

SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES OF TARGET 4 OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION PLAN (2014–2024)

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Abstract

This study analyzes the progress and challenges of Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective during the term of the National Education Plan (PNE) 2014–2024, with an emphasis on the implementation of Target 4. The research was conducted through a Systematic Literature Review using a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach, guided by the recommendations of the PRISMA 2020 protocol. Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, SciELO, and the CAPES Journals Portal, resulting in the selection of six studies that met the established criteria. The findings revealed progress in expanding the access of students who are the target population of Special Education to mainstream classrooms and in broadening the provision of Specialized Educational Services. However, challenges remain regarding teacher education, accessibility, the availability of pedagogical and technological resources, funding, and regional inequalities. The analysis demonstrates that increased enrollment represents significant progress but is insufficient to ensure effective inclusion. It concludes that consolidating Special Education from an inclusive perspective requires continuity in public policies, sustained investment, stronger professional training, and improved conditions to ensure students' continued enrollment, participation, and learning.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, National Education Plan, Special Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective has become one of the principal areas of educational policy aimed at guaranteeing the right to education for all. Grounded in the principles of equal opportunity, recognition of diversity, and the removal of barriers to learning and participation, this perspective represents a significant departure from educational models historically characterized by the segregation of students with disabilities. At the international level, documents such as the 1994 Salamanca Statement and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the United Nations in 2006, reaffirmed countries' commitment to building inclusive education systems and guided reforms in public policies and pedagogical practices.

In Brazil, this movement was strengthened by the 1988 Federal Constitution, which established education as a right of all and provided for specialized educational services, preferably within the mainstream education system. Subsequently, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Law No. 9,394/1996), the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008), the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 13,146/2015), and the National Education Plan (PNE), established by Law No. 13,005/2014, expanded the body of legal provisions intended to promote inclusive education and guarantee access, continued enrollment, participation, and learning for students who are the target population of Special Education.

Among the instruments for educational planning, the National Education Plan (2014–2024) is particularly significant. It established twenty targets for the development of Brazilian education during its term. Among them, Target 4 assumed a strategic role by providing for universal access to basic education and Specialized Educational Services (*Atendimento Educacional Especializado – AEE*) for students with disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and high abilities or giftedness, preferably within the mainstream education system, thereby reaffirming the government's commitment to building an inclusive education system.

According to the most recent data from the Basic Education School Census, released by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira – INEP), enrollment among students who are the target population of Special Education in mainstream classrooms has grown continuously over the last decade. This progress reflects the effects of the public inclusion policies implemented in the country. Nevertheless, the indicators also demonstrate that expanded access does not eliminate challenges related to continued enrollment, learning, accessibility, and the provision of Specialized Educational Services (AEE), all of which remain central to the consolidation of inclusive education.

Educational indicators demonstrate significant progress in expanding these students' access to mainstream schools over the last decade. Data from the Basic Education School Census show continuous growth in Special Education enrollment in mainstream classrooms, a result associated with the expansion of inclusion policies, the provision of Specialized Educational Services, and the implementation of strategies set out in the National Education Plan. However, although the indicators reveal increased access, the scientific literature emphasizes that challenges persist regarding continued enrollment, learning, teacher education, accessibility, public-policy funding, and the reduction of regional inequalities. This indicates that effective school inclusion requires measures extending beyond a student's simple admission to school.

In this context, it is necessary to analyze the extent to which the objectives established under Target 4 had effectively been achieved by the end of the National Education Plan's term. Increased enrollment alone does not ensure high-quality inclusive education. It is therefore essential to investigate whether the policies implemented helped guarantee appropriate conditions for the learning, participation, and development of students who are the target population of Special Education. This discussion is especially relevant given the need to assess the results produced by the PNE and inform the planning of new educational policies aimed at consolidating inclusive education in the country.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: What were the principal achievements and challenges in implementing Target 4 of the National Education Plan (2014–2024) for the consolidation of Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective in Brazil?

This research is justified by the academic, social, and educational importance of the subject. From a scientific standpoint, it contributes to systematizing the knowledge produced about the implementation of PNE Target 4 by identifying convergences, gaps, and challenges highlighted in the specialized literature. From a social perspective, the investigation makes it possible to understand the limitations and potential of public policies on school inclusion, thereby providing a basis for improving government initiatives and educational practices. Given that the National Education Plan ended in 2024, it is particularly timely to analyze the results achieved and reflect on the pathways required to strengthen Special Education from an inclusive perspective.

The general objective of this research is to analyze the progress and challenges of Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective during the term of the National Education Plan (2014–2024), with an emphasis on implementing Target 4. Specifically, it seeks to identify the advances promoted by public school-inclusion policies; analyze challenges related to teacher education, Specialized Educational Services, and accessibility conditions; and discuss the contributions of the scientific literature to understanding the results achieved over the term of the National Education Plan.

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative Systematic Literature Review was conducted based on an analysis of scientific articles, official documents, and legislation concerning Special Education, Inclusive Education, and the National Education Plan. The methodological procedures adopted are presented in the following section.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is characterized as a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This method was selected because of the need to gather, organize, and critically analyze scientific research on Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective, with an emphasis on implementing Target 4 of the National Education Plan (2014–2024).

A Systematic Literature Review differs from a traditional literature review in that it follows predefined criteria for searching, selecting, analyzing, and interpreting studies. It therefore seeks to reduce potential bias in the research process, making the findings more reliable, transparent, and reproducible by other researchers.

The research was guided by the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) protocol, which is widely adopted in national and international scientific research to guide the preparation and reporting of systematic reviews. The use of this protocol contributes to the transparency, methodological rigor, and reproducibility of the process used to select, analyze, and synthesize the studies included in the review.

SEARCH STRATEGY

The search for studies was conducted between April and May 2026 in the following databases: Google Scholar; Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO); and the Journals Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES).

These databases were selected because they contain substantial national and international scientific output in Education, including articles published in journals recognized by the academic community.

The following descriptors were used to locate the studies: Special Education; Inclusive Education; National Education Plan; PNE Target 4; Specialized Educational Services; Teacher Education; School Inclusion.

The studies were located using previously defined descriptors combined through the Boolean operators **AND** and **OR**, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1
Systematic review search strategy

Database	Descriptors used	Boolean operators
Google Scholar	“Special Education”; “Inclusive Education”; “National Education Plan”; “PNE Target 4”; “Specialized Educational Services”; “Teacher Education”	AND / OR
SciELO	“Inclusive Education”; “Special Education”; “National Education Plan”; “Target 4”	AND / OR
CAPES Journals Portal	“Special Education”; “School Inclusion”; “Specialized Educational Services”; “Teacher Education”	AND / OR

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

To ensure the quality of the review, criteria were established to select only studies directly related to the objective of this research.

The following inclusion criteria were considered:

- scientific articles published between 2003 and 2025;
- full texts available;
- publications in Portuguese;
- studies concerning Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective, Target 4 of the National Education Plan, public school-inclusion policies, teacher education, and Specialized Educational Services.

The following were excluded from the analysis:

- duplicate articles;
- undergraduate capstone projects;

- brief or extended abstracts;
- editorials;
- experience reports without a scientific foundation;
- studies not directly related to the subject under investigation.

STUDY-SELECTION PROCESS

The studies were selected in four successive stages:

1. identification of studies in the databases;
2. title screening;
3. abstract screening;
4. full-text review of the selected studies.

Initially, 48 publications were identified.

After the titles and abstracts had been read, 26 studies were excluded because they did not meet the research objectives.

The remaining 22 papers underwent full-text review.

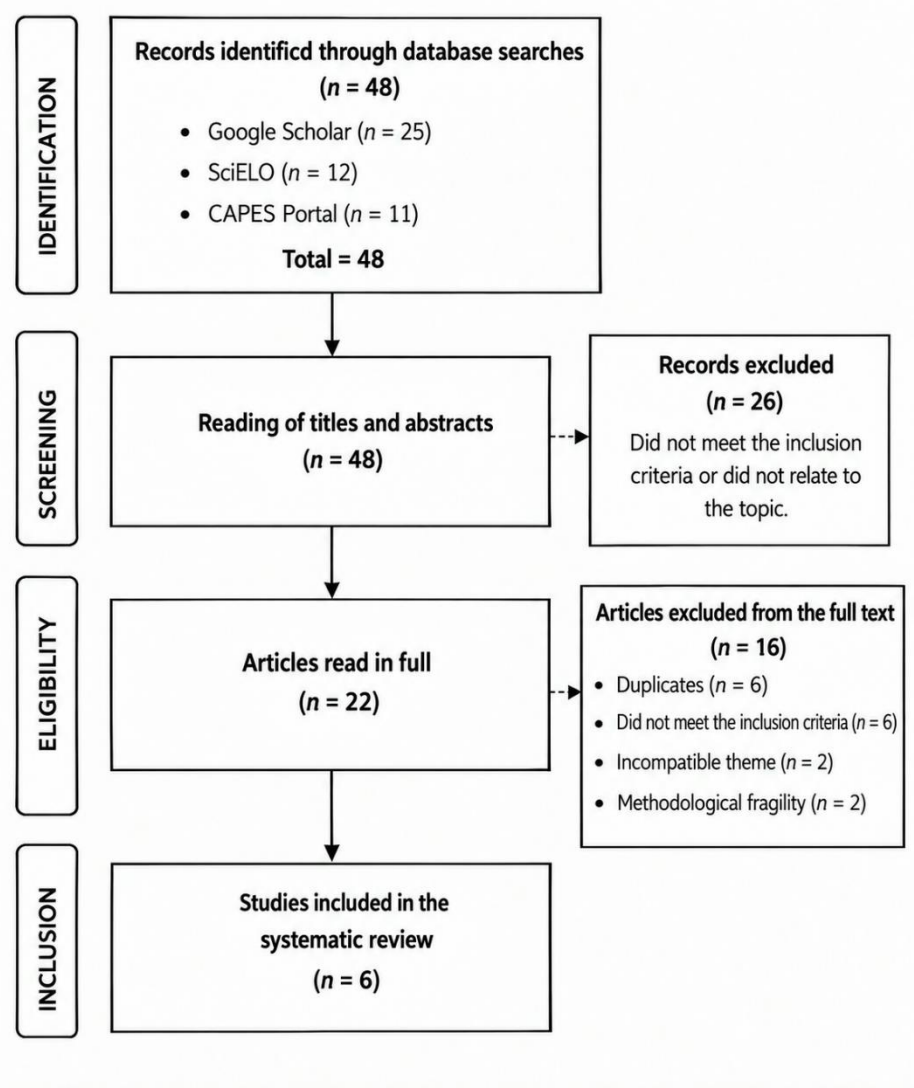
Following application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 16 studies were excluded because they were duplicates, were methodologically unsuitable, or did not specifically address the implementation of Target 4 of the National Education Plan.

At the end of the process, six scientific articles were selected and constituted the analytical corpus of this Systematic Literature Review. The final composition of the sample demonstrates the methodological rigor applied during study selection. Although more publications were initially identified, few specifically addressed the implementation of Target 4 of the National Education Plan from the perspective of Inclusive Special Education while simultaneously meeting the eligibility criteria established in this research.

Although the final number of studies is small, this number reflects the methodological rigor applied during selection, since few papers specifically addressed implementation of Target 4 of the National Education Plan from the perspective of Inclusive Special Education.

Flowchart 1

Study-selection process according to the PRISMA protocol



Source: Prepared by the authors (2026), adapted from PRISMA (2020).

After selection, the studies were organized into a synthesis table containing authorship, year of publication, objective, method used, principal findings, and contribution to this research.

Table 2

Characteristics of the selected studies

Author(s)	Year	Study objective	Method	Principal findings
Macena and Justino	2018	To analyze the challenges posed by Target 4 of the National Education Plan for Special Education.	Documentary study	They identified progress in access but difficulties related to continued enrollment, infrastructure, and teacher education.
Souza and Prieto	2016	To discuss public policies concerning Special Education within the PNE.	Literature review	They emphasize the importance of coordination among funding, teacher education, and public policies.
França and Prieto	2023	To assess the results of Target 4 of the National Education Plan.	Documentary research	They identified growth in enrollment in mainstream classrooms, although regional inequalities persist.
Glat and Blanco	2007	To discuss the foundations of Inclusive Education and teacher education.	Literature review	They demonstrate that inclusion depends on school reorganization and ongoing teacher education.
Mantoan	2003	To present the principles of school inclusion.	Theoretical work	She advocates reorganizing schools to accommodate student diversity.
Sasaki	2003	To discuss the foundations of social and educational inclusion.	Theoretical work	He advocates removing architectural, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

DATA-ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Following article selection, all studies included in the review were read in full.

The information was organized into thematic categories, allowing convergences, divergences, and gaps in the scientific literature to be identified.

The categories defined for the analysis were:

- progress in Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective;
- implementation of Target 4 of the National Education Plan;
- teacher education;
- Specialized Educational Services;
- challenges to consolidating inclusive education.

The studies were subsequently analyzed comparatively to understand how different researchers interpret the results of public policies concerning Special Education and which challenges remain in making school inclusion effective in the Brazilian context.

This strategy enabled the construction of a critical analysis of the literature, relating the findings to the objectives of the present research and contributing to a broader understanding of the progress and challenges of Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective during the term of the National Education Plan (2014–2024).

SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE IN BRAZIL

Brazilian Special Education has undergone profound transformations in recent decades, reflecting social, political, and educational changes associated with recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities. For much of history, a welfare-based and segregating model predominated, under which students with disabilities were served in specialized institutions, isolated from mainstream school life and opportunities for social participation. This paradigm gradually began to be replaced by an understanding grounded in human rights, the recognition of diversity, and the promotion of inclusive education.

Internationally, the Salamanca Statement, adopted in 1994 during the World Conference on Special Needs Education, represented a milestone in consolidating inclusive education by affirming that all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or cultural characteristics, should learn together in mainstream schools, which must be prepared to address students' different needs. Subsequently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promulgated in Brazil with constitutional status, strengthened the right to inclusive education at all levels, prohibited every form of discrimination, and established the obligation of States to promote inclusive education systems.

In Brazil, the 1988 Federal Constitution introduced a new paradigm by establishing education as a right of all and, in Article 208, imposing upon the government the duty to guarantee specialized educational services for persons with disabilities, preferably within the mainstream education system. This principle was subsequently reaffirmed by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Law No. 9,394/1996), which recognized Special Education as a cross-cutting modality of school

education intended for students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders, and high abilities or giftedness.

This new paradigm was consolidated with the publication of the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education in 2008. The document established that Special Education must form part of schools' pedagogical plans, complementing mainstream education through Specialized Educational Services (AEE), the removal of barriers to learning, and the promotion of accessibility. From this perspective, inclusion ceases to mean merely admitting a student to a mainstream school and comes to encompass guarantees of effective conditions for participation, continued enrollment, learning, and development.

For Mantoan (2003), school inclusion represents a structural change in the organization of schools and requires overcoming historically entrenched exclusionary practices. The author argues that diversity must be understood as an inherent characteristic of the educational process and that schools must reorganize their pedagogical practices to meet the needs of all students, rather than only those considered to fall within a standard of normality.

From a similar perspective, Glat and Blanco (2007) maintain that building inclusive education systems depends on transforming pedagogical practices, institutional reorganization, and the ongoing education of education professionals. According to the authors, school inclusion requires changes extending beyond isolated curricular adaptations and calls for the development of a school culture committed to equity, participation, and respect for differences.

Sassaki (2003), in turn, understands inclusion as a continuous process of societal transformation in which architectural, pedagogical, communicational, and attitudinal barriers must be progressively removed to ensure equal opportunities. From this perspective, responsibility for inclusion does not rest solely with students but with society itself, which must adapt its spaces, services, and institutions to guarantee the full participation of all people.

In recent decades, progress in public policies has been reflected in growing enrollment among students who are the target population of Special Education in mainstream basic-education classrooms. School Census data indicate that most of these students are currently enrolled in mainstream schools, demonstrating the gradual consolidation of the school-inclusion policy. Nevertheless, researchers such as Macena and Justino (2018) and França and Prieto (2023) emphasize that expanded access does not necessarily mean that inclusion has become effective. Challenges remain regarding the quality of learning, teacher education, accessibility, the provision of Specialized Educational Services, and the availability of appropriate pedagogical resources.

In this context, Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective constitutes a public policy that remains under continual construction. Although legislative and institutional progress has significantly expanded access to mainstream schools, the consolidation of genuinely inclusive education systems depends on sustained public investment, stronger educational policies, and a collective commitment to guaranteeing the right to high-quality education for all students.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION PLAN (2014–2024) AND TARGET 4

The National Education Plan (PNE), established by Law No. 13,005 of June 25, 2014, constitutes the principal planning instrument for Brazilian educational policies. Developed for the ten-year period from 2014 to 2024, the Plan established twenty targets and 254 strategies intended to expand access to education, improve teaching quality, enhance the status of education professionals, and reduce educational inequalities. Its preparation represented significant progress in the institutionalization of public educational policies by establishing long-term objectives and monitoring mechanisms for the development of national education.

Among the targets established, Target 4 occupies a strategic position because it specifically addresses the right to education of persons who are the target population of Special Education. Its wording provides for universal access, for the population aged four to seventeen with disabilities, autism

spectrum disorder, and high abilities or giftedness, to basic education and Specialized Educational Services (AEE), preferably within the mainstream education system, thereby ensuring an inclusive education system across all levels, stages, and modalities.

The formulation of Target 4 reflected an intense process of debate among public administrators, researchers, social movements, and organizations representing persons with disabilities. As Souza and Prieto (2016) emphasize, its wording sought to reconcile differing conceptions of Special Education by reaffirming the principle of school inclusion while recognizing the importance of specialized services as complementary support for mainstream education.

To facilitate the achievement of Target 4, the National Education Plan established several strategies, including expanding the provision of Specialized Educational Services; establishing and maintaining multifunctional resource rooms; promoting architectural and communicational accessibility; providing initial and continuing teacher education; producing accessible teaching materials; strengthening intersectoral coordination among education, health care, and social assistance; and developing mechanisms for monitoring the learning of students who are the target population of Special Education.

Table 3
Development of public Special Education policies in Brazil

Year	Document	Principal contributions to Special Education
1988	Federal Constitution	Recognized education as a right of all and guaranteed specialized educational services, preferably within the mainstream education system.
1994	Salamanca Statement	Reaffirmed the principle of inclusive education and schools for all.
1996	National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB)	Established Special Education as an educational modality.
2008	National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education	Established guidelines for Specialized Educational Services and for strengthening school inclusion.
2014	National Education Plan (Law No. 13,005/2014)	Established Target 4, aimed at universalizing access to inclusive education.
2015	Brazilian Law on Inclusion (Law No. 13,146/2015)	Consolidated the rights of persons with disabilities and strengthened educational inclusion.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Over the term of the PNE, the enrollment of these students in mainstream basic-education classrooms expanded significantly. Data released by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP) through the School Census demonstrate continuous growth in school inclusion over the last decade, indicating that most Special Education students began attending mainstream schools. These results demonstrate significant progress in public policies aimed at democratizing access to education.

More recent studies have broadened this discussion by demonstrating that monitoring Target 4 must consider not only quantitative enrollment indicators but also aspects related to the quality of school inclusion, public-policy funding, teacher education, and monitoring student learning. Research conducted by Furtado (2022) and Silva Júnior, Oliveira, and Miranda (2025) demonstrates that significant differences persist among education systems regarding implementation of the strategies established in the National Education Plan, reinforcing the need for continuous assessments of educational policies.

Nevertheless, the specialized literature emphasizes that enrollment growth alone is not a sufficient indicator for assessing the success of inclusion policy. França and Prieto (2023) argue that the effectiveness of Target 4 must be analyzed by considering not only access to school but also continued enrollment, learning, participation, and the conditions provided for students' development. Assessing the public policy therefore requires the combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Macena and Justino (2018) also emphasize that expanded access represents a major achievement of Brazilian Special Education. They nevertheless warn that challenges persist regarding the funding of inclusion policies, the unequal distribution of educational resources among the country's regions, the provision of Specialized Educational Services, and the education of the professionals responsible for implementing the measures established in the National Education Plan.

Another aspect widely discussed in the literature concerns teacher education. Although Target 4 establishes strategies aimed at preparing education professionals, various studies demonstrate that many teachers still report feeling unprepared to develop inclusive pedagogical practices, make curricular

adaptations, and use accessibility resources. This situation demonstrates that consolidating school inclusion depends not only on legal provisions but also on sustained investment in educators' initial and continuing education.

In addition to teacher education, challenges concerning school infrastructure remain present across different education systems. Architectural barriers, limited access to assistive technologies, insufficient accessible pedagogical materials, and regional inequalities in public-policy implementation continue to hinder realization of the principles established in Target 4. These limitations demonstrate that universal access must be accompanied by guarantees of appropriate conditions for students' continued enrollment and learning.

Another relevant point concerns the end of the National Education Plan's term in 2024. This milestone makes it particularly important to conduct studies assessing the results achieved over the ten-year period and identifying progress, limitations, and remaining challenges. Rather than merely verifying formal compliance with the established targets, it is necessary to understand how public policies have affected the organization of education systems and the promotion of the right to inclusive education.

Target 4 has thus become one of the principal normative instruments of Brazilian Special Education by reaffirming the government's commitment to building inclusive education systems. However, the literature analyzed demonstrates that achieving the objectives established in the National Education Plan remains contingent upon the continuity of public policies, stronger educational funding, greater emphasis on teacher education, and improved accessibility conditions, all of which are indispensable to ensuring high-quality inclusive education for all students.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND SPECIALIZED EDUCATIONAL SERVICES: CHALLENGES TO MAKING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION EFFECTIVE

The consolidation of Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective depends on a range of factors extending beyond the existence of legal provisions and public policies. Although Brazilian

legislation guarantees the right to inclusive education, realization of that right is directly related to education systems' capacity to offer pedagogical, structural, and human conditions compatible with the needs of students who are the target population of Special Education. In this context, teacher education and Specialized Educational Services (AEE) constitute two of the principal pillars supporting implementation of Target 4 of the National Education Plan.

Teachers play a central role in developing inclusive pedagogical practices. The diversity found in classrooms requires professionals who are able to recognize different ways of learning, plan flexible teaching strategies, use accessibility resources, and promote the effective participation of all students. Nevertheless, several studies demonstrate that a significant proportion of teachers still report difficulties in developing inclusive practices, especially because of shortcomings in their initial education and the limited availability of continuing-education programs.

The National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008) recognizes that preparing education professionals is an indispensable condition for building inclusive education systems. Similarly, Target 4 of the National Education Plan establishes strategies aimed at strengthening the education of teachers, school administrators, and other professionals involved in serving Special Education students.

According to Mantoan (2003), school inclusion requires a profound transformation of schools' institutional culture. For the author, teachers cease to perform exclusively the role of transmitting content and assume the role of learning mediators, developing pedagogical practices that respect differences and promote the participation of all students. This perspective presupposes changes in curriculum organization, learning assessment, and the very conception of teaching.

Consistent with this understanding, Glat and Blanco (2007) state that teacher education must promote not only technical knowledge about disability but also critical reflection on public policies, human rights, accessibility, and the construction of inclusive school environments. The authors argue that

professional development must occur continuously, linking theory and practice and fostering the development of the competencies required to work with diversity.

Despite progress in education policies, the literature demonstrates that significant challenges persist. Recent research indicates that many teachers still feel unprepared to make curricular adaptations, select accessible pedagogical resources, and develop strategies capable of meeting students' specific needs. This situation demonstrates that expanding opportunities for continuing education remains a priority for strengthening inclusive education.

Alongside teacher education, Specialized Educational Services play a fundamental role in guaranteeing the right to learning. As defined by the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education, the purpose of AEE is to identify, develop, and organize pedagogical and accessibility resources that remove barriers to student participation, complementing and supplementing their education without replacing the instruction provided in mainstream classrooms.

This understanding demonstrates that Specialized Educational Services do not constitute a parallel form of schooling but rather a service coordinated with mainstream education and aimed at promoting students' autonomy, participation, and development. From this perspective, AEE provides specialized pedagogical support, promotes the removal of barriers that hinder learning, and contributes to realizing the right to inclusive education.

During the term of the National Education Plan, the provision of multifunctional resource rooms and Specialized Educational Services expanded across various education systems. The literature nevertheless indicates that this expansion occurred unevenly among Brazilian regions, reflecting differences in education systems' investment capacity and the availability of specialized professionals.

Macena and Justino (2018) emphasize that, although expanding AEE represents significant progress in public inclusion policies, its effectiveness remains contingent upon appropriate infrastructure, accessible pedagogical resources, assistive technologies, and coordination between mainstream teachers

and specialized professionals. When these elements are absent, the service tends to lose part of its potential to promote students' learning and participation.

Another frequently mentioned challenge concerns the need for integration among the different professionals involved in the educational process. Developing inclusive practices presupposes collaboration among mainstream classroom teachers, Specialized Educational Services teachers, school administrative teams, families, and health-care and social-assistance professionals. This interdisciplinary approach broadens the capacity to identify students' educational needs and facilitates the development of more appropriate pedagogical strategies.

In addition to pedagogical considerations, making inclusive education effective requires sustained investment in physical, communicational, technological, and attitudinal accessibility. Sassaki (2003) emphasizes that inclusion becomes a reality only when the barriers present in school environments are progressively removed, allowing everyone to participate fully in educational activities on an equal basis.

The literature analyzed therefore demonstrates that teacher education and Specialized Educational Services are inseparable dimensions of Special Education policy from an Inclusive Perspective. Although significant progress was made during the term of Target 4 of the National Education Plan, challenges persist regarding professional preparation, expanded AEE provision, public-policy funding, and the reduction of regional inequalities. Overcoming these challenges is essential to consolidating genuinely inclusive education systems and guaranteeing the right to high-quality education for all students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review identified six studies that fully met the inclusion criteria established for this research. Although they use different methodological approaches, the studies analyzed converge in recognizing that implementation of Target 4 of the National Education Plan represented an important milestone in strengthening policies on Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective in Brazil. They also demonstrate, however, that expanding access to mainstream schools was insufficient to ensure the

continued enrollment, participation, and learning of students who are the target population of Special Education on an equitable basis.

Table 4
Synthesis of the thematic categories and principal evidence identified in the Systematic Literature Review

Thematic category	Principal evidence identified	Studies supporting the discussion
Expanded access to inclusive education	Growth in enrollment in mainstream basic-education classrooms.	Macena and Justino (2018); França e Prieto (2023).
Teacher education	Initial and continuing education remain insufficient to address the demands of school inclusion.	Mantoan (2003); Glat and Blanco (2007); Furtado (2022).
Specialized Educational Services	Expansion of AEE, although regional and structural inequalities persist.	Souza and Prieto (2016); Macena and Justino (2018).
Challenges related to Target 4	Continued enrollment, learning, accessibility, funding, and public-policy monitoring.	All studies analyzed.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Organizing the studies into thematic categories made it possible to identify convergences among the authors regarding the advances promoted by Target 4 of the National Education Plan while highlighting recurring challenges related to teacher education, Specialized Educational Services, public-policy funding, and the conditions required for students’ continued enrollment and learning. The following discussion is developed from these categories.

The comparative analysis of the studies made it possible to organize the results into four thematic categories: (a) expanded access to inclusive education; (b) teacher education; (c) Specialized Educational Services; and (d) challenges to making Target 4 effective. This organization facilitated a broader understanding of the progress achieved during the term of the National Education Plan and the limitations that remain in public-policy implementation.

The first category concerns expanded access to inclusive education. All the studies analyzed identify substantial growth over the last decade in the enrollment of students who are the target population of Special Education in mainstream classrooms. This result demonstrates the positive effects of the public policies implemented following publication of the National Policy on Special Education

from the Perspective of Inclusive Education and approval of the National Education Plan. Official School Census data corroborate this trend, indicating a continuous increase in these students' participation in mainstream schools and the strengthening of the principle of school inclusion.

Nevertheless, the authors analyzed unanimously state that increased enrollment cannot, in isolation, be interpreted as an indicator of public-policy success. França and Prieto (2023) argue that assessment of Target 4 must consider not only access but also continued enrollment, learning development, participation in school activities, and the actual conditions provided by educational institutions. This understanding broadens the concept of school inclusion by shifting the focus from enrollment alone to guaranteeing the right to learning.

The second category identified concerns teacher education. The studies analyzed demonstrate that it remains one of the principal challenges to consolidating Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective. Although the legislation establishes guidelines for education professionals' initial and continuing education, researchers report that many teachers still feel unprepared to develop inclusive pedagogical practices, make curricular adaptations, and use accessibility resources. This finding shows that normative progress has not yet been fully accompanied by the professional preparation required to address the diversity found in Brazilian schools.

A consensus was also identified among Mantoan (2003), Glat and Blanco (2007), and more recent studies concerning the need to understand teacher education as a continuous process of professional development. The literature emphasizes that isolated training programs are insufficient to address the complexity of inclusive education and that institutional continuing-education policies integrated into everyday school life are indispensable.

The third thematic category concerns Specialized Educational Services. The studies recognize that expanding the provision of AEE and multifunctional resource rooms constituted one of the principal achievements of national Special Education policy during the term of the National Education Plan. However, they also identify significant inequalities among different Brazilian regions in terms of

available infrastructure, numbers of specialized professionals, and the quality of the services provided. This heterogeneity demonstrates that the effectiveness of Specialized Educational Services remains contingent upon education systems' structural and financial conditions.

Another recurring issue in the literature is the need to strengthen collaboration between mainstream classroom teachers and Specialized Educational Services professionals. The studies indicate that coordination among these professionals promotes the development of more inclusive pedagogical strategies, broadens the possibilities for curricular adaptation, and contributes to student autonomy. When this integration does not occur, inclusive practices become more difficult to implement and the measures established under Target 4 are less effective.

The fourth category encompasses the principal challenges to making school-inclusion policy effective. In addition to limitations related to teacher education and Specialized Educational Services, the studies emphasize difficulties concerning public-policy funding, insufficient assistive technologies, architectural and communicational accessibility, the production of accessible pedagogical materials, and regional inequalities. These factors demonstrate that consolidating Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective depends on coordinated measures across different levels of government and sustained investment in the structure of education systems.

The comparative analysis also revealed an important shift in perspective within the scientific literature. Whereas research produced during the first decade of the 2000s focused on advocating for the right of students with disabilities to access mainstream schools, more recent studies direct their attention toward the quality of inclusion and emphasize learning, participation, continued enrollment, and students' holistic development. This shift reflects the maturation of Special Education research in Brazil and demonstrates that present-day challenges extend beyond increasing enrollment and now center on realizing the right to high-quality education.

Overall, the findings of this systematic review indicate that Target 4 of the National Education Plan promoted significant progress in consolidating Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective,

particularly with respect to expanded access to mainstream schools and stronger public policies concerning Specialized Educational Services. The literature also demonstrates, however, that structural, pedagogical, and institutional challenges persist and limit the effectiveness of these policies. The consolidation of genuinely inclusive education systems thus depends on continued public investment, stronger teacher education, improved accessibility conditions, and enhanced strategies for monitoring the learning of students who are the target population of Special Education.

Analysis of the selected studies made it possible to identify significant progress and persistent challenges related to implementing Target 4 of the National Education Plan (2014–2024). The studies demonstrate that public policies concerning Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective helped expand the access of students who are the target population of Special Education to mainstream schools, thereby strengthening the principle of inclusive education in Brazil.

One of the principal achievements identified concerns increased enrollment among students with disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders, and high abilities or giftedness in mainstream classrooms. The studies demonstrate that the inclusion policies implemented in recent decades promoted a gradual reduction in school segregation and expanded opportunities to access basic education. This situation is directly related to the guidelines established by the National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008) and the strategies set out under Target 4 of the National Education Plan.

According to Macena and Justino (2018), increased enrollment represents an important indicator of progress in inclusion policies. The authors emphasize, however, that the effectiveness of school inclusion cannot be assessed solely through quantitative indicators. For inclusion to occur effectively, appropriate conditions must be guaranteed for students' continued enrollment, participation, and learning.

Another issue frequently addressed in the studies concerns teacher education. The research analyzed indicates that insufficient specific preparation for working in inclusive contexts remains one of the principal challenges faced by education systems. Many teachers report difficulty making curricular

adaptations, using accessible pedagogical resources, and addressing the specific needs of students who are the target population of Special Education.

Glat and Blanco (2007) state that teacher education is a fundamental element in building inclusive schools. According to the authors, school inclusion requires professionals prepared to understand the diversity present in educational settings and develop pedagogical strategies that promote learning for all students. Continuing education therefore emerges as an important means of strengthening inclusive practices and improving pedagogical work.

The studies also demonstrate the importance of Specialized Educational Services (AEE) for the development of Special Education students. Establishing multifunctional resource rooms and expanding pedagogical support services represent significant achievements observed during the term of the PNE. Researchers nevertheless emphasize that regional inequalities in the provision of these services continue to hinder many students' access to specialized support.

Another challenge identified concerns the structural conditions of educational institutions. Issues related to physical accessibility, technological resources, adapted pedagogical materials, and multidisciplinary support continue to be cited as obstacles to effective school inclusion. In many schools, insufficient resources compromise student participation and limit learning opportunities.

Mantoan (2003) emphasizes that school inclusion requires transformations extending beyond the enrollment of students in mainstream schools. According to the author, pedagogical practices, school organization, and institutional culture must be changed so that diversity is recognized as a constitutive element of the educational process.

The studies analyzed also demonstrate that school inclusion must be understood as a continuous process of social construction. Sasaki (2003) emphasizes that inclusion depends not only on adaptations made by students but primarily on the ability of society and its institutions to remove barriers that hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities.

Overall, the findings of the systematic review indicate that Target 4 of the National Education Plan contributed significantly to expanding access to basic education for students who are the target population of Special Education. They also demonstrate, however, that challenges related to teacher education, Specialized Educational Services, accessibility, and schools' structural conditions must still be addressed to guarantee genuinely inclusive education.

The studies analyzed therefore converge in affirming that the progress achieved during the term of the PNE represents significant gains for Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective. Nevertheless, consolidating inclusive education systems requires sustained investment, stronger public policies, and a collective commitment to promoting the right to high-quality education for all students.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research sought to analyze the progress and challenges of Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective during the term of the National Education Plan (2014–2024), focusing on implementing Target 4. The systematic literature review made it possible to understand that public school-inclusion policies contributed significantly to expanding access to mainstream schools for students who are the target population of Special Education.

The studies analyzed demonstrated substantial growth in these students' enrollment in basic education, revealing significant progress in consolidating inclusive education in Brazil. Expanded provision of Specialized Educational Services, the implementation of multifunctional resource rooms, and stronger discussions concerning teacher education and school accessibility were also identified.

The research nevertheless revealed that effective school inclusion still faces several challenges. The principal obstacles identified include insufficient specialized teacher education; shortages of adapted pedagogical and technological resources; structural deficiencies in educational institutions; and regional inequalities in the provision of specialized services. These factors demonstrate that access to school, although essential, does not in itself guarantee students' continued enrollment, participation, and learning.

Another issue highlighted in the literature concerns the need to strengthen public policies addressing Special Education. School inclusion requires continuous investment in professional training, accessibility, educational resources, and pedagogical monitoring so that students can fully develop their potential and exercise their right to high-quality education.

It may therefore be concluded that Target 4 of the National Education Plan represented an important instrument for advancing Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective in Brazil. The results achieved during its term indicate, however, that challenges remain to be overcome before school inclusion can become effective in all educational institutions.

Although the results demonstrate significant progress in consolidating Special Education from an Inclusive Perspective, the literature indicates that implementing Target 4 remains an ongoing process. Effective school inclusion requires continuity in public policies, permanent monitoring of educational indicators, stronger teacher education, and increased investment in accessibility and Specialized Educational Services.

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