The precariousness of teaching in the Covid-19 pandemic: impacts on the inclusion of visually impaired university students

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Abstract
This article aims to explain the challenges and barriers imbricated in teaching practice regarding the inclusion of visually impaired university students in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. It follows the foundations of Socio-Historical Psychology and Dialectical Historical Materialism. Six university students with visual impairments from different undergraduate courses at a public university in the Northeast of the country, participated in the research. The data were produced through a semi-structured interview, which was carried out individually by Google Meet. For data analysis we used the meaning nuclei. The results showed that the lack of knowledge about the inclusion of people with visual impairment, combined with the lack of appropriation of digital tools and the multiple demands contributed to an excluding pedagogical practice that is guided by an ideological bias of the normative body. However, we consider that remote teaching enhanced the precariousness of teaching practice, and that it exacerbated the exclusion of students with visual impairments.

Keywords
college students; visual impairment; teaching practice; remote teaching.

A precarização do ensino na pandemia da Covid-19: impactos na inclusão do universitário com deficiência visual

Resumo
Este artigo objetiva explicitar os desafios e as barreiras imbricadas na prática docente no tocante à inclusão de universitários com deficiência visual em tempos de pandemia da Covid-19. Segue os fundamentos da Psicologia Sócio-Histórica e do Materialismo Histórico Dialético. Participaram da pesquisa seis universitários com deficiência visual de cursos de graduação de uma universidade pública do Nordeste do país. Os dados foram produzidos por meio de entrevista semiestruturada, que foi realizada individualmente pelo Google Meet. Para a análise dos dados, utilizaram-se os núcleos de significação. Os resultados apontaram que a falta de conhecimento acerca da inclusão da pessoa com deficiência visual, aliada à falta de apropriação das ferramentas digitais e às múltiplas demandas, contribuiu para a prática pedagógica excludente que se pauta num viés ideológico corponormativo. Contudo, considera-se que o ensino remoto potencializou a precarização da prática docente, consequentemente agudizou a exclusão dos universitários com deficiência visual.

Palavras-chave
universitários; deficiência visual; prática docente; ensino remoto.

1

Precarización de la enseñanza en la pandemia de Covid-19:

impactos en la inclusión de universitarios con discapacidad visual

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo explicar los desafíos y las barreras relacionadas en la práctica docente con respecto a la inclusión de estudiantes universitarios con discapacidad visual en tiempos de la pandemia de Covid-19. Sigue los fundamentos de la Psicología Socio-Histórica y del Materialismo Histórico Dialéctico. Participaron de la investigación seis estudiantes universitarios con discapacidad visual de diferentes carreras de pregrado de una universidad pública del Nordeste del país. Los datos fueron producidos a través de entrevista semiestructurada, la cual fue realizada individualmente por Google Meet. Para el análisis de datos, se utilizaron los núcleos de significación. Los resultados mostraron que el desconocimiento sobre la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad visual, combinado con la falta de apropiación de las herramientas digitales y las múltiples demandas, contribuyó para una práctica pedagógica excluyente y guiada por un sesgo ideológico de cuerpo normativo. Por tanto, se considera que la enseñanza remota potenció la precariedad de la práctica docente y exacerbó la exclusión de los estudiantes con discapacidad visual.

Palabras clave

universitarios; discapacidad visual; prática docente; enseñanza remota.

1 Introduction

In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 pandemic. To reduce the spread of the disease, social isolation was mandated in Brazil. From then on, all the society was affected. In this context, with the worsening health crisis in Brazil, classes were temporarily halted across the country, including in Higher Education. Since then, several academic activities have been carried out virtually, such as live streamings and webinars.

Given the pandemic, the Conselho Nacional de Educação (CNE) issued the Parecer No. 5/2020 about the reorganization of the school/academic calendar and the possibility of calculating non-contact activities to comply with the minimum annual workload due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2020, with no prospect of returning to face-to-face classes, in Higher Education, classes were resumed remotely, using technological resources supported by Portaria No. 343 of March 17, 2020, which provides for the replacement of in-person classes with classes using digital media while the Covid-19 pandemic situation lasts (BRAZIL, 2020).

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We can call this "[...] new remote teaching format, a form of teaching that uses synchronous communication tools (in real-time) to reproduce what is done in person" (NUNES; AMORIM; CALDAS, 2020, p. 46). Also, in this new teaching format, asynchronous activities are carried out. "In turn, the asynchronous activity allows each individual to organize themselves as they see fit" (SCHNEIDER *et al.*, 2020, p. 1173). Although not in real-time, asynchronous activity is also mediated by ICT, especially in the pandemic context.

In this new teaching format, the classroom, which used to be physical, now with remote teaching, classes are held on virtual platforms, called Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), but this teaching format has a series of issues that need to be considered.

In the pandemic scenario, remote teaching was put into practice with little preparation for everyone to have quality access to virtual teaching platforms, such as cell phone, which does not meet the demands of remote teaching, requiring adequate equipment, such as a computer. In addition, everyone needs to be comfortable using ICT, to have a good Internet connection and teachers need to be prepared for this new teaching model (SAVIANI; GALVÃO, 2021).

These are challenges that are very evident in this format. Schneider et al. (2020) state that many teachers were not prepared to use ICT and had to insert them into their teaching practice and that, sometimes, this becomes a reproduction of in-person teaching in an environment that does not work like that.

Nunes, Amorim, and Caldas (2020) consider that the remote teaching model implemented in an emergency disregarded several aspects, both resulting from the pandemic, that interferes with the teaching-learning process, such as loss of relatives, unemployment, equipment that is not adequate, as well as those that already existed before the pandemic, such as the lack of structure for studying at home.

The authors reinforce that point:

> This model has received deserved criticism for ignoring the difficulties of connection and access to the Internet, the technological resources in their different supports (tablet, laptop, cell phone), and the need for students and teachers, in this new context, to have to reconcile domestic tasks and family care, for example, with the study schedule. So, they have been considered a format that excludes many individuals from the educational process, in addition to not fulfilling the pedagogical objectives thought for the in-person model. (NUNES; AMORIM; CALDAS, 2020, p. 46).

3

ARTICLE

To contribute to the discussion, Saviani and Galvão (2021, p. 38) bring forward the following reflection:

> We emphasize that we know the multiple determinations of online 'teaching', among them the private interests placed for education as a commodity, technological exclusion, the absence of democracy in decision-making processes for the adoption of this model, the precariousness and intensification of work for teachers and other public servants of the institutions.

We understand that the problem of online teaching goes beyond ICT itself. It involves aspects that condition its use, such as accessibility by both the student and the teacher who has no training in this area. "Teachers must have the knowledge and ability to use new digital tools and resources to help students in the process of appropriating knowledge" (SCHNEIDER *et al.*, 2020, p. 1177), as well as regarding accessibility for students with visual impairments (VI).

At present, with more than two years of the pandemic, with cases of Covid-19 reduced and with little risk of worsening due to the vaccine, hybrid teaching has come into focus, replacing full online teaching. This type of teaching "[...] presumes the combination of studies in the physical space of the HEI and outside of it, a combination of in-person and online models, using technology as an essential and indispensable tool for this process" (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2021, p. 921).

In this context, it is important to consider that the pandemic continues; It's not over. As it is, the educational system is falling apart, the teaching practice is precarious, the university with a reduced budget, and the economic crisis of students who are experiencing a lack of basic needs, considering the increase in unemployment and social inequalities that have deepened in the pandemic. The proposition of the blended learning model should not camouflage the explicit reality. Remote teaching and its implications have emptied the university and overburdened professors. In reality, remote teaching further pushed the educational system over its limit.

Considering the new situation in which education is transforming, this article aims to explain the challenges and barriers intertwined in teaching practice regarding the inclusion of university students with VI during the pandemic.

4

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2 Methodology

This article has Socio-Historical Psychology (SHP) as a theoretical-methodological basis, more specifically the production of Vygotsky, which is based on Dialectical Historical Materialism (DHM).

> We start from a conception that affirms the ontological primacy of the real: knowing the real is an effort that we make to reconstruct in our thinking the movement of reality, an effort to capture, unveil, and decode how reality is concretely made. (PASQUALINI, 2020, p. 2).

Six university students with VI from different undergraduate courses at a public university in the Northeast of the country participated in the research. These university students were selected from an online questionnaire, which was published in WhatsApp groups. As a selection criterion, participants had to have attended an exceptional school period, in addition to the diversity in the responses to the questionnaire, aiming to form a group that was as diverse as possible. The names of the participants are fictitious to ensure their anonymity, per the ethical precepts set out in the Free and Informed Consent Form that appeared in the questionnaire. This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under the Certificate of Ethical Appreciation Presentation 47081721.80000.5013.

After selecting six participants from a total of 17, we started data production. For this, we conducted a semi-structured interview (MERRIAM; TISDELL, 2015) with each participant. The interviews were conducted through Google Meet. For data analysis, we used the meaning cores (AGUIAR; OZELLA, 2013). This procedure is not unconnected to the conception of the human being that is constituted in the social relationship, with the culture, in which dialectically it is constituent and is constituted in and by the activity, a subject that, at the same time, is singular and collective; it is a synthesis of multiple determinations, which makes it human (AGUIAR; OZELLA, 2013).

This procedure starts with the floating reading of the material (produced data). Then, the selection of pre-indicators is made, which are the phrases that present relevance, recurrence, emotional charge, and ambivalence. Next, we grouped the pre-indicators according to similarity, contraposition, and complementarity, thus forming the indicators. Later, we articulated the indicators forming the meaning cores (MC), which are

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named thematically. The MC analysis reveals the contradictions and determinations existing in the objective reality that constitutes the subject (AGUIAR; OZELLA, 2013). With the data produced, we built three MCs. For this article, we only discuss one NS: *Barriers and challenges of teaching practice in the context of remote classes: "They don't remember that there are blind students in class"*.

3 Results and discussion

This MC discusses some constituent aspects of teaching practice during remote teaching. In this context, we will approach the indicators that are related and constitute the social phenomenon that permeates this article. As Pasqualini (2020) explains, every social phenomenon contains within itself the singularities that constitute it, so the social phenomenon should not be analyzed in a reductionist way and disjointed from the institutional and more general aspects (BOCK; AGUIAR, 2016).

In this perspective, the indicator that refers to teaching practice in the context of remote teaching explained situations that imply pedagogical work considering the presence of a student with VI. For the discussion, we highlight the following pre-indicators:

> *My presence made them [the professors] look for ways... methodology... to include me in the classes so that I wouldn't give up on the class. This made her look for the NAC.* (EDSON).
>
> *Some professors, it's... they adapted better, others... ran over things with a lot of activities.* (IRENE).
>
> *Regarding the professors, not all of them were prepared, right? As I don't know how to use technology, many teachers have difficulty using technology in remote teaching. I realized that it's not just me.* (LAURA).
>
> *All of them [the professors] readjusted my activities, and the professors never left me out of activities, no.* (ISABEL).

According to the fragments in evidence, not only was remote teaching with different demands something new but also, for some professors, the presence of university students with VI in their classes.

Returning to the pre-indicators above, the context of the students' statements, we highlight the lack of teacher training for the inclusion of students with disabilities.

6

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Therefore, we understand that "[...] it is necessary, whenever we are dealing with the human dimension, to consider human diversity, assuming all the contradictions that imply what a human being is" (MEZZAROBA; CARRIQUIRIBORDE, 2020, p. 4). This assumption should be part of teaching training and practice, especially from an inclusive perspective.

In this sense, some professors sought ways to develop a pedagogical practice from an inclusive perspective, for example, they sought support from the university's accessibility center (NAC), and others had VI students themselves as a reference to conduct their practice. According to Saviani and Galvão (2021), in remote teaching, the pedagogical practice also requires knowledge of the use of virtual platforms on the part of the teacher besides the other type of knowledge, since some teachers were not prepared to use these digital tools.

For Saviani (2020), remote teaching should not have happened, as it is characterized as a ruling class mechanism to further deepen the forms of domination. For this author, students would remain active, with activities aimed at reading and textual production; teachers and students provided with good Internet connection and digital technological equipment, scholarships for students to live through the economic crisis and, when they were able to return to classes in person, they would resume the March 2020 calendar, when it was interrupted. "Brazil missed a great opportunity to be an example for the whole world in facing the pandemic" (SAVIANI, 2020, p. 8). In this fight against the pandemic, teacher training from an inclusive perspective would be an opportunity, considering that this is one of the pieces of knowledge necessary for teaching practice.

The lack of knowledge about the inclusion of people with VI, combined with the lack of appropriation of digital tools, elements that imply the teaching practice in remote teaching, nevertheless, made explicit the excluding pedagogical practice that is based on an ideological corponormative bias. This already existed in regular teaching and was sharpened and made explicit in remote teaching. We can see in the following pre-indicators:

> *When they use slides in online classes, most professors don't describe them. They don't remember that there are blind students in the class and then they keep using language that is also vague. It says: 'Look! As you can see there, this is how it happens'.* (EDSON).

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A class that didn't include me. A class where the professor said to the students: 'Can you see here?', and he doesn't even remember that there is a visually impaired person in the room. (IRENE).

When she [the professor] shares a screen, and then she describes what that screen has, and then she asks me... she asks me for my opinion, she asks what... if I understood. (ISABEL).

Analyzing these pre-indicators, we notice that the pedagogical practice is still imbued with exclusionary actions, which make invisible and disregard the specificity of the students with VI. To understand these actions, we turned to Kahhale, Rosa, and Sanchez (2020) to explain the situation with the categories historicity and mediation, which point out that the experiences lived in the formative and professional path of these teachers did not bring mediations to the mobilization towards educational inclusion. The particularities that mediate the pedagogical practice bring minimal traces of inclusion in the university context. We put forward that the mediations in the inclusive perspective walk at a slow pace and that they have not yet affected the work of most teachers.

In this context, we consider the contradictions of remote teaching that is shown as a solution for education while promoting normalizing situations so that the students "excludes themselves" or give up their academic training. When teacher training is not offered, when teaching work is precarious due to the overload of activities, or when material conditions are lacking to carry out a satisfactory job, indirectly, in a strategic way, educational inclusion becomes unfeasible.

The mentioned aspects permeate the teaching practice and can directly affect the learning and permanence of students with VI at the university. In this context, the teacher becomes a cog in the gear of the system, which is dominated by the capital.

An important part of the teaching practice that should be mentioned is the learning assessment. In this sense, we emphasize that students with VI need resources or strategies that promote accessibility. For this, the teacher must know the possibilities of the student and the range of options that exist for an evaluation from the inclusive perspective. Furthermore, in remote teaching, in which academic activities are being carried out digitally, the particularities of students must be considered, including the tools and/or platforms to be used, so as not to promote exclusion, as happened with Edson: "*Some professors did not try to know how I would do [the evaluation]. [...] the*

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question of time [...], it was the same amount of time as the others, without considering my difficulties. So, I didn't feel [...] included". However, it was also evidenced, according to the pre-indicators below, that some teachers listened to the students. This action brought possibilities to promote evaluation from an inclusive perspective:

> *Three of the five professors in that period knew my situation and were very approachable. So, they were close, they listened to my side, they supported me, they did and gave me ways to evaluate me.* (ANA).
>
> *Usually, my tests are oral or on the laptop, so when there was the Portuguese test, [...] this official period, you know, the teachers have already asked: 'What do you prefer? A group, isolated, oral, laptop? How it's going to be?'.* (JÚLIO).

Learning assessment should not be disconnected from the student's reality, especially in the pandemic in which interaction is only taking place through DICT. In remote teaching, other aspects must be considered, such as the specificities of students with VI, as Edson pointed out: "*[...] without considering my 'difficulties', so I didn't feel [...] included*". These are aspects that can influence learning and also the teaching format itself. *For J. Garcia and N. Garcia* (2020, p. 7):

> There is a relationship between the circumstances of the assessment and the information your devices collect. Failing to consider the context in which we are assessing students can distance us and truly alienate us from what we want to know about them. [...] Different pedagogical circumstances may require the use of different assessment approaches.

The authors point in particular to the teaching during the pandemic, in which a new form of teaching was adopted. Thus, teaching practice, including assessment, needs to be consistent with the educational scenario experienced by students, given that assessment is not limited to skills, knowledge, or other competencies to meet a pedagogical agenda, but it is also necessary that teachers understand the state in which students find themselves, especially when we focus on the context of remote teaching, in which multiple and complex determinations have been taking place, from economic to sanitary aspects.

However, we reiterate that the pedagogical action is not neutral and sometimes follows the dominant ideology, in which meritocracy is seen as the main core of the evaluation process. "Teachers build expectations about student performance based on idealized views about them. Their expectations express what they want to see or their beliefs about how students should perform" (GARCIA, J.; GARCIA, N., 2020, p. 8-9),

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da Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE)

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which is almost always based on the hegemonic bias of equality of conditions, disregarding the equitable needs of students, especially those with VI.

Therefore, the evaluation needs to have meaning, it can't be random. For an inclusive and democratic teaching practice, students can suggest evaluation proposals. In the current educational scenario, considering what is relevant to learning can be more assertive than a vast amount of content without real academic use.

Continuing the analysis process, the data led to the construction of the indicator: Access to adapted teaching materials. In this indicator, we focus on the question of the time in which these materials are made available to students. In the following pre-indicators, we found that the needs of university students with VI are not considered, this may imply absenteeism or failure of these students:

> *In this remote period of the first semester [Portuguese class], I received a lot of things late, [...] I definitely failed two subjects because of that.* (ANA).
>
> *Only one [professor] sent all the subject materials in advance because I requested them. I made the same request to others, and they didn't send me.* (EDSON).
>
> *Some materials arrived through the NAC, but they arrived late, they always arrived late.* (IRENE).
>
> *But when I go to get [the material], the professor has already taught that class and has already demanded work on that material, and I haven't received it yet.* (LAURA).

Most of the time, the pedagogical materials used in curricular activities are not in an accessible format for students with VI. Thus, it is necessary to produce or make adaptations to them, making them accessible. This is a service that must be offered by the NAC, which is a sector of the university that supports students with disabilities. According to the guidelines of this sector, requests for adaptation of materials/texts and other services must be made at least 15 days in advance of the delivery date for the student and may exceed this deadline if the material has more than 100 pages and an image, footnote, etc. This information is contained in the material adaptation request form, available on the university website.

Thus, considering the reading/study time, which for the person with VI is longer, given the circumstances and dynamics of the reading done by them, the material must be adapted long before its use in the activity. This implies dialogue between NAC and the professor. However, perhaps one of the obstacles to requesting adaptation is

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bureaucracy. This is so forceful that, for each material to be adapted, a new request is necessary, even if they are all from the same subject and requested at the same time. "Bureaucracy is inherent to the capital, to the interest of a given social class, insofar as it appears as an element of combat and guarantees of interests of the classes that are antagonized and that antagonize the purposes of the bourgeoisie" (FORTES, 2017, p. 134). In this way, bureaucracy is an instrument to keep the university with a bias based on meritocracy, in which only the elite have the power to belonging.

Given the situations described in the previous pre-indicators, the articulation between NAC, teacher, and student is essential, but we analyze that this mediation is not being carried out satisfactorily. The new teaching model can be an aggravating factor, since the professor is involved with new and growing demands, which lead to overload and, as already pointed out, can make teaching work precarious.

Souza et al. (2021, p. 3) explain that "[...] the precariousness of work is the term used to characterize the new conditions established in the world of work, especially from the seventies, with the advancement of neoliberal policies", which is strongly evidenced in the current educational situation, in which remote teaching is being experienced. Teaching practice from an inclusive perspective, however, is part of their professional activity, which is essential for the success of their work.

Spanning the educational reality of university students with VI, the following indicator emerged from the data: Student-teacher relationship, since social interaction between people and with human productions constitutes social and conscious subjects. However, when there is no social relationship, that is, when there is the exclusion of students with disabilities, it results in their rejection and can cause a setback in their learning process, consequently in their social/intellectual development. For Vigotski (2007), social interaction mediated by semiotic elements is fundamental in the intellectual development of the subject and in their way of acting.

This author also says that language is the main mediating instrument. Therefore, through social relations mediated by language, we can understand the "[...] motives, needs, interests, motivations and driving tendencies of thought, which guide the movement in this or that aspect" (VIGOTSKI, 2000, p. 16), this is why the relationship between subjects is so important for the development of typically human higher psychological functions.

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Saviani (2020, p. 67) believes that remote teaching does not allow for the complexity and richness that is part of school/academic education:

> Education is necessarily constituted as an interpersonal relationship, implying, therefore, the simultaneous presence of two educational agents: the teacher and their students. And it is known that one of the main functions of education is socialization [...], which cannot be done with remote teaching.

About the student-teacher relationship, we have the following pre-indicators:

> *My relationship with them [professors], with all of them, in fact, was very good, apart from one.* (ANA).
>
> *My interaction with the professors is almost none.* (EDSON).
>
> *Professors have always remained open to dialogue.* (JÚLIO).
>
> *With some [professors], I have a lot of interaction, but only during class time.* (LAURA).

We observe in the quotes that the student-teacher relationship sometimes happens in a limited and fragmented way due to the material conditions of the subjects, who are experiencing moments of different tensions, which are caused by the health and economic crisis, but have reverberation in all aspects of human life. The interpersonal relationship, however, is a need of the subject that allows the continuity of the academic process, which may be harmed in the remote teaching model.

Saviani (2020, p. 6) considers that the educational process goes beyond mediation by cell phone, tablet, computer or other digital technological communication equipment: "By its very nature, education can only be fin-person", since it requires affection, knowledge exchange, critical positioning, and activities not contemplated by remote teaching, which obeys the logic of the capital, only focusing on profit and the hegemony of the bourgeois.

In this teaching format, this scope is well designed; it is explicit that "[...] technology becomes an instrument of submission of the workforce to an unlimited time leading it to exhaustion" (SAVIANI, 2020, p. 7), both for the student and for the teacher, while it signals that student learning and development – a process that is built in interpersonal relationships – are not the focus of this model.

We postulate that the objective conditions of the educational reality in remote teaching do not allow the interpersonal relationship to satisfaction. Due to multiple and

12

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intense demands, teachers are not always available and are almost always exhausted, in addition to problems with the Internet connection, which makes the interaction between teacher and student difficult, as well as several other problems arising from this teaching format, including limitations in pedagogical practice. These are the challenges and barriers in teaching practice for the inclusion of university students with VI in the pandemic with the new teaching model.

4 Final considerations

Because of the discussion presented, we consider that the teaching practice was strained by several challenges: the inclusion of the VI student, the classes in the remote model, and the appropriation of the use of digital technologies for teaching. We understand that these challenges are combined with the health and economic crisis and the control of the hegemonic power that crosses teaching practice, which sometimes serves as a mechanism to enhance exclusion, following the ideological bias of the oppressive system, with meritocratic and capable actions. In the context of remote classes, the teaching practice of a capacitist nature was evidenced, especially in classes that made students with VI invisible.

We also learned that, during remote classes, teachers experienced several challenges that limited teaching practice, especially from an inclusive perspective. Such challenges are characterized by the increase in pedagogical demands, the precariousness of work, low-quality technological equipment and Internet connection, the domestic environment that exposes the privacy of teachers - and the multiple activities that come together in this context - and also the lack of knowledge for an inclusive teaching practice.

It was evidenced that, in the context of remote teaching, the support service for the inclusion of students and professors is not following the same dialogue, since accessible materials are not being delivered to students on time, which can compromise the progress of the student and teaching practice in an inclusive proposal.

We understand that remote teaching potentialized the precariousness of teaching practice and exacerbated the exclusion of students with VI. We consider that this teaching model has implemented barriers that limit student participation and the

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development of teaching practice, reverberating to the exclusion of students who need pedagogical support. Possibly remote teaching will have disastrous consequences in terms of academic and professional training.

Finally, it's been two years of the pandemic; we are currently experiencing teaching in the hybrid model, which is possibly a fallacy, taking into account the many social inequalities and the precariousness of education, including teaching practice. Remote learning has dismantled inclusive education and left many uncertainties. Thus, further research is needed in this area, especially regarding teaching practice and support services for the inclusion of university students with disabilities.

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