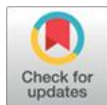


Demands and main challenges of special and inclusive education in face with the commitments of the 2030 agenda in Angola

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Abstract

Guaranteeing the right to quality education for everyone, including the target audience for special education, is one of the commitments present in the 2030 Agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the current challenges of the National Special Education Policy Oriented toward School Inclusion in light of the commitments of the 2030 Agenda. A qualitative study of the documentary type was carried out that emphasized the legislation on the Educational System, National Plans for Development, and reports from the Ministry of Education, while, for international studies, along with the 2030 Agenda, statements and reports from specialized agencies of the United Nations were considered, through latent thematic analysis. The results indicate that Angola has made good progress in terms of regulatory frameworks under the influence of multilateral organizations, however, the advances recorded are little reflected in the expected results in the context of practice.

Keywords

special education; inclusive education; Agenda 2030; Angola.

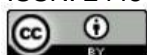
Demandas e principais desafios da Educação Especial e Inclusiva em face dos compromissos da Agenda 2030 em Angola

Resumo

A garantia do direito à educação de qualidade a todos, incluindo o público-alvo da Educação Especial, é um dos compromissos presentes na Agenda 2030 sobre os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável. Daí que este estudo objetiva analisar os desafios atuais da Política Nacional de Educação Especial Orientada para a Inclusão Escolar em face dos compromissos da Agenda 2030. Foi realizado um estudo qualitativo do tipo documental que enfatizou as legislações sobre o Sistema Educativo, Planos Nacionais de Desenvolvimento e relatórios do Ministério da Educação, ao passo que, para os internacionais, junto da Agenda 2030, foram consideradas declarações e relatórios das agências especializadas da Organização das Nações Unidas, através da análise temática latente. Os resultados indicam que Angola tem avançado bem no quesito dos marcos normativos sob influência das organizações multilaterais, porém os avanços registrados pouco se refletem nos resultados esperados no contexto da prática.

Palavras-chave

educação especial; educação inclusiva; Agenda 2030; Angola.



Demandas y principales desafíos de la educación especial e inclusiva ante los compromisos de la agenda 2030 en Angola

Resumen

Garantizar el derecho a una educación de calidad para todos, incluido el público objetivo de la educación especial, es uno de los compromisos presentes en la Agenda 2030 sobre los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Por lo tanto, este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los desafíos actuales de la Política Nacional de Educación Especial Orientada a la Inclusión Escolar a la luz de los compromisos de la Agenda 2030. Se realizó un estudio cualitativo de tipo documental que puso énfasis en la legislación en el Sistema de Educación, Planes Nacionales de Desarrollo e informes del Ministerio de Educación, mientras que, para los estudios internacionales, junto con la Agenda 2030, se consideraron pronunciamientos e informes de organismos especializados de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas, a través de análisis temáticos latentes. Los resultados indican que Angola ha logrado buenos avances en términos de marcos regulatorios bajo la influencia de organizaciones multilaterales, sin embargo, los avances registrados poco se reflejan en los resultados esperados en el contexto de la práctica.

Palabras clave

educación especial; educación inclusiva; Agenda 2030; Angola.

1 Introduction

This study aims to analyze the current challenges of the National Policy for Special Education Oriented to School Inclusion (NPSEOSI) in the face of the commitments of Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which consists of guaranteeing quality education based on access to inclusive, quality and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, considering that “[...] the social transformations experienced in some current contexts alert us to the ease with which children's rights can be violated, and this is an issue that is widely addressed in scientific and media contexts” (Nascimento; Sobral; Carvalho, 2022, p. 2), especially when it comes to the principle of compulsory basic education, which should be accessible to all school-age children.

As António (2023) highlights, the implementation of the Special Education Modality, which happened in 1979, four years after Angola's independence, did not immediately mark the construction of the current policy. This happened in 2015, when the Rodrigo Mendes Institute (IRM), at the invitation of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), began to provide technical advice to the National Institute for Special Education (NISE) and, consequently, to draft the text of the current policy, which was promulgated in 2017. As can be seen below, the main advances in Angola's Special and

Inclusive Education policy are directly linked to the interventions of multilateral organizations, but this is not unique to Angola. As Lobo and Castro (2023, p. 2) state, "[...] since the late twentieth century, national states no longer decide their national education policies without following the guidelines and directions of international organizations interested in expanding educational markets".

With the strong and active participation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank (WB), UNICEF and the IRM, Angolan education policy, specifically the Special Education modality, is strictly aligned with the main philosophical and conceptual guidelines of the United Nations (UN), which promotes a global education agenda.

Currently, as is the case with most countries and their states, Angolan public policies are focused on the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, demanding major challenges because it is a global agenda that is not always compatible with the country's socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions. For this reason, we think it is pertinent and opportune to reflect on a local education policy and its contours in adopting recommendations that promote a global education agenda. Although it is essential to establish partnerships with the governments of developing countries (Rodrigues; Andrade, 2022), the terms defined need to consider local idiosyncrasies and solve real problems.

The study was conducted using a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive approach based on Gil (2008), using documentary analysis complemented by bibliographic sources in the process of gathering information. The exploratory scope of the research is justified because it deals with a problem that lacks national studies, while the descriptive scope is justified in order to situate and characterize the panorama of the Special Education Modality. The documentary analysis was based on national and international reference documents that define guidelines and guidelines on Special and Inclusive Education in line with SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda and other related UN documents. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 5), who consider it to be "[...] a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data". In order to ensure the study was more theoretically aligned, latent thematic analysis was used, in other words, analysis that goes beyond the semantic meaning of the themes, considering the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and

ideologies that are theorized as formatting or informing the semantic content of the data. Without necessarily following a linear order, thematic analysis began with reading the data, followed by the initial generation of codes, the search for themes, the review of themes, the naming of themes, and, finally, the production of the text. Like any research, the study had its limitations from the point of view of the information needed, which is not easily accessible, and, on the other hand, the few local studies related to the subject under analysis.

The text is organized into three sections. Firstly, a general overview of Special and Inclusive Education in the context of global agendas is presented, looking at the most influential international organizations and how they influence local public policies. Secondly, we reflect on special and inclusive education in Angola and how the normative frameworks drawn up according to the recommendations of specialized UN agencies do not always solve the concrete problems in the context of practice. Thirdly, we examine the guarantee of the right to education for the target audience of Special Education through the guidelines and action milestones of SDG 4. It is important to note that the construction of the items resulted from reading the documents through latent or emerging thematic analysis, which made it possible to establish a theoretical alignment between the resulting report and academic production in the local context, as well as international production, which reflects a reality parallel to that of Angola. At the end of the text, the closing remarks are presented, in line with the proposed objective and the evident results.

2 Special and Inclusive Education on the Horizon of global agendas

The right to quality education for all is currently one of the main issues the world is debating. With the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the UN, through its General Assembly, adopted and recognized the right to education for all human beings (UN, 1948). In 1990, the same organization promulgated the World Declaration on Education for All, reiterating the commitment of the UDHR, but going a step further by emphasizing an approach that could meet the basic learning needs of all, regardless of the student's condition.

At the heart of discussions on public policies for education is Special and Inclusive Education, which aims to meet the learning needs of its target audience, mainly

people with disabilities, neurodevelopmental disorders, high abilities, and vulnerable and marginalized minority groups. In this regard, the UN, through its specialized agencies, has been creating and promoting a global agenda that seeks to provide an increasingly inclusive and humanized education.

One of the highest points for Special and Inclusive Education on the UN Global Agenda came with the ratification of the Salamanca Declaration, the result of the World Conference on Special Educational Needs (SEN), organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the Spanish government. As António, Mendes, and González (2021) state, this was also a determining event for Special Education from an inclusive perspective in Angola; as a result, Project 534/Ang/10 on Promoting Educational Opportunities for the Rehabilitation of Vulnerable Children was drawn up and implemented with the support of UNESCO.

Through the fundamental principle of inclusive schools, the conference called for all students to learn together, wherever possible, to the extent that local governments had to take on the commitment to develop local policies focused on education for all (UNESCO, 1994). The relaunch of this global campaign was also evident when, in addition to the call for governments to join international cooperative programs, the challenge was made to international funding agencies, especially the sponsors of the World Conference on Education for All, UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the WB, to support educational programs that promote the development of education for students with special needs.

With the commitments made and challenges launched at this conference, it is clear that there are interests at stake on the side of the UN and its specialized agencies in the dissemination of a globalized education agenda which, apart from the advances they allow in public governance policies, are sometimes incompatible with local realities. According to Barbosa, Silva, and Alves (2023, p. 3):

In line with economic policy and managerial logic, under the precepts of the New Public Management, they recommend and disseminate political-pedagogical guidelines with a global reach based on a set of skills and competencies suited to the demands of the new occupational situation, guided by the principles of competitiveness, flexibility, and efficiency, which are now central to the educational policy agenda of national systems, in the name of a supposed improvement in the quality of education.

Under the argument that education is the means by which sustainable development is achieved through investment in human capital, the interventions of the UN's specialized agencies, in the context of public policies on Special and Inclusive Education, express their interests and preferences for an inclusive school that educates all students together (António, 2023). For the author, partnership proposals between developing countries and specialized UN agencies in which education is defined as one of the areas with a special focus, as is the case in Angola with the World Bank Group (WBG), are not limited to financing and monitoring investments; they identify needs, define goals and priorities within the country's political framework.

The humanitarian discourses assumed in the meanders of these agencies preach the productive character of education, in which the message of education to alleviate poverty in developing countries has become the strategy for social regulation, combating poverty and guaranteeing security through constant alignments over time, to respond to neoliberal demands, which focus more on human capital than on the human being (Leher, 1999; Oliveira, 2016). Furthermore, the recommendations coming from these agencies are not always suggestive, sometimes taking on what Souza and Pletsch (2017) consider to be a mandatory nature, as they do not take into account the specific characteristics and needs of the nation, especially when agreements are made with poorer countries.

Following on from the plot to consolidate the aims and progress of global education policy, the 2030 Agenda, made up of 17 SDGs, was defined in 2015 at the United Nations headquarters in New York. These are a common vision for humanity, a contract between world leaders and the people, and a list of things to do on behalf of the people and the planet. The 2030 Agenda is a broad and ambitious agenda that addresses various dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, environmental) and promotes peace, justice, and effective institutions.

Of the 17 SDGs defined in this agenda, the fourth is to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015). For the purposes of our reflection, it is important to look at this global agenda and how it becomes feasible considering the marked differences between developed and underdeveloped countries in terms of Special and Inclusive Education. In education, according to the UN (2020, p. 7), "[...] inclusion means ensuring that all students feel

valued and respected, and that they can enjoy a true sense of belonging", a challenge that is recognized as difficult to achieve due to all the dilemmas and tensions resulting from deep-rooted beliefs and convictions, cultural peculiarities and, fundamentally, financial, material and human conditions to respond to the Inclusive Education paradigm that struggles with segregating and exclusionary practices in the contexts of practice.

The "lifelong learning for all" which is a matrix and commitment of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, consists of leaving no one behind, which would be the full meaning of inclusion without exception. According to the UN (2020, p. 9), the agenda promises "[...] a just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of those most disadvantaged are met".

Although the ideal of student diversity in classrooms and mainstream schools is desirable because it could prevent stigmas, stereotypes, discrimination, and alienation, it is important to recognize that it would not be an easy task for the professionals who deal directly with these students. We understand, however, that the economic justification claimed by the UN (2020) as one of the benefits of inclusion allows loopholes for liberal/capitalist governments to adopt inclusive schools under the argument of saving resources, i.e. why build special schools if we can bring all students together in the same schools? As UNESCO recognizes (2017, p. 7):

Education is, therefore, crucial to achieving sustainable development. However, not all types of education support sustainable development. Education that promotes economic growth alone can also lead to an increase in unsustainable consumption patterns.

In any case, education should be an indispensable asset for everyone, "[...] it is both a goal in itself and a means to achieve all the other SDGs. It is not only an integral part of sustainable development but also a key factor in achieving it" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 1). It can be said that education is an end insofar as it is also the means to its own achievement. It would be impossible to eradicate poverty without education. It would be equally impossible to cultivate an awareness of peace and care for our environment without education. Education can and must contribute to a new vision of sustainable global development (UNESCO, 2015).

In order to achieve these SDGs, UNESCO (2017) proposes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), an instrument that aims to develop skills that enable

people to reflect on their own actions, taking into account their current and future social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts, from a local and global perspective.

As several studies have shown, the UN, together with its specialized agencies, exerts an important influence on what Verger (2019, p. 16) calls Global Education Policy (GEP), a "[...] power that is also about the ability to define the main priorities and objectives of educational change, as well as which are the main problems that educational systems should try to address". Regardless of the progress that these international organizations can make in drawing up and translating public policies for education, the Nation States that benefit from their funding lose a certain amount of decision-making power and become subject to the scrutiny of the funders. As a result, some of their guidelines are incompatible with local reality.

3 Special Education and School Inclusion in Angola: norms versus demands

Education, as António, Mendes, and Lukombo (2023, p. 15) state, although it is "[...] a fundamental right inherent to every human being as enshrined worldwide by the UN, access to school in the least developed countries is a current challenge that still requires firm localized policies and actions". For these authors, the right to education set out in the World Declarations resulting from the international conferences organized by Unesco in Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000) constitutes a commitment by all world governments, which, in addition to ensuring access, must also guarantee the conditions necessary for the process of forming values to take place with the necessary quality. This challenge becomes ever more demanding when it comes to the target audience of Special Education in Angola.

Special and Inclusive Education, as an instrument for guaranteeing the right to education in Angola, is a challenge that dates back to 1979, the year in which Special Education was officially implemented in the Angolan Education and Teaching System. The unstable socio-economic and political situation at the time, however, did not allow for significant progress in this regard.

As was the case with most of the countries aligned with UNESCO's main recommendations regarding the development and implementation of public policies for education, the major turning point in the issue of school inclusion for students who are the

target of Special Education came with Angola's participation in the World Conference on SEN, which, according to António, Mendes and González (2021), resulted in the most important document in the field of Special Education and Educational Inclusion, the Salamanca Declaration.

It should be noted that Angola's participation in and signing of the Salamanca Declaration enabled the drafting and implementation of project 534/Ang/10 on the "Promotion of Educational Opportunities for the Rehabilitation of Vulnerable Children, enabling the integration of children with SEN in general education schools, in special and integrated classrooms" (NISE, 2006, p. 10). This project comprised two phases, the first (pilot phase), in 1994, in three provinces, Luanda, Benguela, and Huila, and the second phase, which began in 2000, in the provinces of Huambo, Cabinda, and Bié, although the services only reached the areas least affected by the civil war at the time.

Since 2011, under the influence of the UN, which had promulgated the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, the Angolan state has made considerable progress in terms of the legal system to guarantee the right to education for people with disabilities and all those targeted by Special Education. With the promulgation of Presidential Decree No. 20/11, of January 18, the Statute of the Special Education Modality was approved; its provisions apply to students with SEN¹ in Pre-School Education, Primary Education, and the 1st and 2nd Cycles of Secondary Education. This document defined the main areas of intervention according to the type of disability, the special compensation equipment, the adaptations needed to guarantee access conditions and the conditions for enrollment, curriculum adaptation, and assessment, highlighting the Individual Educational Plan (Angola, 2011a).

Still in 2011, in order to align with UN precepts, Presidential Decrees No. 237/11, of August 30, and No. 238/11, of August 30, were simultaneously promulgated, approving the Policy for People with Disabilities, which establish:

¹ In this study, considering that it refers to the Angolan context, the term "Special Educational Needs" appears at times because it is used in some Angolan documents. In Angola, the term "Special Educational Needs" designates, according to the Statute of the Special Education Modality, the exclusive demands of the subject who, in order to learn what is expected for their reference group, needs different forms of pedagogical interaction or additional support, such as adapted resources, methodologies and curricula, as well as differentiated times, during all or part of their school journey. However, in the text of the current NPSEOSI, the following terms are used to designate the target audience of Special Education: students with disabilities, students with autistic spectrum disorders and students with giftedness or high abilities.

The set of normative guidelines that aim to ensure the full exercise of the individual and social rights of people with disabilities, through the implementation of coordinated, multisectoral, and multidisciplinary actions by the Executive, with a view to [sic] fulfilling its legal obligations in the field of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and integration (Angola, 2011b, p. 4090).

On the same day and month, the Strategy for the Protection of People with Disabilities was enacted:

It defines the general bases and guidelines for the provision of different services for people with disabilities, namely physical rehabilitation, medical care and medication, technical and vocational training, work and employment, education and teaching, housing, accessibility, HIV/AIDS, orientation and mobility with technical aids, culture, sport, social support, justice and psychosocial support (Angola, 2011c, p. 4096).

The Policy for Persons with Disabilities and the Strategy for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities served as the background to the enactment, the following year, of the Law on Persons with Disabilities, which "[...] establishes the legal regime applicable to the prevention, habilitation, rehabilitation, and participation of persons with disabilities in social life" (Angola, 2012, p. 3256). It is important to note that, until the enactment of this law, Angola had not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which happened in 2014.

Before the ratification of the Law on Persons with Disabilities, the CRPD aroused curiosity because it seemed like an inverted procedure from the usual logic, but the Angolan state justified itself by arguing that this occurrence, according to António (2023, p. 108), "[...] was due to a mechanism to strengthen the partnership of Institutional Strengthening between UNDP and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights", indicating, increasingly, the importance of the UN, through its specialized agencies in the process of elaborating the Special and Inclusive Education Policy in Angola.

In 2014, the year of Angola's ratification of the CRPD, Presidential Decree No. 312/14, of November 24, was promulgated, approving its Organic Statute of NISE, considering it as the Public Institute dedicated to the implementation and execution of the educational policy regarding people with disabilities, endowed with legal personality, administrative, financial, and patrimonial autonomy (Angola, 2014). This decree was revoked in 2021 by Presidential Decree No. 63/21, of March 12, which sought to align with Presidential Decree No. 187/17, of August 16, which approved NPSEOSI.

In the current Statute, the legal nature of NISE also includes special scientific-pedagogical autonomy and, in addition, its target audience has been updated from "children, young people and adults with special educational needs" to "children and students with disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and high abilities/giftedness", as a procedure to align it with the UN's conceptual precepts and guidelines. However, NISE's services were centralized in Luanda, which is why the need to be represented at a local level by the provincial services provided for in point 1 of article 21 of Presidential Decree no. 312/14, of November 24, led to the creation of the NISE Provincial Services, called Provincial Offices for the Care of Students with Special Educational Needs (POCSSEN), under Joint Executive Decree No. 144/16, of March 7, between the Heads of the Ministerial Departments responsible for the education and territorial administration sectors, as provided for in point 3 of article 21 of the 2014 Statute (Angola, 2014, 2016a).

In 2016, a year before the current Special and Inclusive Education Policy, Law no. 17/16, of October 7, the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System, was enacted, repealing Law no. 13/01, of December 31. Between the two laws, in terms of Special Education, there are important differences, not only from a conceptual point of view but also from a paradigmatic point of view.

In Law 13/01, special education is dealt with in Article 43, subsection I of Section VIII, on Teaching Modalities. In this law, special education is understood as:

A transversal teaching modality, both for the general education subsystem and for the adult education subsystem, aimed at individuals with SEN, namely motor, sensory, and mental disabilities and conduct disorders, and deals with their prevention, recovery, and socio-educational and socio-economic integration, as well as gifted students (Angola, 2001, p. 16).

In Law no. 17/16, of October 7, later amended by Law no. 32/20, of August 12, Special Education is dealt with in Article 83, section II of Chapter IV, on Objectives and Organization of Differentiated Education Modalities². In this law, Special Education is understood as "[...] a type of education that cuts across all education subsystems and is aimed at individuals with disabilities and students with high abilities, gifted, talented and autistic, with a view to their socio-educational integration" (Angola 2016b, p. 4445). In

² "Differentiated Education Modalities are specific ways of organizing and conducting educational processes, transversal to various education subsystems, adapted according to the particularities of the beneficiaries" (Angola, 2016b, p. 4445).

2020, this same definition was updated and the name “individual with a disability” was changed to “person with a disability”.

Between Law No. 13/01, of December 31, and Law No. 17/16, of October 7, we can point to three important differences that indicate a more up-to-date alignment. While the former limits the transversality of the modality to the General Education Subsystem and the Adult Education Subsystem, the latter extends this responsibility to all Education Subsystems. As for the target audience of Special Education, the former mentions “individuals with special educational needs”, a terminology currently considered inadequate to designate the recipients of Special Education, while the current law, more in line with the recommendations of a global agenda, uses the terminology “person with a disability”. Finally, insofar as the former refers to the prevention and recovery of disorders, indicating a biomedical and ableist conception of disability that is much criticized today, the latter only points to the purpose of their socio-educational integration. These differences, more than terminology, demand a paradigm shift in our view of the challenges of Special and Inclusive Education from the clinical model of disability to the social and educational model.

After all this regulatory process and theoretical and philosophical alignment of Special and Inclusive Education in Angola, we come to what António, Mendes, and González (2021) consider the recent high point of Angolan educational policy in the field of Special Education and inclusion, which is the promulgation of the NPSEOSI by Presidential Decree No. 187/17, of August 16, considered as:

One of the instruments of the Angolan executive's Education Policy aimed at school inclusion and its objective is to define guidelines and action strategies for Angolan education and training networks to ensure the right of access, participation, and permanence of students with disabilities in the National Formal Education System (Angola, 2017b, p. 3674).

Today, it can be said that, from the point of view of the legal system, Angola has a Special and Inclusive Education policy that is aligned with the main international recommendations coming from the UN and its specialized agencies that fund projects related to it, from the moment they are drawn up to the scrutiny of the actions developed in their implementation. However, the major challenges currently facing Special and Inclusive Education have to do with the results of these measures, which are not reflected in practice. In other words, to say that our schools are inclusive and that they meet the

demands of the target audience for Special Education would result in an exacerbated utopia at the risk of generating a complacency fed by the political and legal discourse of the main normative documents and reports that mask real panoramas.

In addition to the important progress made in terms of the enactment of laws and decrees on the issue in question, it is essential that we move towards concrete actions for Inclusive Education, through a committed process of opening up general education schools to diversity. “The concept of diversity suggests that all students have their own specific individual educational needs in order to access the learning experiences necessary for their socialization established in the school curriculum” (Antônio; Lara; González, 2021, p. 3). As stated in Angola (2017b, p. 3674), a school open to diversity “[...] is a regular school that strives to eliminate the barriers that hinder access, permanence and completion, which is a challenge for the whole of Angolan society”.

Furthermore, the results of the current Special and Inclusive Education policy, which are out of step with real aspirations, can be explained by the hegemony of guidelines from a global educational agenda that is not always compatible with local needs and demands. As noted by Werning *et al.* (2016), transferring educational policies indiscriminately from an international conception to local implementation, especially when educational governance models and the socio-cultural context follow different dynamics, can have negative consequences.

Just as the contributions of multilateral organizations to the progress made in Angolan education policy are undeniable, it is equally irrefutable that cultural particularities and local socio-economic and political contexts have an important influence on the materialization of public policies.

The traditional belief of associating disability with supernatural forces of evil, the non-existence of Special Education until before 1979, the intense 27-year civil war that would cause damaging human and material damage, the lack of enough teachers and schools to guarantee educational inclusion, the lack of sufficient financial resources in the post-independence and post-war periods, characterize the later inclusion-oriented special education policies (Antônio; Mendes; González, 2021, p. 4).

The mismatch between political discourse and the translation of public education policies anchored in UN guidelines is often due to the fact that the diversities and complexities of the contexts in which international and national policies are conceived and approved are not truly portrayed (Werning *et al.*, 2016). An important reflection made

by Artiles and Kozleski (2019) is that if Inclusive Education aspires to change education systems by seeking to improve access, participation, and outcomes for all students, regardless of any form of difference that students supposedly embody, it is paradoxical that education reforms politically proposed to cater for all students are implemented with a focus on people with disabilities. This is a point worth considering: if inclusion is about everyone, without exception, the system should be designed for everyone, and not divided into majority and minority groups, with some being the included and others the includers.

3.1 SDG 4 and Special and Inclusive Education in Angola: the right to quality education without exception

The Angolan state, in collaboration with the UN, has been working to achieve the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. For this reason, the National Development Plan (PND) 2018-2022, aligned with the SDGs, was supported by the UN in its preparation. Among the many different areas covered by the SDGs, our focus is on SDG 4, which focuses on Special and Inclusive Education to find out how the country has dealt with these challenges. To find out how and where we are and where we are going, two documents deserve our full attention: the National Education Development Plan (PNDE) 2017-2030 and the PND 2018-2022.

Among the many important figures in the PNDE 2017-2030, some of them, despite the optimism they are likely to generate, deserve a realistic and critical look. Table 1 shows the following data:

Table 1 – Distribution of the special and inclusive schools in the Angolan Education Network

Province	Special schools	Inclusive schools
Benguela	3	130
Bengo	1	4
Bié	1	1
Cabinda	0	45
Cunene	1	21
Huila	1	206
Huambo	1	19
Quando Cubango	1	0
Cuanza Norte	1	0
Cuanza Sul	1	5
Luanda	3	95
Lunda Norte	1	12

Lunda Sul	1	5
Namibe	1	6
Malanje	0	47
Moxico	1	100
Uíje	1	0
Zaire	1	54
Total	20	775

Source: Angola (2017)

The data in Table 1, as encouraging as it may seem, needs a less romanticized look from professionals and researchers in the sector. According to this document, the country has 775 inclusive schools and 28 Multifunctional Resource Rooms (MRS). Let's take a look at this: according to Angola (2017b), MRS are spaces where teachers with continuing training in Special Education provide Specialized Educational Assistance (SEA). According to Presidential Decree No. 187/17, these classrooms are equipped with furniture, teaching materials, pedagogical accessibility resources, and specific equipment and are located in general education schools that have enrolments of students who are targets of Special Education. SEA, on the other hand, is one of the services that the Special Education modality guarantees to its target public and its aim is to research, plan, organize, and make available teaching resources and materials that promote access to the curriculum and, consequently, effective learning (Angola, 2017b). For it to work, three technicians are needed: a psychotherapist, a specialist in writing and reading Braille, and an interpreter and translator of Angolan Sign Language (ASL).

On the other side are the Inclusion Support Centers (ISCs), which, according to Angola (2017b, p. 3686), "[...] are spaces that aim to offer pedagogical support to the network of general education schools through continuing education, in-service training, production of materials, teaching media and modes of communication". In other words, for inclusive schools to function, ISCs and SEA offered in MRS are essential. Although the SEA happens in general education schools through the SRM, the production of materials, teaching aids and modes of communication and ongoing and in-service training are the responsibility of the NAIs, so how do you explain the fact that the country has 775 inclusive schools and only 28 MRS? This question is not intended to question the encouraging data presented in the PNDE 2017-2030, but it is intended to provide a realistic analysis so that the suggested solutions meet the true scenario of Special and Inclusive Education in Angola.

The PNDE 2017-2030, in addition to the diagnosis, makes a prognosis of the education sector, pointing out strengths and weaknesses followed by a set of suggestions and projections. Corroborating our view, the document highlights some positive references, such as: approval of the Organic Statute of INNE, Statute of the Special Education Modality, Promulgation of NPSEOSI, provision, albeit intermittent, of specialized special education services called SEA, the existence of 22 special schools across the country and an ASL.

In addition, some constraints are mentioned, such as: insufficient number of trained teachers, little information and lack of knowledge on the part of school managers about Special and Inclusive Education, a detail that was also confirmed in António's doctoral thesis (2023), a shortage of ASL interpreters and the lack of a law on the subject, and difficult access to data on students targeted by Special Education at all levels (from schools, municipal education offices, provincial education offices and the NISE itself, which does not have a website where professionals and researchers in the field could easily access it).

Because of these handicaps and keeping an eye on SDG 4, the PND 2018-2022 defined some targets and priorities aimed at responding to the challenges of Special and Inclusive Education. Within the objectives set for the Training and Management of Teaching Staff Program, specifically in Target 2.1, it was established that 149 more Special Education and Adult Education teachers would be trained between 2018 and 2022, a figure that we cannot confirm due to lack of access to the implementation reports. In the field of primary education, in Target 2.3, the commitment was made that, by 2022, at least 1,316 primary schools would have inclusion rooms, with priorities being the creation of inclusion rooms in primary schools, the operationalization of the Psychopedagogical and Professional Office and the production and distribution of textbooks, especially those specific to special education (Angola, 2018).

As a way of reiterating its international commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in 2021 Angola released the Voluntary National Report 2021 on its implementation, in which the creation of a regulatory framework for children with disabilities was recognized as one of the important milestones, in this case, the Policy, Strategy, and Law for People with Disabilities, already mentioned in the previous

approaches, and, together with these, NPSEOSI, stand out. Despite these advances, the report highlights that school inclusion remains a challenge.

However, it remains a challenge for schools to have the physical adaptations to allow access to children with disabilities, but also to create the conditions for mainstream schools to be open to the inclusion of children with disabilities, with the support of guidance and resource centers for inclusion that raise awareness and support families, provide guidance and resources for the timely diagnosis of disability and access to education for children in mainstream schools (Angola, 2021b, p. 40).

The progress that Angola has made in terms of developing public policies aimed at more inclusive education is visible, especially the adoption of the main recommendations from the UN and the establishment of local regulations are evidence of this commitment. However, we now need to move on to more practical issues and the technical empowerment of mainstream schools. If the ICSs don't work, there will be no SEM; without SEMs, there will be no SEA, in other words mainstream schools will only function as inclusive if there are prepared human resources (multidisciplinary teams for diagnosis and guidance, ASL interpreters and translators, specialists in the Braille writing and reading model and teachers who will be subject to continuous training). In addition to the human factor, there is the issue of physical adaptations to guarantee accessibility and quality education for all.

4 Closing remarks

As a topic characterized by few local studies, Special and Inclusive Education, in the field of research and professional practice, are still incipient and without a solid tradition. Although Special Education, as a teaching modality, was increased rather than implemented in 1979, the main advances date back to 1994, through the Salamanca Declaration, of which Angola is a signatory. With the UN and its specialized agencies mentoring and funding the main school inclusion projects for the target audience of Special Education, the Angolan state has been aligning its entire public policy in the education sector with the main theoretical and philosophical guidelines of a global education agenda.

As a result, important progress has been made in establishing a regulatory framework that is aligned with the World Declaration on Education for All, the CRPD, the

precepts of the Salamanca Declaration and other consequent recommendations and, currently, the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, in which Angola has been receiving advice from a UN mission to ensure the best alignment.

Finally, although the country has taken important steps in response to the challenges of guaranteeing the right to education for the target audience of Special Education, especially in the drafting of the legal framework, in practice, the real context does not keep up with these advances, because the commitments need to take the next step, perhaps the most important one, moving from theory to practice, from legal documents to the inside of the school, from the desired to the worked results, from the ideal to the real. Regular schools will not be inclusive if they are transformed as such; they will be inclusive when they start to act and function as such. This involves creating human and material conditions, but also respecting local idiosyncrasies.

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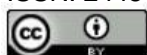
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