

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND TEACHER MENTAL HEALTH: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of contemporary educational policies, promoting access, participation, and learning for all students in school environments that respect diversity. However, the expansion of inclusive practices has been accompanied by new demands on teachers, who frequently face excessive workloads, complex pedagogical demands, and structural limitations that may compromise their mental health and professional performance. This chapter aims to analyze the challenges related to teacher mental health in the context of inclusive education and to discuss strategies for building sustainable school environments that reconcile inclusion, educational quality, and the recognition of education professionals. The study is characterized as an integrative literature review based on the

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analysis of scientific studies published in national and international databases, as well as legal and regulatory documents concerning inclusive education and policies for recognizing and supporting teachers. The findings indicate that factors such as insufficient continuing professional development, a shortage of pedagogical resources, a lack of multidisciplinary support, and the intensification of administrative demands contribute to increased occupational stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among teachers. It is concluded that the consolidation of sustainable school environments depends on coordination among public policies, institutional investment, participatory school management, and ongoing mental health promotion initiatives, thereby strengthening both school inclusion and teachers' quality of life and professional development.

Keywords: Continuing professional development, Inclusive education, Sustainable school environments, Teacher mental health, Teacher recognition.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has occupied a central position in debates concerning educational quality and the guarantee of the right to learn, establishing itself as a guiding principle of public education policies in recent decades. Grounded in the principles of equity, respect for diversity, and the participation of all students, this perspective seeks to ensure that children, adolescents, and young people have access to educational opportunities in school environments that value their individual characteristics and promote their holistic development. In Brazil, this commitment is supported by legal provisions such as the 1988 Federal Constitution, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional—Law No. 9,394/1996), the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Política Nacional de Educação Especial na Perspectiva da Educação Inclusiva; Brazil, 2008), and the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Lei Brasileira de Inclusão da Pessoa com Deficiência—Law No. 13,146/2015), which reinforce the responsibility of the State and educational institutions to build inclusive education systems.

Although regulatory advances have significantly expanded access to mainstream education for students who are the target population of special education, the effective implementation of inclusion continues to face challenges related to the conditions under which teachers work. The need to plan diversified pedagogical strategies, adapt teaching resources, accommodate different learning paces, and promote collaborative practices requires teachers to possess increasingly broad competencies, often without adequate institutional conditions for meeting these demands. This situation demonstrates that consolidating inclusive education depends not only on guaranteeing access to school but also on providing appropriate support to the professionals responsible for implementing inclusive policies.

In this regard, Maria Teresa Eglér Mantoan (2015) emphasizes that school inclusion entails transforming institutional culture and pedagogical practices and goes beyond merely placing students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. According to the author, building a genuinely inclusive school presupposes structural changes, ongoing educator development, and the reorganization of educational processes, allowing diversity to be understood as a constitutive element of the school environment.

Alongside the strengthening of inclusive policies, concern regarding teachers' mental health has increased. The expansion of pedagogical responsibilities, combined with heavy workloads, bureaucratic requirements, insufficient resources, and limited institutional support, may contribute to occupational stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and burnout syndrome. These factors compromise not only teachers' well-being but also the quality of pedagogical practices and relationships within the school environment, highlighting the need to understand mental health as an essential component of sustainable inclusive education.

According to Michael Fullan (2007), educational reforms produce more consistent results when accompanied by investment in teacher recognition, collaborative leadership, and continuing professional development. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that sustainable education systems depend on building professional capital capable of strengthening collective work, pedagogical innovation, and the quality of teachers' working conditions.

In the field of occupational health, Maslach and Leiter (2016) demonstrate that professions characterized by intensive human interaction are more vulnerable to psychological illness when subject to high demands and limited organizational support. In education, this situation is particularly relevant given the increasing complexity of inclusive practices, which require teachers to adapt continually, pursue professional development, and sustain a high degree of emotional involvement.

Brazilian authors such as Libâneo (2013) and Saviani (2019) emphasize that educational quality is directly related to the objective working conditions provided to teachers. Professional recognition, continuing professional development, democratic management, the availability of pedagogical resources, and multidisciplinary support are therefore indispensable to the effective and sustainable implementation of school inclusion, benefiting students and educators alike.

Against this backdrop, the present study is guided by the following question: What challenges affect the promotion of mental health among teachers working in inclusive education contexts, and what strategies can contribute to building more sustainable school environments?

Based on this problem, the general objective of this chapter is to analyze the relationship between inclusive education and teacher mental health, discussing the main challenges faced by teachers and identifying strategies capable of promoting sustainable school environments grounded in professional recognition and educational quality.

The specific objectives are to understand the legal and pedagogical foundations of inclusive education; identify factors associated with mental illness among teachers working in inclusive contexts; analyze the influence of working conditions and continuing professional development on professional well-being; and discuss institutional strategies aimed at strengthening teacher mental health and the sustainability of inclusive practices.

The relevance of this study is associated with the growth of discussions concerning school inclusion and the need to broaden the debate regarding teachers' working conditions. Although the literature presents significant advances in the implementation of inclusive policies, further studies

integrating pedagogical, organizational, and psychosocial dimensions are still needed to demonstrate that the promotion of inclusion must proceed in conjunction with initiatives aimed at recognizing and caring for education professionals.

From a theoretical perspective, this chapter draws on the contributions of Mantoan (2015), Libâneo (2013), Saviani (2019), Fullan (2007), Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), and Maslach and Leiter (2016), as well as Brazilian legislation concerning inclusive education. These frameworks support the understanding that sustainable school environments are built by coordinating public policies, democratic management, continuing professional development, multidisciplinary support, and ongoing mental health promotion initiatives, ensuring that school inclusion is accompanied by adequate conditions for the practice of teaching.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory research approach conducted through an integrative literature review. This methodological approach was selected because it enables the collection, critical analysis, and synthesis of scientific evidence concerning the relationship among inclusive education, teacher mental health, and strategies for building sustainable school environments. In addition to bringing together different theoretical perspectives, an integrative review makes it possible to identify knowledge gaps and understand how studies have addressed the challenges teachers face in the context of inclusive policies.

According to Gil (2022), descriptive studies seek to characterize phenomena and establish relationships among variables within a particular context, whereas exploratory studies help broaden the understanding of complex topics that are still undergoing scientific consolidation. Combining these approaches proved appropriate for analyzing the factors that influence teacher well-being and discussing strategies capable of strengthening school inclusion sustainably.

Regarding technical procedures, an integrative literature review was selected because it makes it possible to systematize knowledge produced in different contexts, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the topic under investigation. According to Souza, Silva, and Carvalho (2010), this method enables the integration of findings from studies with different methodological designs, contributing to the development of a broad understanding of the phenomenon under study and informing future research and professional practice.

INFORMATION COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The literature search was conducted in national and international databases widely used in the fields of Education and Health, including SciELO, the Virtual Health Library (Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde—BVS), ERIC, the CAPES Journals Portal (Portal de Periódicos CAPES), Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. Official documents published by the Ministry of Education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and Brazilian legislation concerning inclusive education were also consulted.

The searches employed descriptors in Portuguese and English combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR, including the Portuguese terms *educação inclusiva*, *saúde mental docente*, *bem-estar do professor*, and *ambientes escolares sustentáveis*, and the English terms *inclusive education*, *teacher mental health*, *teacher well-being*, and *inclusive school*.

The materials included scientific articles, books, book chapters, master's dissertations, doctoral theses, and institutional documents published preferably between 2015 and 2026, available in full text, and directly related to the research objective. Duplicate studies, publications lacking a consistent scientific foundation, works addressing only the clinical aspects of special education, and studies that did not establish a relationship among school inclusion, teachers' working conditions, and mental health were excluded.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

After the publications had been selected, the material was read both exploratorily and analytically, after which the information was organized into thematic categories related to the research objectives. The evidence identified was grouped according to the main areas of discussion found in the literature, making it possible to analyze the challenges teachers face, the factors associated with mental illness, and the strategies described for strengthening inclusive and sustainable school environments.

Data interpretation was based on a thematic analysis of the literature, seeking to identify convergences, divergences, and contributions among the selected studies. As Bardin (2016) emphasizes, thematic categorization facilitates the systematic organization of information and enables consistent interpretations of complex phenomena, even when content analysis is not conducted in the strict sense.

METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The adoption of a qualitative approach is justified by the multidimensional nature of the object under investigation, since the relationship between inclusive education and teacher mental health encompasses pedagogical, institutional, social, and emotional aspects that cannot be understood solely through quantitative indicators. Analyzing the literature makes it possible to understand how different factors affect teachers' daily work and how educational policies, management practices, and working conditions influence the development of healthier school environments.

Within this context, the frameworks proposed by Mantoan (2015), Libâneo (2013), Saviani (2019), Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), and Maslach and Leiter (2016) provide theoretical support for understanding that the effectiveness of inclusive education depends on coordination among continuing professional development, professional recognition, institutional support, and the promotion of educators' mental health.

Thus, the adopted methodology makes it possible to integrate different scientific perspectives and produce a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and strategies related to building sustainable school

environments. By bringing together evidence from the fields of Education, Psychology, Public Health, and Public Policy, this study seeks to contribute to strengthening inclusive practices that reconcile educational quality, teacher well-being, and institutional sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature analyzed demonstrates that the effective implementation of inclusive education depends on a set of factors that extend beyond guaranteeing students access to mainstream education. Although Brazilian legislation has brought about significant advances in expanding the right to education, several studies demonstrate that school attendance, participation, and success are directly related to the institutional conditions provided to schools and education professionals. Within this context, the development of sustainable school environments emerges as an essential element in ensuring the quality of inclusive practices and preserving teachers' mental health.

According to Mantoan (2015), school inclusion should be understood as an ongoing process of transforming pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and school organization. Responsibility for inclusion therefore cannot be assigned exclusively to teachers; rather, it must be shared among administrators, pedagogical teams, families, and public policies capable of providing educational institutions with ongoing support.

The literature review revealed that a lack of adequate teaching conditions remains one of the principal obstacles to consolidating inclusive education. Excessive workloads, limitations in specialized training, shortages of teaching resources, and inadequate specialized support are among the factors most frequently associated with teachers' psychological distress and the diminished quality of pedagogical practices.

Table 1

Main Challenges in Building Sustainable School Environments

Identified challenges	Effects on teaching practice
Excessive workload	Increased physical and emotional strain
Insufficient training in inclusive education	Lack of confidence in conducting pedagogical practices
Limited pedagogical resources	Difficulty diversifying teaching strategies
Lack of multidisciplinary support	Accumulation of responsibilities by the teacher
Inadequate school facilities	Reduced effectiveness of inclusive initiatives
Excessive administrative duties	Less time to plan and monitor students' progress

Source: Prepared by the author based on Mantoan (2015), Libâneo (2013), Saviani (2019), and Maslach and Leiter (2016).

The studies demonstrate that the intensification of professional demands contributes to occupational stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, particularly when teachers are required to address simultaneously the pedagogical, administrative, and socioemotional demands present in inclusive classrooms. Maslach and Leiter (2016) emphasize that organizational environments characterized by intense pressure and limited institutional support are more likely to trigger work-related illness.

Another aspect widely emphasized in the literature concerns the importance of continuing professional development in strengthening teachers' professional confidence and expanding their ability to respond to the different educational needs encountered in everyday school life. Teachers who regularly participate in professional development tend to develop greater autonomy in making curricular adaptations, employing diversified methodologies, and establishing collaborative practices.

Table 2
Contributions of Continuing Professional Development to Sustainable School Environments

Strengthened dimensions	Observed benefits
Updating knowledge	Greater mastery of inclusive practices
Pedagogical planning	Organization of more diversified strategies
Collaborative work	Integration among teachers and support teams
Professional development	Increased teacher confidence and autonomy
Methodological innovation	Expanded learning opportunities
Professional well-being	Reduced insecurity and occupational stress

Source: Prepared by the author based on Libâneo (2013), Saviani (2019), Nóvoa (2022), and Mantoan (2015).

In addition to teacher development, the studies analyzed indicate that the sustainability of inclusive processes depends on coordinated work among different professionals and the implementation of institutional policies focused on caring for educators. The presence of school psychologists, educational psychologists, Specialized Educational Services professionals (Atendimento Educacional Especializado—AEE), social workers, and committed management teams helps both to support students and to reduce the burden placed on teachers.

In this context, sustainable school environments are characterized by the promotion of collaborative relationships, collective participation in pedagogical decision-making, professional recognition, and ongoing investment in infrastructure, educational resources, and psychosocial support. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) emphasize that educational reforms produce lasting results only when they reconcile pedagogical innovation, professional development, and stronger working conditions.

Table 3

Strategies for Promoting Sustainable School Environments and Strengthening Teacher Mental Health

Institutional strategies	Expected outcomes
Ongoing continuing professional development	Improvement of inclusive practices
Multidisciplinary support	Shared pedagogical responsibilities
Mental health promotion programs	Prevention of stress and burnout
Participatory school management	Strengthening of a collaborative culture
Investment in infrastructure and resources	Improved teaching conditions
Teacher recognition policies	Greater professional satisfaction and career retention

Source: Prepared by the author based on Fullan (2007), Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), Libâneo (2013), Nóvoa (2022), and UNESCO (2020).

An integrated analysis of the evidence makes it possible to understand teacher mental health and inclusive education as complementary and interdependent dimensions. Consolidating inclusive practices depends not only on legal provisions but also on creating institutional conditions that ensure pedagogical support, professional recognition, and care for educators. In this sense, investing in sustainable school environments is a strategy capable of promoting educational quality, teacher well-being, and the effective realization of every student’s right to learn.

CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to analyze the relationship between inclusive education and teacher mental health, seeking to understand the challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive practices and to discuss strategies capable of promoting sustainable school environments. The analysis of the literature showed that school inclusion represents a significant advance in guaranteeing the right to education. Its effective implementation, however, requires more than legal provisions; it demands institutional conditions that support both student learning and the well-being of education professionals.

The studies reviewed demonstrated that factors such as excessive workloads, insufficient continuing professional development, shortages of pedagogical resources, structural limitations, and a lack of multidisciplinary support compromise professional performance and increase teachers’

vulnerability to occupational stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Conversely, schools that invest in teacher recognition, participatory management, continuing professional development, and stronger collaborative work are better positioned to develop consistent and enduring inclusive practices.

The study also demonstrated that building sustainable school environments depends on coordination among public policies, educational management, and institutional initiatives focused on teacher care. Promoting teacher mental health should be understood as an integral component of educational quality, since professionals who are valued, supported, and emotionally healthy are better able to develop inclusive pedagogical practices, establish more meaningful educational relationships, and respond effectively to students' different needs.

In addition to bringing together current scientific evidence, this study helps broaden the understanding that school inclusion and teacher recognition are complementary and inseparable processes. Accordingly, administrators, public policymakers, and educational institutions may use the reflections presented here to guide initiatives that strengthen continuing professional development, expand multidisciplinary support, improve working conditions, and foster a school culture grounded in cooperation, respect for diversity, and the sustainability of educational practices.

Finally, it is recommended that future research conduct empirical studies in different educational contexts, investigate the effects of institutional programs aimed at promoting teacher mental health, and evaluate the impact of teaching-support strategies on the consolidation of inclusive education. Further investigation may inform the formulation of more effective education policies capable of ensuring sustainable and inclusive school environments committed to learning, professional recognition, and the social quality of education.

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