020   |
| UESC       | CONSEPE Resolution No. 38/2020<br>CONSEPE Resolution no. 56/2020  |
| UNEB       | UNEB CONSU Resolution No. 1.423/2020<br>Joint Normative Instruction PROGRAD-PPG-PROEX-PGDP 001/2021<br>Practical Student Handbook (2021)  |

Source: Research data, 2023.

After selecting the documents, a preliminary reading of the chosen materials was conducted to identify references to how the institution understood accessibility issues concerning its students with disabilities in remote teaching. At this point, the following descriptors were defined for the text search: inclusion; students with disabilities, and accessibility. After identifying such references in the text or confirming their absence, the relevant excerpts were transcribed and analyzed. It is necessary to note that the absence

of discussion on these issues was also considered a significant aspect to be highlighted in this research.

## **Remote teaching and accessibility: an overview of state universities in Bahia**

This section discusses the data found in the various institutional guidelines and regulations of the state universities of Bahia regarding the activities developed during remote teaching and the accessibility issues envisaged. Initially, the concept of remote teaching adopted by each institution is discussed, followed by issues relating to accessibility.

It is important to note that, although they have different histories and origins, except for the Universidade Estadual de Santa Cruz, founded in December 1991, the other three state universities in Bahia were created in the same period, the early 1980s. UEFS and UESB were founded in December 1980 and UNEB in June 1983.

Of the four state universities in Bahia (UEBAS), only UNEB has a *campus* in the capital Salvador, where its administrative headquarters are also located. The others adhere to the policy of interiorization of public higher education, with UEFS based in the city of Feira de Santana, UESB in Vitória da Conquista, and UESC in Ilhéus. UNEB has 27 *campi* spread across various territories in the state of Bahia. UESB has three *campi*; UEFS has two and UESC has one *campi*.

All four UEBAS are committed to educational inclusion through reparation policies toward the population historically excluded from higher education. In this sense, all four universities have Accessibility Centers that aim to support students with disabilities in the process of access, participation, permanence, and completion of the undergraduate course.

## **Remote teaching: the emergence of a new concept in Bahia's state universities**

Recent literature makes an important distinction between remote teaching and Distance Education (DE). The former was taken on by educational institutions as an emergency measure to deal with the pandemic, while DE is a teaching modality with its legislation and peculiar forms of monitoring and evaluation.

According to Art. 1 of Decree No. 9.057/2017, Distance Education involves “qualified personnel, with access policies, with compatible monitoring and evaluation [...]” (Brasil, 2017, p. 1). This shows the specific requirements of Distance Education, which pertain to the training of the professionals involved (professors and tutors) and the physical, technological, and human resources infrastructure of the distance education centers, among other aspects.

[...] On the other hand, remote “teaching” is seen as a substitute [to distance education (DE)], exceptionally adopted in this period of pandemic, when face-to-face education is banned. (Saviani; Galvão, 2021, p. 38).



Although it is acknowledged that the various institutions offered professors' training courses on the use of digital tools in teaching and different forms of pedagogical mediation, the sudden emergency measure did not provide enough time to mature the need to build what Moreira, Henriques e Barros (2020, p. 352) call "a quality networked digital education".

Rather than transferring face-to-face practices, there is now an urgent need to create virtual learning models that [...] promote collaborative and constructivist learning environments on the chosen platforms. (Moreira; Henriques; Barros, 2020, p. 352).

If the so-called remote teaching was carried out hastily; its conception was also built *pari passu* with its realization. Thus, as shown in Table 2, the different universities in Bahia have their approaches to non-face-to-face pedagogical work.

**Table 2-** Terminologies used by State Universities in Bahia regarding non-face-to-face academic activities during the Covid-19 pandemic

| INSTITUTION | NORMATIVE  | NAME                      |
|-------------|--|---------------------------|
| UEFS        | Resolution of the Higher Council for Teaching, Research and Extension (CONSEPE) No. 131/2020 | Emergency remote teaching |
| UNEB        | Joint Normative Instruction PROGRAD- PPG-PROEX-PGDP 001/2021                                 | Remote academic activity  |
| UESB        | CONSEPE Resolution no. 22/2020   | Emergency remote teaching |
| UESC        | CONSEPE Resolution no. 56/2020   | Non-face-to-face teaching |

Source: Research data, 2023.

Although the terminology may seem similar at first, the name "academic activity" used by UNEB gives a wider scope to the actions planned, as it allows the principle of inseparability between teaching, research, and extension to be conceived, as provided for in article 207 of the 1988 Federal Constitution. Yet, among the three universities that use the terminology 'teaching', two affirm the temporary nature of this practice through the use of the term emergency.

It should be noted that within public institutions there was a strong fear that remote teaching would gradually be incorporated into academic practices, strengthening liberal conceptions that are contrary to free public higher education. In line with this discussion, Saviani and Galvão (2021, p. 39) draw attention to the implications of this practice in the post-pandemic period. They warn of the risks posed by pressures to generalize distance education and the tendency to commodify education. This practice has become "a 'way out' of the budget crisis faced by the higher education institutions, which are increasingly strangled by federal government budget cuts."



As for the concept adopted by the different state universities in Bahia, we see that CONSEPE/UEFS Resolution No. 131/2020 defines emergency remote teaching as “a temporary and strategic solution that allows, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, to maintain, within the possible circumstances [...], academic activities in undergraduate courses, using remote activities as a priority” (UEFS, 2020d, p. 1). It can be seen that the concept adopted by the UEFS is intended to reaffirm the temporary nature of these remote actions, delimiting them to the pandemic context.

In CONSEPE/UESB Resolution No. 22/2020, emergency remote teaching is defined as a “teaching regime temporarily adopted to develop curricular academic activities with the pedagogical mediation of digital and non-digital information and communication technologies, enabling student-knowledge-professor interaction” (UESB, 2020a). Here, a recurring concern with the emphasis on the temporal nature of remote teaching is evident, although there is a conceptual expansion with the use of the term “curricular academic activities”, which can include research and extension in addition to teaching. Furthermore, the perspective of pedagogical mediation of digital and non-digital technologies expands the possibilities for carrying out activities, which can involve both the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and digital platforms, such as Google Meet, as well as WhatsApp groups or non-digital printed media.

Within the scope of UESC, this broader approach can also be seen in CONSEPE Resolution No. 56/2020, which in its Art. 2, §2, points out that in non-face-to-face teaching

[...] the activities will be carried out through the use and development of teaching and learning strategies, primarily via non-face-to-face teaching, mediated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), digital educational resources, and other alternatives, as substitutes for face-to-face activities for undergraduate and graduate education, referred to as Non-Face-to-Face Teaching. (UESC, 2020b, p. 1).

At UNEB, the Joint Normative Instruction No. 001/2021, collaboratively developed by the Pro-Rector of Undergraduate Education (PROGRAD), the Pro-Rector of Research and Postgraduate Education (PPG); the Pro-Rector of Extension (PROEX), and the Pro-Rector of People Management and Development (PGDP), defines remote academic activities as those “carried out in a virtual learning environment” (UNEB, 2021a). It should be noted that, in this concept, UNEB defines the environment in which academic activities would be carried out as being in a VLE. A reductionist nature is emphasized in this definition, as the VLE is an online space that enables interaction and learning, typically used for teaching, interaction, and sharing of materials.

Regarding the implementation of remote activities, the four institutions provide synchronous activities, involving real-time participation of professors and students, as well as asynchronous activities, with activities scheduled to be completed at different times, depending on the students' possibilities, incorporating the use of



[...] digital platforms, through applications and communication and interaction services, or specific virtual classroom solutions that, in addition to live broadcasts, allow recordings, teaching materials, and complementary activities to be available. (UEFS, 2020d, p. 1).

CONSEPE/UESB Resolution No. 22/2020 further details how emergency remote teaching is carried out, providing for the use of different means:

I. digital resources (video lectures, content organized on virtual teaching and learning platforms or in virtual meeting environments, social networks, e-mail, among others); II. television or radio programs; III. teaching materials and digital tools with pedagogical guidelines provided to students; IV. reading guidelines, projects, research, activities, and exercises specified in the teaching materials; V. other resources, at the professor's discretion, provided they are outlined in the teaching plan for the activities. (UESB, 2020a, p. 4).

The universities generally indicate a specific platform for synchronous activities and a specific VLE for asynchronous activities, although the use of other platforms, applications, and e-mail, among others, is unrestricted.

The different approaches to conceptualizing remote teaching reflect not only the necessity experienced during the period regarding the urgency of decision-making to maintain academic activities and provide guidelines for the academic community but also highlight the pathways undertaken during this time, particularly concerning pedagogical practices.

## **Accessibility dimensions in the institutional regulations of state universities in Bahia**

The data collected during the research shows that the four state universities in Bahia have drawn up internal regulations to guide the academic community on how the institution should operate during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each institution has defined guidelines to govern its support and target activities, which involve teaching, research, and extension, in its own time and based on the constitutional prerogatives that guarantee them autonomy.

Overall, it was observed in the university regulations that the inability to take part in curricular activities offered during the period of remote teaching did not harm the students, as the regular continuity of their studies was ensured upon the return to face-to-face classes; the possibility of suspending enrollment was guaranteed; and that failure did not affect the calculation of the Academic Performance Coefficient or the time frame for degree completion.

Concerning the accessibility dimensions addressed in the different regulations and institutional guidelines, Table 3, shown below, summarizes what has been provided for by the different institutions.

**Table 3-** Accessibility dimensions addressed in the guidelines issued by the state universities of Bahia from 2020 to 2021

| UNIVERSITY | ANALYZED TEXT  | ACCESSIBILITY DIMENSION |
|------------|--|-------------------------|
| UEFS       | Note from PROGRAD on March 24, 2020                            | Methodological          |
|            | Announcement from PROGRAD on March 30, 2020                    |                         |
| UESB       | Guidance on accessibility in emergency remote teaching at UESB | Digital                 |
|            |  | Communicational         |
|            |  | Methodological          |
|            |  | Instrumental            |
|            |  | Attitudinal             |
| UESC       | CONSEPE Resolution No. 38/2020                                 | Instrumental            |
|            | CONSEPE Resolution no. 56/2020                                 | Digital                 |
| UNEB       | CONSU Resolution No. 1.423/2020                                | Digital                 |
|            |  | Communicational         |
|            |  | Instrumental            |
|            | CONSEPE Resolution No. 2.082/2020                              | Methodological          |

Source: Research data, 2023.

The presented table shows that, on the one hand, there was a mobilization by the four institutions to regulate what is called remote teaching; on the other hand, there is a lack of attention to the requirements for ensuring that academic activities during the pandemic period reached all students, including those with disabilities.

UEFS published a note on March 24, 2020, through its Pro-Rector of Undergraduate Studies (PROGRAD). It advised professors to complete curricular courses remotely, making it possible to plan the offer of non-compulsory, complementary, and/or supplementary curricular activities, when returning to face-to-face activities. It also made it possible to plan the offer of non-mandatory, complementary, and/or supplementary curricular activities, upon the return of face-to-face activities, if “losses in the development of student’s skills and competencies” were perceived (UEFS, 2020b).

On the one hand, this institutional provision can be understood as a way to avoid penalizing students for potential challenges arising from non-face-to-face academic work, ranging from issues related to internet access to emotional difficulties caused by the pandemic. On the other hand, the indication of the possibility of offering activities upon the return to face-to-face classes as a way to mitigate losses may reflect an institutional acknowledgment of the difficulty in addressing the factors contributing to such challenges during remote academic activities, particularly for students with disabilities. In these cases, the maintenance of the losses represents a pause or postponement of the completion of the course and entry into professional practice.

On March 30, in a statement on remote work, PROGRAD/UEFS reiterated some guidelines for the academic community and recommended that professors



[...] that use, whenever possible, resources that do not require all students to be online (synchronous) at the same time, prioritizing asynchronous activities [...], taking into account the needs of students and their limited access to digital media and activities, establishing deadlines for the activities that are compatible with the timing and level of demands of each task/activity. (UEFS, 2020c, s/p.).

This institutional statement explicitly orients toward making the deadlines for delivering activities more flexible. It also points to the various possibilities already used by professors to “expand communication and work alternatives between professors and students” (UEFS, 2020c, s/p.), including social networks, e-mail, virtual classrooms, and videoconferencing rooms.

As for the institutional regulations governing remote teaching, CONSEPE/UEFS Resolution No. 131/2020 mentions accessibility in Article 13, stating that

All students have the right to join the ERE, and it is up to the University to promote the necessary means to enable accessibility, especially for quota students and/or those enrolled in remote internship activities, prioritizing socioeconomic vulnerability criteria. (UEFS, 2020d, p. 2).

Although the term used in the transcribed article is accessibility, the context allows us to infer that it is a reference to digital inclusion, related to guaranteeing access to communication and information technologies for students from all social classes. Addressing accessibility issues would necessarily imply mentioning the elimination of barriers for students with disabilities, which could involve both quota and non-quota students.

Article 15 of the aforementioned Resolution states that “students may request a total or partial withdrawal of enrollment from curricular courses, upon justification of the impossibility of monitoring remote activities, at a time defined in the academic calendar” (UEFS, 2020d, p. 2). Although the text allows students to request that their enrollment be suspended, it does not, at any point, state that in the event of inaccessibility being duly communicated, there would be institutional planning to eliminate any barriers that might be preventing students from participating in remote learning.

In turn, UESB, through CONSEPE Resolution No. 22/2020, approves the regulation for the development of non-face-to-face pedagogical activities in undergraduate teaching, during the pandemic period. This Resolution is made up of sixteen articles that deal with: the concept of ERE, the means of its realization, forms of image protection and copyright, and guides how curricular courses and other academic activities are offered, as well as defining how teaching hours are accounted for, although without direct mention of accessibility issues.

Additionally, at UESB, a document entitled “Guidelines on accessibility in emergency remote teaching at UESB” was prepared in collaboration with the teams from the Access, Permanence, and Affirmative Actions Office (AAPA), the Accessibility and Inclusion Sub-Management, and PROGRAD. It aimed to “subsidize teaching pedagogical practices accessible to students with disabilities during the ERT” (UESB, 2020b, p.05). The document

contains 23 pages and the text considers that one of the challenges of the ERE relates to the inclusion of students with disabilities. The challenges include:

i) the need to overcome barriers related to the lack of accessibility in the adopted digital platform and its respective applications; ii) the planning of courses to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities; iii) the redefinition of methodological procedures to enable the qualitative inclusion of students with disabilities in the teaching-learning process; iv) the reorganization of assessment tools to respect the development of students with disabilities, among others. (UESB, 2020b, p. 5).

This document recognizes the right to digital accessibility for people with disabilities, guaranteed by Law 13.146/2015 - the Brazilian Inclusion Law, and the importance of ensuring that right. In the text, digital accessibility is defined as the absence of barriers in the use of digital tools, ensuring “that all people can access, understand, use, interact and contribute to the digital environment, whether in digital documents, web pages or systems” (Salton; Agnol; Turcatti, 2017, p. 37 *apud* UESC, 2020b, p. 5). Based on this understanding, the document presents “accessibility measures to be adopted by UESB professors in methodological procedures during the ERT” (UESB, 2020b, p. 7).

The guidelines provided are aimed at providing “accessibility for students who are deaf, autistic, visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically disabled, etc. It must also be considered for students with learning difficulties or problems” (UESB, 2020b, p. 7). It is important to note that these guidelines were developed based on the work carried out by the Center for Inclusive Actions for People with Disabilities (NAIPD), taking into account: “the contributions of students with disabilities” (UESB, 2020b, p. 7); the document entitled eMAG - Accessibility Model in Electronic Government from the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management, of Logistics and Information Technology Division (Brasil, 2014), and guidelines from other Brazilian higher education institutions.

The document provides practical suggestions regarding different dimensions of accessibility, such as (i) digital - referring to the elimination of barriers to browsing the Internet, with organized content so that all people can understand it; (ii) communicational - concerning the removal of obstacles that hinder or prevent “the expression or reception of messages and information through communication systems and information technology systems” (Brasil, 2015); (iii) methodological - relating to the removal of barriers in teaching methods and techniques; (iv) instrumental - concerning the eradication of barriers in study tools and resources; (v) attitudinal - focusing on the deconstruction of prejudices, stigmas, stereotypes, and discrimination.

At UESC, CONSEPE Resolution No. 38/2020 contains 26 articles that regulate non-face-to-face teaching activities mediated “by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), digital educational resources and others, as alternatives to face-to-face activities for undergraduate and graduate teaching, known as Non-Face-to-Face Teaching.” (UESC, 2020a, p. 2), with Art. 19 defining:

Art. 19 It is the responsibility of the course committee to notify the professor responsible for the curricular course so that the planning of activities takes into account the specific needs when a student is enrolled:

I - with disabilities, global development disorders, high abilities or giftedness;

II - with a specific functional disorder (Dyslexia, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), among others.

Sole paragraph The professor can depend on the support of the Center for Accessibility and Specialized Educational Assistance - NAAEE. (UESC, 2020a, p. 7).

In addition to the provisions of other state universities, the definition contained in the aforementioned UESC rule ensures that professors are notified in advance of the enrollment of students with disabilities in the curricular course offered. Thus, it creates conditions for planning to approach the specific needs and, consequently, to promote accessibility scenarios. The possibility of prior awareness allows the professor to find ways how to organize content and teaching resources to better support students with disabilities, with the assistance of a specific sector of the institution.

At UESC, the 2020 academic year was validated by CONSEPE Resolution No. 56/2020, based on the research and extension activities carried out throughout the period, plus non-face-to-face teaching activities. This Resolution is organized into 27 articles, two of which address accessibility issues, namely paragraph 3 of Article 1 and Article 20, which repeats the content of Article 19 of CONSEPE Resolution No. 38/2020 mentioned above.

S3º When conducting non-face-to-face teaching activities, the conditions for students to access the Internet in their social distance location must be considered, adapting resources and devices in digital technologies to support teaching and learning, based on the essential needs of students. (UESC, 2020b, p. 2).

The provision for adapting resources and devices to meet the needs of students suggests an approach to the inclusion of students who are entitled to instrumental and methodological accessibility conditions.

Within the scope of UNEB, on August 5, 2020, CONSU Resolution No. 1,423/2020 approved the Reference Documents concerning academic actions, personnel management, and administrative procedures during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the guiding principles of the Reference Document for UNEB's academic actions are: «Isonomy of access to learning; Unrestricted connectivity for all students and staff, i.e. the university must provide the infrastructure for technological equipment and Internet access» (UNEB, 2020a, p. 3).

The definition of isonomy in access to learning as a principle of this document points to qualified permanence understood as equity in access, not only to material issues (food, transportation, housing, access to teaching materials, and others) but also to the support network (reception, pedagogical and psychological support and participation in activities) necessary for academic success (Ferreira, 2023, p. 185).



In the specific case of accessibility and inclusion, it is possible to say that being guided by isonomic actions to guarantee access to learning also means considering people who learn in different ways, forms, and at different times.

The guidelines presented by the institution for academic actions relating to remote activities involve, among other issues:

- [...] diagnosis [...] with the academic community, regarding accessibility and connectivity conditions and the work of professors, students, and personnel [...] for remote work and online education of the three segments;
- Institutionalization of pedagogical training for professors concerning non-face-to-face teaching and learning assessment strategies, [...];
- Institutionalization of training for students and personnel on the various technologies, to favor the teaching and learning process in non-face-to-face conditions, including training [...] as AACC/AC for the student;
- Maintenance of the institutionalization of affirmative action policies within UNEB, [...among which are included] the Policy for Inclusion and Accessibility; Promotion of digital accessibility, encompassing both connectivity and Assistive Technologies (AT), as well as linguistic diversity (Braille translation, Braille versions of printed materials, audio description), which are essential for the personal autonomy and independent living of students, faculty, and administrative staff with disabilities;
- Defense of the guarantee of assistance policies for students in situations of social and economic vulnerability, aiming to ensure their institutional retention regardless of the teaching modality adopted by UNEB (in-person or technology-mediated), [...] to prevent dropout or even the exclusion of students from the university environment
- Identification of [...] students with physical, sensory, and multiple disabilities, aiming to ensure that they are not exposed to unhealthy health conditions, as recommended by the leading global and national public health authorities. (UNEB, 2020a, p. 4-7).

Although in the first item of the excerpt transcribed, accessibility conditions are associated with connectivity. It is possible to consider in other sections of the normative text the commitment to inclusion and accessibility policies, involving the provision of different dimensions of accessibility, such as digital and instrumental accessibility, with the inclusion of Assistive Technology resources.

As part of the planned inclusive efforts implementation, UNEB has defined a set of actions: “Providing special tutoring programs tailored to the pandemic, prioritizing social and pedagogical accessibility criteria.” (UNEB, 2020a, p. 7).

Another institutional regulation was CONSEPE/UNEB Resolution No. 2.082/2020, which approved the general guidelines for drawing up the extraordinary plan for offering curricular courses and other undergraduate teaching activities. Among the ten articles that outline the general guidelines for drawing up the plan, paragraph 2º of article 8º, which deals with assessment activities, concerns students with disabilities, autistic spectrum disorder, or giftedness.





§ 2º. The pedagogical and assessment activities developed within the curricular courses and teaching activities offered, in which students with disabilities, disorders, syndromes, or giftedness are enrolled, must, while respecting the professors' pedagogical autonomy and in dialogue with the Special Education Centers (NEDE), ensure the necessary adaptations for the effective inclusion of these students. (UNEB, 2020b, p. 6).

Ensuring conditions of accessibility in pedagogical and assessment activities during remote teaching is a basic condition, without which the effective inclusion of students with disabilities in the learning process is not guaranteed. However, further in the text, Art. 5º of the referred plan stipulates that

Art. 5º Enrollment in curricular courses provided for in the Offer Plan is optional and will not affect the maximum period for curricular completion.

[...]

§ 4º. Students who are unable to or who choose not to enroll in curricular courses or undergraduate teaching activities under this Extraordinary Offer Plan will not be affected in terms of completing the curriculum in their academic progress. (UNEB, 2020b, p. 5).

Although it is important to ensure the optional nature of enrolment in curricular courses offered remotely, without compromising the course competition timeline, the wording of paragraph 4º places the responsibility for the lack of conditions on the student. It must be remembered that, in the case of students with disabilities, accessibility conditions must be ensured by the context in which the student is included.

In 2021, PROGRAD/UNEB published the Practical Student Handbook for the Special Academic Semester 2021.1, offered between March and July 2021, in which academic activities were still mediated by technology. The aforementioned manual is a document presented in digital format, consisting of twenty pages, and guides: (i) enrollment in curricular components; (ii) the functioning of remote activities; (iii) the use of institutional online tools, with Microsoft platforms preferred for synchronous activities while allowing the use of other online interaction platforms, and for asynchronous activities, the preferential use of the institutional online tool VLE Moodle UNEB. The manual also highlights the possibility of using other interaction interfaces and the rules of virtual etiquette to guarantee respectful relationships. Concerning the accessibility issues, the Manual recommends that complaints be forwarded to the coordination of the undergraduate courses. This document would be an important instrument for bringing visibility to the rights of students with disabilities to the different dimensions of accessibility.

On February 1, 2021, UNEB published a Joint Normative Instruction PROGRAD-PPG-PROEX-PGDP 001/2021 providing the rules for remote academic activities. The regulations are organized into twelve articles, and in article 3º, item VII of the aforementioned normative instruction, it is stated that the responsibility of the Course Committee:

Identify difficulties in carrying out activities through technological mediation and/or the use of DICTs with professors and: a) guide professors to training through the Free Online Courses [...]

or to schedule guidance on the use of TDIC through UNEAD's Educational Design Center. (UNEB, 2021a, p. 3).

Although the Student Handbook indicates that accessibility demands should be directed to the Course Committees, the normative instruction seems to suggest that the difficulties identified in remote academic activities will be solved by referring professors for training. It is important to reiterate that one of the demands of remote activities is to make the curricular course contents accessible. Thus, the absence of guidelines in this regard can lead to difficulties in the teaching and learning process. Item II of Article 4º of the normative instruction also states that professors are responsible for: «Indicating the need for accessibility for professors and students with special needs, if any» (UNEB, 2021a, p. 4).

Both regulations indicate that the Course Committee is the center for receiving demands for accessibility from both students and professors. This indicates that the course Committees must be closely monitored by the sector responsible for the institution's inclusion policy, aiming to reduce potential delays in responding to demands that are, for the most part, urgent given the short time frame of the semesters.

## Final considerations

The universities comprising the state education system of Bahia remained attentive to ensuring accessibility conditions for their students with disabilities during the period of remote academic activities, albeit with varying levels of detail in their proposals.

In terms of accessibility issues, it was noted that the guidelines outlined in the institutional regulations do not address all the aspects of this concept. The primary emphasis is placed on digital and methodological accessibility. Only UESB presents specific guidelines, detailing the various dimensions of accessibility: digital, communicational, methodological, instrumental, and attitudinal.

At UNEB, although the institutional regulations are somehow general, they mention digital, instrumental, and methodological or pedagogical accessibility dimensions. In turn, the UESC documents present a differentiated perspective by requiring prior notification to professors about the enrollment of students with disabilities in the offered curricular courses. It allows early preparation in both: knowledge with support from the specific department and the pedagogical resources selection and organization, that address the diverse needs.

In this analysis, it is impossible to overlook that in some normative texts, such accessibility guidelines are not presented, demonstrating that, although the increase in enrollments of students with disabilities is a reality in higher education, these students remain invisible or are not reached by all institutional policies. This indicates a lack of programmatic accessibility, i.e. accessibility aimed at eliminating barriers in institutional policies.

Nevertheless, while the data analyzed shows progress, it raises other concerns, including the need to evaluate the operationalization and effectiveness of the institutional policies analyzed here. The perspective of students with disabilities should be considered, as well as the perception of professors and specialized professionals who work in accessibility



centers regarding the effectiveness of these spaces as supporters of inclusion. Listening to these various segments involved in inclusion will make it possible to monitor and evaluate institutional policies, so that this community, which has historically been excluded from higher education, is effectively included, taking up this space that is their right.

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