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# Assessment of Inclusive Institutional Policies in a Brazilian University

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**Abstract:** The production of affirmative action policies aimed at reducing the inequalities in participation of different, more vulnerable groups in accessing university education is already a widely disseminated reality in Brazil. These policies encompass Black, mixed-race, Indigenous, and people with disabilities. Engaging in a discussion on this topic involves recognizing institutional strategies aimed at improving the quality of education with an intersectional and inclusive perspective within the university. With that in mind, the study sought to identify how the academic community (students, staff, and professors) assesses inclusive institutional policies at a Brazilian public university. The data collection was carried out through the application of the Higher Education Inclusion Index (INES) to establish parameters for characterizing the presence and/or absence of these policies within the university. Additionally, a database of normative/institutional documents was organized to contribute to a broader understanding of the responses obtained in the study. The results highlighted that the university has not been considered an accessible and inclusive place for everyone, according to the perceptions of those who are part of it. On one hand, they point to the absence of inclusive institutional norms despite the documents found in the study, but on the other hand, these findings indicate the need for community involvement in their development, in order for it to be a promising path towards the intended direction. In conclusion, it is evident that INES has been considered a tool for institutional evaluation situated within the theoretical-conceptual movement for social transformation, advocating for a more democratic and inclusive university.

**Keywords:** Higher Education, Affirmative Actions, Assessment, Traffic Light System

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## 1. Introduction

Democratic coexistence and the development of inclusive actions based on the appreciation of higher education are recurring themes in the present day. The enrollment of groups in situations of economic, social, and cultural vulnerability in this level of education, with a particular emphasis on the presence of people with disabilities, is a reality in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Brazil. Affirmative policies have been implemented in order to ensure the reserve of vacancies for minorities and vulnerable groups [1, 2]. Affirmative policies in education are those that aim to extinguish conditions of inequality and discrimination, ensuring that elite and marginalized groups are not maintained. Regarding higher education, Law 12,711/2012 [1] established the reservation of vacancies for those

self-declared black, brown and indigenous. Subsequently, in 2016, Law No. 13,409 [2] included people with disabilities as beneficiaries of the quota system, or as it is popularly known, the "quota law." However, even though affirmative action policies of this nature provide opportunities for various oppressed groups in favor of cultures that prioritize the value of life and a more humane, accessible, and inclusive world, they cannot be considered as the sole strategies capable of bringing about social change [3].

It is important to consider that HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) need to ensure the access, retention, and successful completion of studies for these students, minimizing the potential ableism that the university environment can generate, and thus eliminating all forms of discrimination related to people with disabilities. In this regard, the Brazilian Inclusion Law, Law No. 13,146/2015 [4], describes the term as follows:

Discrimination based on disability is understood to be any form of differentiation, restriction, or exclusion, whether through action or omission, that has the purpose or effect of harming, preventing, or nullifying the recognition or exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms of a person with a disability, including the refusal to provide reasonable accommodations and assistive technologies. [4].

Based on this premise, it is imperative to investigate how the academic community addresses issues of this nature, in addition, it is essential to examine whether Higher Education Institutions (IES) have inclusive affirmative institutional policies that contribute to the development of proposals for correcting inequalities, redistributing income, and cultural capital in society. In this regard, it is through institutional assessments that universities restructure change strategies to enhance the quality of education.

When it comes to Brazilian Higher Education, some assessment instruments are widely used, such as the Census of Higher Education [5], considered as an instrument capable of capturing information on the functioning of HEIs in Brazil, infrastructure organization, candidate/vacancy relationship, enrollment, among others. Organized by the Ministry of Education within the technical-administrative management, its purpose is to outline designs that can influence the development of public policies to improve the quality of education at this level. In the same direction, the National System of Evaluation of Higher Education [6], organized through the offer of the National Student Performance Examination - ENADE, was developed to contribute to the collection of information on the academic performance of students, in undergraduate courses; in addition to assisting in understanding data on the functioning of the institutional structure, and pedagogical policy projects, at this level of education.

However, when reading these instruments, we note that they fail to present indicators of inclusive education policies and accessibility at this level of education. In a more restricted way when observed, the number of enrollments of these collectives in the University, the possibility of the student to participate in the evaluation exams with the support of some specific resource or service. Therefore, they do not provide information regarding how universities adhere to accessibility guidelines in offering services and specialized support/resources to eliminate barriers to learning for people with disabilities, ensuring their equitable presence and participation in university activities. They also fail to address intersectional aspects involving the different vulnerable groups accessing higher education and the various possibilities in the face of the multiplication of different forms of oppression, as these conditions do not simply add up but rather multiply [7]. Therefore, it is observed that the nationally used assessment instruments provide limited coverage of how these policies depict aspects of the profile of university students who identify themselves as having disabilities from a more intersectional perspective compared to other groups in vulnerable situations.

On the other hand, some studies show a greater concern when discussing the ways of understanding and characterizing institutional political processes for the promotion of inclusion and accessibility in higher education. Among other aspects, these studies emphasize the importance of valuing diversity and pluralism as fundamental constructs of human development in educational settings, taking a more intersectional approach to the topic [8-12].

Developed with the purpose of assisting in the evaluation of existing policies, the Higher Education Inclusion Index (INES) [13] has been characterized as a tool that allows for the identification of parameters that characterize an inclusive university environment. It also assesses how often these practices occur and whether there is recognition among the academic community of the presence of political guidelines from this perspective in the university. In other words, it has allowed us to understand how university policies are present in higher education institutions and to what extent they align with the principles of inclusive education. In this regard, the INES was recently translated for its application in the Brazilian university context [14].

Programmed to assist in the development of an education improvement plan, the INES is characterized by the collection of 25 indicators grouped into 12 factors. These factors encompass issues related to the social role and services provided by the institution to the community at large (1. Mission and Institutional Project; 4. Academic Processes; 5. National and International Visibility; 6. Spaces for Research, Innovation, Artistic and Cultural Creation; 7. Relevance and Social Impact; 9. Institutional Well-being) - These aspects are related to understanding the institutional enrollment profile and its technical-administrative staff (2. Students; 3. Teachers/Staff); and also, factors that validate the functioning of the university (8. Self-assessment and Self-regulation Processes; 10. Organization, Management, and Administration; 11. Academic Support Resources and Physical Infrastructure; 12. Financial Resources)

Each factor unfolds into at least one indicator with conditions of validity and reliability, ensuring the alignment of respondents' operational and conceptual perceptions of the evaluated educational institution's structure. In this sense, it creates an opportunity for the university to establish itself as a democratic space, fostering inclusive social interaction practices and advocating for knowledge production in a movement against ableism and other forms of oppression faced by groups considered vulnerable within HEIs.

### ***1.1. Adaptation of the Inclusion Index for Higher Education***

The proposed adaptation of the INES [13] was necessary since an evaluation instrument should be appropriate to the context in which it will be applied. For this reason, the process of translation and adaptation of the index took place preserving the objective of the instrument, but aiming to carry out all the necessary cultural adaptations [15]. Thus, the format of the instrument was maintained according to the original with three questionnaires (with Likert scales), which seek to evaluate through 12 factors (Table 1) and 25

indicators, central themes of inclusive education with emphasis on the development of cultures, inclusive policies and practices at the university [14].

*Table 1. INES-Brazil indicators.*

FACTORS
1. Mission and Institutional project
2. Students
3. Teachers
4. Academic processes
5. National and international visibility
6. Spaces for research, innovation, artistic creation, and cultural activities.
7. Relevance and social impact
8. Self-evaluation and self-regulation processes
9. Institutional well-being.
10. Organization, management, and administration.
11. Academic support resources and physical infrastructure.
12. Financial resources

Source: adapted from Colombia (2017).

### 1.2. Target Audience Covered by INES

The INES as an instrument for evaluating higher education, goes through issues that go beyond a specific audience, often indicated as "target audience of special education" (people with disabilities, high skills/ giftedness and autism spectrum disorder) [16, 17] and/or mistakenly referred to as "public beneficiary exclusively of inclusion policies". The inclusive perspective is developed through an intersectional and cross-cutting lens that encompasses not only people with disabilities but also all other groups in vulnerable situations present in the university environment. These groups may also have specific educational needs (SENs). For the purpose of evaluating inclusive strategies, it is important to consider how the university is or should be ensuring more accessible spaces for everyone, including those who recognize and/or identify with SENs.

It is worth noting that although the guiding document on accessibility in higher education - the Incluir Program [17] - attributes specific needs only to the group that recognizes itself as having disabilities, considered the target audience for the accessibility resources and services policies provided by HEIs, which include "[...] Brazilian Sign Language translator and interpreter, guide-interpreter, assistive technology equipment, and accessible educational materials, meeting the specific needs of students," this study takes a position against the approaches that define disability as synonymous with SENs [16, 17]. It values positions that describe SENs as any need "resulting from interactions of students with or without disabilities" that hinder and/or impede access to the curriculum and the participation of these individuals in their academic activities [18]. These needs can be either temporary or permanent, requiring different levels of support from the institution (resources and/or services). This position is adopted to prevent misunderstandings, as has occurred in instruments that portray this perspective, as discussed by the authors regarding the identification policies of students with disabilities. As they emphasize:

The statistical summary spreadsheet of the CENSO/INEP

provides the following information: "Enrollments of Students with Special Needs in Courses...". The distribution by type of special need includes the following references: Blindness, Low Vision, Deafness, Hearing Impairment, Physical Disability, Deafblindness, Multiple Disabilities, Intellectual Disability, Childhood Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Giftedness [18].

Based on the information provided, this article discusses inclusion indicators, policies, and affirmative actions in the university context. It is worth noting that this is a section of a doctoral thesis that investigated accessibility and inclusion parameters in a Brazilian public university, considering the responses of students, staff, and faculty members [19].

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through a set of forms and/or documents that allowed for the identification of the participants' profiles in this study, as well as the gathering of inclusion indicators at the university, which include:

- Model of the census form for the student registry in the "Undergraduate System - SisGrad" [20];
- Model of the census form for the student registry in the "Graduate System - SisPG" [20];
- Statistical Summary Spreadsheet of the INEP Census [21];
- UNESP Statistical Yearbook [22, 23];
- INES-Brasil (form used to collect data related to inclusion and accessibility barriers at the university).

### 2.2. Ethical Aspects of Research

This research was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee (protocol no. 94374418.2.0000.5398 – CAAE/Plataforma Brasil), as it complies with the legal, methodological, and ethical parameters in Resolution CNS 466/12 of the National Health Council. In addition, all participants read and signed the Informed Consent Form.

### 2.3. Application of the Instrument

The instrument was administered using the online tool Google Forms, which allowed for the creation of the questionnaire in digital format and generated an access link for participants to fill it out via devices such as mobile phones, computers, tablets, and other digital devices with internet access. The link was sent to participants via email through the institution and was also shared by the researcher in classroom settings. Participants filled out the instrument individually after accessing the link during one of the previously described moments.

### 2.4. Criteria for Selecting the Study Sample

A non-probabilistic convenience sample with a 5% margin of error was used. According to Freitag [24], this type of

sample selects the most accessible, collaborative or available participants to contribute to the process. The margin of error of 5% was adopted in order to ensure a representativeness of the sample in the investigated context. The option for convenience sample was supported based on other research in the area of education ensuring the assertiveness of this choice by this methodological strategy [25].

**2.5. Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the form responses were tabulated and organized in an Excel spreadsheet. The distribution by frequency of the responses for each of the indicators was calculated, and subsequently, a descriptive analysis of the responses was conducted. Percentages of responses for the different indicators in each axis were calculated and associated with a traffic light system, as previously used by other authors [8, 10, 26]. However, for the present study, an adaptation was made by grouping some categories of interest to proceed with the exploratory data analysis. Unlike what was

adopted by Angel and Pérez and Goyneche and Ruiz [8, 10], this study considered not only the option "exists and is implemented" for existence-type responses but also "exists and is not implemented," as well as "always" and "sometimes" for frequency-type responses, instead of considering only "always" (Table 2). This measure was considered because both types of responses in some way encompass the indicators and oppose "does not exist" and "don't know" (for existence) and "never" and "don't know" (for frequency).

Furthermore, for the analysis in this research, we chose to present and discuss the results of the indicators that showed a greater need for modification, in other words, the ones with the lowest positive percentages in the traffic light system. To correlate this information, the indicators with the lowest percentages in the traffic light system indicate a greater urgency in taking actions to modify them with the purpose of removing barriers or transforming them into facilitators of accessibility and inclusion.

*Table 2. Traffic light system with grouping of some categories of interest.*

Type of indicator	Category of interest.	Color	Percentage
Frequency	Always - Sometimes		Under 60%
			Between 60% e 80%
			Over 80%
Existence	Exists and is implemented - Exists and is not implemented		Under 60%
			Between 60% e 80%
			Over 80%
Recognition	Yes		Menos de 60%
			Between 60% e 80%
			Over 80%

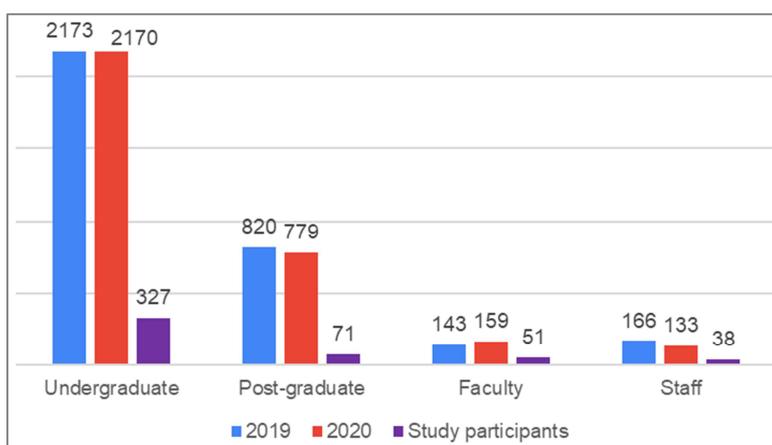
Source: Adapted from Colombia (2017b, p. 18).

**3. Results**

**3.1. Participant Profile**

Data from the institution's statistical yearbook [22, 23] present the total number of students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs for the years 2019 and 2020, as well as

the number of active faculty and staff members at the Marília campus (the campus investigated in this research), and the number of respondents to the INES-Brasil, as shown in Figure 1. Out of this total, 487 individuals participated in the research. Among them, 398 were students, 51 were faculty members, and 38 were non-teaching staff members.



Source: research data.

**Figure 1.** Data from the statistical yearbook regarding undergraduate and graduate students enrolled, as well as active faculty and staff members, for the years 2019 and 2020.

Table 3 presents the distribution of these students by course and indicates the Specific Educational Needs (SENs) mentioned in the enrollment form, based on self-declared

information, as well as the respective course of the student who self-declared as a user of eligible special education services.

*Table 3. Description of the number of students with self-declared SENs by undergraduate course.*

Total number of students participating in the research.	Number of students with SEN	Course	NEEs
6	3	ARCHIVAL SCIENCE	Hearing impairment, TGD
8	0	LIBRARY SCIENCE	Not informed
8	0	INFORMATION SCIENCES	Not informed
41	1	SOCIAL SCIENCES	Physical disability
16	1	PHILOSOPHY	Physical disability
11	0	PHYSICAL THERAPY	Not informed
12	0	PHONOAUDIOLOGY	Not informed
45	1	OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY	Not informed
169	6	PEDAGOGY	Deafness and Hearing Impairment
11	1	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	Not informed

Source: research data.

### 3.2. The INES-Brasil and the Traffic Light System: Indicators of Inclusive Affirmative Institutional Policies

With the data collected from the completion of the INES by the academic community, the percentage of responses for each item allowed for suggesting which indicator needs closer

attention ("red lights") in order to reduce potential barriers indicated by the academic community. Therefore, Table 4 presents the indicators and the result of the traffic light system, highlighting in red those that showed a greater need for modification to achieve an ideal scenario in the context of inclusion in the university environment.

*Table 4. Presentation of the indicators and their respective percentages in the traffic light system.*

INDICATOR	DEGREE OF MODIFICATION %
1.1 Barriers to learning and participation	61,2
1.2 Student identification and characterization	67,4
2.1 Student participation	64,9
3.1 Faculty participation	52,2
3.2 Inclusive faculty	66,1
4.1 Interdisciplinarity and curricular flexibility	68,8
4.2 Flexible assessment	39,2
5.1 Institution's Engagement in National and International Academic Contexts	63,9
5.2 External Relations of Professors and Students	53,2
6 Investigation, Innovation, and Artistic and Cultural Creation in Inclusive Education	53,6
6.2 Research/Investigation. Cooperation networks in inclusive education.	74,9
6.3. Policies in inclusive education.	45,8
7.1 Extension, social projection, and regional context	45,0
8.1 Regulation of inclusive education	45,6
8.2 Intervention, evaluation, and improvement strategies	47,0
8.3 Accessible Information System	47,6
9.1 University wellness programs	68,0
9.2 Student permanence	54,8
10.1 Administrative and Management Actions	53,0
10.2 Organizational structure	52,2
11.1 Resources, Equipment, and Practice Spaces	59,3
11.2 Facilities and Infrastructure	76,4
12.1 Sustainable Inclusive Education Programs	66,3
12.2 Financial and Student Support	63,9

Source: research data.

As can be seen, more than half of the indicators require significant modifications for the university to be considered an accessible and inclusive space. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that there is much to be done in different areas, ranging from inclusive education policies, teaching strategies, accessible systems, and more. As the data in the table

demonstrates, the indicator "4.2 Flexible assessment" showed the lowest value in the traffic light system (39.2%). In other words, it is the indicator in the most alarming state according to the academic community, suggesting the absence of tools and strategies capable of identifying the abilities and potential of each individual. In this regard, we highlight the importance

of the cultural value that the curriculum and evaluation exert on higher education and also affirm that the educational institution "must express, through curriculum and evaluation, the educational intentions of planning and its development to obtain results that do not end in themselves, but that, articulated, develop teaching and learning" [27].

The authors add that, in most cases, there is curricular flexibility, however, when it comes to evaluation, the objective remains: the need to examine due to the rooted aspects of the evaluation processes. In this sense, it is also observed that the indicator "8.1 Regulation of inclusive education" problematizes actions that favor education in an inclusive perspective as well as institutional self-assessment. Thus, the relationship between these indicators reinforces the need for initiatives outlined in the Institutional Development Plan [28], such as the "regulation of actions to promote inclusive education through the improvement of the evaluation system for programs, projects, courses, events, and university extension activities to demonstrate qualitative impact and proven social transformation" and also the "implementation and development of continuous assessment programs to improve planning, services, and informational products offered by libraries" [28].

On the other hand, indicators "6.3 policies in inclusive education" and "8.3 Accessible information system" reinforce that the academic community does not recognize the existence of policies that propose the creation of agreements between institutions and promote research in the field of inclusive education, as well as an accessible information system that can contribute to the development of policies within this theme. However, the HEI has a resolution that regulates these agreements, favoring the participation of the academic community in partnerships and scientific and cultural exchange activities with institutions in other countries [29]. However, there is no identification of the target audience, and so they fail to indicate the specific demands of different groups at the university, which may explain the low response percentages observed. In this regard, in the IES focused on in this research, only more recently there has been the development of policies aimed at addressing the study's theme, focused on accessibility and inclusion standards at the university [30], which are expressed through calls for research incentives with the offer of scholarships aimed at benefiting students covered by affirmative action policies (or quotas), including people with disabilities, who became part of the public covered by these policies only in 2016 under Law No. 13.409 [2].

In addition to Resolution No. 48 [29] and Ordinance No. 69 [30], Resolution No. 52 [31], which regulates the Local Accessibility and Inclusion Commission - CLAI [32] and the Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion Research Network - REPADI [33], it is worth noting the more recent creation of the Coordination of Affirmative Actions, Diversity, and Inclusion - CAADI [34]. These guidelines reinforce the institutional commitment to the development of inclusive policies for diverse bodies present in universities, which may sometimes require resources to address their specific needs, whether educational or otherwise. Thus, these committees can

facilitate the creation and implementation of affirmative educational policies that include the participation of vulnerable groups in their development.

It is known that policies play a fundamental role in the functioning of a society. Therefore, when we talk about inclusive educational policies, we are dealing with rules, laws, and resolutions that directly affect the functioning of educational institutions with the aim of making them inclusive. However, these policies do not become implemented and effective without the participation of the community. Through policies, society can make progress in various areas, and in the case of education, policies play an important role in the process of inclusion, promoting accessibility, and removing barriers to participation and learning in different educational contexts.

In this sense, one of the stages of this research conducted a survey of institutional policies that could contribute to understanding the indicators of the INES observed by the participants of the research and that would require greater as well as the development of inclusive affirmative action policies in the university in attention to the identified demands.

When it comes to institutional policies directly related to INES indicators, the predominant document is the University's Institutional Development Plan (PDI). The PDI is designed to promote the evolution and improvement of the institution. It also encompasses various aspects that support the university, including teaching, research, extension, academic management, human resources, infrastructure, technology, social responsibility, among others. And enables, in line with INES, the evaluation of performance indicators in order to achieve the goals also proposed in the document. For this reason it can be said that the implementation of INES as an institutional tool can contribute to the institution to revisit its PDI, considered a document of extreme importance for promoting the quality of education at this level of education. Thus, the academic community must take the lead in the preparation of the PDI, characterized as a guide of internal policies that corroborate for the better functioning of the university.

It is important to highlight that its use has allowed for a nuanced understanding that inclusive institutional policies should embrace everyone. Additionally, affirmative policies emerge with the intention of reducing discrimination and prejudice still present in universities, aiming to promote equal opportunities with equity for vulnerable minorities (women, Black people, Indigenous people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people with disabilities), while also considering the possibilities of intersection between these groups. Thus, such policies are directed towards reservation of seats and the implementation of quotas, as well as scholarships and initiatives to encourage participation and retention, combating inequalities and promoting greater representation of minority groups in vulnerable situations. Furthermore, taking into account the characteristics that make up one's identity means paying attention to the particularities or specificities of each group within the population. To achieve the ideal of equality or equal access, actions that promote inclusion with

proportional representation of members of vulnerable groups in various social spaces are essential. These actions can occur through affirmative action policies because affirmative actions are, therefore, a reasonably effective remedy for these problems [36].

It should also be noted that the institutional affirmative action policies that guide university policies were not designed to recognize and/or consider the demands of students with SEN in an intersectional way. In the historical context, affirmative action [1] has been widely discussed apart from the foundations of inclusive educational policies which, among other reasons, advocate protective measures and the recognition of fundamental rights of access to higher education for a certain section of the population, considered to be a special education public, among whom they are identified in a situation of disability [2].

This topic also appears timidly in discussions involving the presence of these groups in primary and secondary education. It is a fact that a higher education institution should prioritize quality and adhere to the principles of inclusive education and the demands of different groups within educational institutions. In this regard, the institution at the center of this study has implemented some strategies based on affirmative actions aimed at ensuring the rights of all, including people with disabilities. This process gains momentum with the creation of the Coordination of Affirmative Actions, Diversity, and Inclusion – CAADI [34], which aims to develop "actions towards the debate and promotion of affirmative policies (reservation of seats and quotas), as well as the fight against the validation of violence and all forms of discrimination, based on human rights" [34].

Among these actions are the creation of pedagogical support centers, affirmative action scholarships, diversity, and inclusion; guidance booklets, lecture series, and ongoing training for teachers and staff, among others. According to the statement made by the president of CAADI during a regular meeting of the Council for Teaching, Research, and Extension (CTRE) [37], future actions of this coordination include expanding the local pedagogical support centers to a pedagogical support group, as well as the establishment of regulations on inclusive language and the creation of a booklet on affirmative actions in postgraduate programs. However, the results of the data obtained in this research do not reflect the recognition of these movements that also include people with disabilities as beneficiaries of affirmative institutional actions and policies.

Therefore, it is imperative to emphasize that institutional evaluation should call upon and/or engage the participation of all members of the academic community. Thus, the use of INES has proven to be an instrument that enhances the debate around existing policies, based on indicators that aim to transform existing cultures into a more inclusive and intersectional perspective on the emphasized topic.

## 4. Conclusion

The impact of affirmative action policies in higher

education has become increasingly evident. However, it cannot be guaranteed that these policies promote an inclusive university environment. This article has highlighted the need to implement a system capable of evaluating the quality of higher education from an inclusive perspective. The application of INES, although it did not yield significant results, suggests that many factors guide the relationships between pedagogical and administrative praxis in the university, to make it more accessible and inclusive over time.

Adopting tools that allow for institutional assessment dedicated to devising an improvement plan for higher education in Brazil has been considered a necessary strategy in this context. Involving the academic community in their role in shaping existing policies can generate more favorable indicators for the consolidation of more accessible and inclusive environments. The study highlights the need for procedures that generate indicators capable of signaling aspects of the quality of education offered in Higher Education from an intersectional perspective, which can be a promising path toward a more democratic and inclusive university.

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