



THE INFLUENCE OF CONTACT ON SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION: STUDY WITH STUDENTS FROM BRAZILIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A influência do contato nas atitudes sociais face à inclusão: estudo com alunos de escolas públicas brasileiras

La influencia del contacto en las actitudes sociales hacia la inclusión: estudio con alumnos de escuelas públicas brasileñas

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ABSTRACT

Social attitudes towards inclusion are composed of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components and may function as predictors of behavior toward specific social groups, such as people with disabilities. These attitudes can be influenced by several factors, including gender, age, previous contact, and education. Considering this, the present study aims to analyze whether contact with people with disabilities is associated with more favorable social attitudes towards inclusion. Five hundred students aged 6 to 16 participated in the study, distributed among the early and final years of Elementary Education, from public schools from the five regions of Brazil. The Children's Scale of Social Attitudes towards Inclusion was used as the data collection instrument. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test was applied to examine differences between students with and without previous contact with people with disabilities. The results indicate no statistically significant differences in the North, Northeast, Midwest, and South regions. A statistically significant difference was identified only in the Southeast region. These findings suggest that the relationship between contact and social attitudes is not uniform across regions and may be influenced by contextual and institutional factors, in line with intergroup contact theory. Taken together, the findings highlight that contact alone does not necessarily lead to more favorable social attitudes toward inclusion, reinforcing the importance of considering the quality and context of interactions, as well as regional and educational conditions in which they occur.

Keywords: Special Education; Inclusive Education; Social Attitudes.

RESUMO

As atitudes sociais em relação à inclusão são compostas por componentes cognitivos, afetivos e comportamentais e podem funcionar como preditores de comportamento em relação a grupos sociais

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específicos, como as pessoas com deficiência. Essas atitudes podem ser influenciadas por diversos fatores, incluindo gênero, idade, contato prévio e educação. Considerando isso, o presente estudo tem como objetivo analisar se o contato com pessoas com deficiência está associado a atitudes sociais mais favoráveis em relação à inclusão. Quinhentos estudantes com idades entre 6 e 16 anos participaram do estudo, distribuídos entre os anos iniciais e finais do Ensino Fundamental, provenientes de escolas públicas das cinco regiões do Brasil. A Escala Infantil de Atitudes Sociais em relação à Inclusão foi utilizada como instrumento de coleta de dados. O teste de Wilcoxon foi aplicado para examinar diferenças entre estudantes com e sem contato prévio com pessoas com deficiência. Os resultados indicam ausência de diferenças estatisticamente significativas nas regiões Norte, Nordeste, Centro-Oeste e Sul. Uma diferença estatisticamente significativa foi identificada apenas na região Sudeste. Esses achados sugerem que a relação entre contato e atitudes sociais não é uniforme entre as regiões e pode ser influenciada por fatores contextuais e institucionais, em consonância com a teoria do contato intergrupar. Em conjunto, os resultados destacam que o contato, por si só, não necessariamente conduz a atitudes sociais mais favoráveis em relação à inclusão, reforçando a importância de considerar a qualidade e o contexto das interações, bem como as condições regionais e educacionais em que elas ocorrem.

Palavras-chave: Educação Especial; Educação Inclusiva; Atitudes Sociais.

RESUMEN

Las actitudes sociales hacia la inclusión están compuestas por componentes cognitivos, afectivos y conductuales y pueden funcionar como predictores del comportamiento hacia grupos sociales específicos, como las personas con discapacidad. Estas actitudes pueden verse influidas por diversos factores, incluyendo género, edad, contacto previo y educación. Considerando esto, el presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar si el contacto con personas con discapacidad está asociado a actitudes sociales más favorables hacia la inclusión. Quinientos estudiantes de entre 6 y 16 años participaron en el estudio, distribuidos entre los años iniciales y finales de la Educación Primaria, procedentes de escuelas públicas de las cinco regiones de Brasil. La Escala Infantil de Actitudes Sociales hacia la Inclusión fue utilizada como instrumento de recolección de datos. La prueba de Wilcoxon se aplicó para examinar diferencias entre estudiantes con y sin contacto previo con personas con discapacidad. Los resultados indican ausencia de diferencias estadísticamente significativas en las regiones Norte, Nordeste, Centro-Oeste y Sur. Una diferencia estadísticamente significativa fue identificada únicamente en la región Sudeste. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la relación entre contacto y actitudes sociales no es uniforme entre las regiones y puede estar influida por factores contextuales e institucionales, en consonancia con la teoría del contacto intergrupar. En conjunto, los resultados destacan que el contacto, por sí solo, no conduce necesariamente a actitudes sociales más favorables hacia la inclusión, reforzando la importancia de considerar la calidad y el contexto de las interacciones, así como las condiciones regionales y educativas en las que ocurren.

Palabras clave: Educación Especial; Educación Inclusiva; Actitudes Sociales.

INTRODUCTION

Studies in Social Psychology provide support to discuss the universe of human relationships, which are complex and reveal a series of interdependent phenomena, producing effects on the way individuals interact socially (Rodrigues; Assmar; Jablonski, 2015). The relationships between people without disabilities and people with disabilities are an example of a theme, that has historically been marked by a process of exclusion and struggle for the recognition of rights (Mendes, 2006).

Contributions from the area of Social Psychology to studies involving the inclusion of people with disabilities refer to the hypothesis that contact with people with disabilities can produce more favorable social attitudes towards inclusion. Social attitudes towards inclusion concern what people think and feel in relation to different groups and how this mental and sentimental organization translates into behaviors of inclusion or exclusion of these people (Rodrigues; Assmar; Jablonski, 2015). These attitudes can be

influenced by several factors, such as type of disability, educational problems, gender, age, previous experiences with people with disabilities, area of training etc. (Avramidis; Norwich, 2002; Vieira, 2017).

In relation to people with disabilities, the results of different studies indicate that teachers who have previous experiences with people with disabilities demonstrate more favorable attitudes towards inclusion when compared to teachers who do not (Álvarez; Buenestado, 2015; Lacruz-Pérez, Sanz-Cervera; Tárraga-Mínguez, 2021). However, as pointed out, contact alone is not capable of ensuring that teachers express more favorable attitudes towards inclusion; it is necessary to facilitate positive experiences of contact with children and young people with disabilities, through training appropriate to the demands faced by teachers daily, through the establishment of an effective support network.

In a study developed by Omote and Pereira Junior (2011), the social attitudes of teachers who declared having previous experience with students with disabilities prove to be more positive when compared to the attitudes of teachers who had no prior contact. On the other hand, there are studies that have shown that previous experience with people with disabilities has not been able to produce changes in social attitudes towards inclusion (Sánchez; Puerta, 2018).

There are also studies developed with the aim of investigating social attitudes towards the inclusion of children without disabilities compared to their peers with disabilities.

A more distinctive result about the possibility of changing attitudes through information can be seen in the study by Vieira (2017), which demonstrates that, through an informative program taught by teachers to Elementary School students, it was possible to positively affect students' social attitudes.

Regarding the hypothesis of contact involving children and adolescents, the study carried out by Blackman (2016) demonstrated that prior contact of students without disabilities with their peers who have a disability can be positive for promoting more favorable attitudes towards inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities at school. Similar results are found by Ribeiro *et al.* (2023), in which students who reported having contact with people with disabilities outside of school had more positive attitudes.

Freer (2021) conducts a literature review on the topic and confirmed that contact is a relevant factor related to social attitudes towards inclusion. The author systematized studies by categorizing the types of contact into: 1) individual, including family relationships and friendships in which a person without a disability interacts more closely with a person with a disability, and 2) contact in the classroom, in a group, in which several children interact with each other during school activities.

Gümüs and Öncel (2021) state that proximity between people with and without disabilities generates more positive attitudes, which is corroborated by studies by Reis *et al.* (2020).

However, Pozas and Letzel-Alt (2023) argue that it is the quality of contact that determines whether it will favor social attitudes. Their research highlights the importance of the feeling of self-efficacy that students need to have about having skills and being able to engage in relationships with peers with disabilities and how much this can be strengthened by school interventions that promote inclusion.

Beyond direct contact, scholars have emphasized the importance of educational environments that intentionally foster reflection, empathy, and awareness about disability. Curricular activities, school culture, and pedagogical strategies that encourage collaborative learning and diversity appreciation may contribute to shaping students' attitudes, even in settings where direct contact with disability is limited. These elements reinforce the understanding that inclusion is not a spontaneous outcome, but rather a pedagogical, institutional, and social construction (Omote; Pereira Junior, 2011).

In the present study, inclusion is not understood merely as school access or enrollment. Access refers to the democratization of admission and permanence in educational systems, whereas inclusion implies a broader process of reorganizing school cultures, policies, and pedagogical practices so that diversity is recognized as a constitutive dimension of schooling.

Moreover, the role of teacher preparation and professional development has been highlighted as essential in sustaining inclusive practices. Teachers who feel prepared and supported are more likely to mediate social interactions effectively and promote respectful, equitable relationships among students. Institutional investment in continuous training and guidance can therefore strengthen inclusion efforts and amplify the positive effects of contact experiences.

Another dimension that merits attention is the influence of family and community contexts on attitudes toward disability and inclusion. Children and adolescents do not develop their perceptions solely in school environments; rather, they are influenced by values and attitudes observed in family members, peers, and media. Thus, studies that explore the interactions between school, family, and social discourses may help broaden the understanding of factors that determine social attitudes.

Finally, technological and media-mediated experiences with disability may represent a growing field of investigation. Exposure to digital content featuring people with disabilities, participation in online communities, and the use of accessible educational technologies may also shape attitudes and perceptions. Understanding how virtual interactions complement or differ from face-to-face contact can offer valuable insights for designing inclusion-oriented educational programs.

In this sense, the article aims to analyze whether contact with people with disabilities can contribute to favorable social attitudes towards inclusion. The choice to mobilize Allport's Contact Hypothesis (1954) is based on its foundational relevance in the study of prejudice reduction and intergroup relations. Although later contributions have expanded this debate, the model remains a classical and influential theoretical framework for examining how contact conditions may affect attitudes toward socially marginalized groups.

METHOD

To include students from different social contexts, we decided to invite children and adolescents from five regions of Brazil: North, Northeast, Central-West, Southeast, and South. Our aim was not to achieve regional representation, as we acknowledge that no single school can fully represent a city, state,

or even a territorial region, especially in a country as vast, diverse, and multicultural as Brazil. Thus, the sample is selected based on convenience.

Initially, we contacted ten research professors from various academic institutions to facilitate access to the respective schools. However, this approach does not yield the expected results. Consequently, we change our strategy and sought the assistance of members of the research group to help establish connections with these schools. As a result of these partnerships, authorization letters are submitted to the respective Departments of Education to conduct research in the schools within their regions.

Because data collection depended on institutional approval at multiple administrative levels, the recruitment process proved time-consuming and uneven across regions. Some schools declined participation due to scheduling constraints, internal administrative demands, or lack of availability during the data collection period. Others did not complete the authorization procedures within the study timeline. For this reason, participation was determined by institutional acceptance and feasibility, which characterizes the convenience nature of the sample. Nevertheless, this strategy enabled access to diverse educational contexts across all five Brazilian regions.

After the necessary authorizations were obtained, the research team gained access to participating schools in each Brazilian region.

Therefore, five hundred students aged from 6 to 16 years, male and female, participated in the study, from nine public schools in the five regions of Brazil, named in the study by the letter G (group) and their respective identification number in sequence. Regarding the average age of each group: in G1, the average is 7 years old; in G2, the average is 8; in G3, the average is also 8; in G4, the average is 9; in G5, the average is 10; in G6, the average is 11; in G7, the average is 13; and in G8 and G9, the average is 14 years old. Additionally, to ensure ethical rigor and transparency throughout the process, all participating schools received detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, and expected contributions. Parents or legal guardians were provided with consent forms, and only students whose families formally authorized participation were included.

Data collection takes place during regular school hours, in spaces previously organized by the school team to ensure comfort and minimal environmental distractions. The research team collaborates closely with teachers and school coordinators to organize schedules that would not disrupt pedagogical routines. While our design does not aim for probabilistic sampling, we prioritized methodological consistency across all regions, ensuring that the same instruments, instructions, and collection procedures are applied in every location.

Furthermore, in order to strengthen the study's internal validity, research group members receive training focused on standardized application procedures, ethical considerations when working with children, and strategies to encourage student participation in a respectful and inclusive manner. These efforts contributed to ensuring uniformity in data collection and supported the authenticity and reliability of students' responses across regions.

Below is Table 1 with the characteristics of students in the initial and final years of Elementary School, organized by region, school class, total number enrolled in institutions and total number of students who are authorized to participate and effectively participate in the study.

Table 1 - Characteristics of participants enrolled in the initial and final years of Elementary School⁴

GROUPS	BRAZILIAN REGIONS									
	NORTH		NORTHEAST		MIDWEST		SOUTHEAST		SOUTH	
	ENRL	PART	ENRL	PART	ENRL	PART	ENRL	PART	ENRL	PART
1st Year	27	15	21	5	15	8	26	11	21	5
2nd Year	28	16	23	5	13	5	26	13	21	10
3rd Year	29	13	25	6	16	5	25	10	26	8
4th Year	30	14	24	7	11	0	22	15	27	14
5th Year	19	16	22	8	18	1	29	15	31	16
6th Year	34	13	20	9	21	9	30	10	15	14
7th Year	37	12	24	12	28	20	24	12	20	18
8th Year	39	15	29	11	25	13	29	10	15	17
9th Year	36	17	27	10	31	13	22	8	20	16
TOTAL	268	131	215	73	178	74	134	104	231	118

ENRL = Total of students enrolled. PART = Total of students participating.

Source: The authors.

As reported, nine participating classes are drawn from two schools per region, one school serving the Early Years of Elementary Education (1st to 5th year) and one school serving the Final Years of Elementary Education (6th to 9th year) in the North region; the same arrangement occurs in the Northeast, Central-West, and Southeast regions. Participants from Early Years schools include students in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th years. Students in the 7th, 8th, and 9th years attend Final Years schools. It is worth mentioning that the only region that has the participation of a single school is the South, as both levels of education are concentrated in the same building. Thus, there is a total of nine participating schools.

MATERIAL, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

To collect data from students, the Children's Scale for Measuring Social Attitudes towards Inclusion was used, developed by Baleotti (2020) and validated by Vieira, Omote, Baleotti and Souza (2022). It is worth mentioning that the scale in question was created based on studies carried out on the inclusion of students with disabilities, as well as their respective social attitudes. The scale is made up of 20 statements,

⁴ For your information, in Brazil, Elementary School is a stage of basic education that spans nine years and is divided into two phases: the Early Years, which cover the 1st through the 5th year, and the Final Years, which comprise the 6th through the 9th year. Children typically begin the Early Years at the age of six, where the focus is on literacy and the development of basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as an introduction to other areas of knowledge, such as science, among others. Teaching at this stage is more teacher-centered, with the same teacher often guiding students in various subjects, creating a more integrated learning environment. In the Final Years, which begin around the age of 11, students have already established a solid educational foundation and start to engage with more specific and complex content. Subjects are more segmented, with specialized teachers for each area of knowledge, such as history, geography, science, and philosophy, among others. This structure not only aims to build upon the knowledge acquired in the Early Years but also to prepare students for the challenges of High School, fostering the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. The division of Elementary Education into grades from the 1st through the 9th year, with a separation between the Early and Final Years, is a method of organizing educational development in a progressive manner. This allows the curriculum to be tailored to meet the cognitive and emotional needs of students at each stage of their growth, facilitating the assessment of their progress and the adjustment of teaching practices throughout their school journey. This structure is essential to ensure that children and adolescents receive a continuous and coherent education, appropriate to their level of development and maturity.

10 of which express favorable social attitudes towards inclusion and another 10 unfavorable attitudes. Each item consisted of a statement followed by three response alternatives, namely: “I agree”, “I don’t agree” and “I don’t know”. To ensure procedural consistency across all participating regions, the research team follows a previously established standardized administration protocol, including uniform instructions, equivalent application conditions, and guidance adapted to the age group of participants.

After tabulating the data from the children's scale, the scores for each participant are calculated. The points obtained in each item are added together, varying between 1, 2 or 3. The value 1 is assigned when the respondent disagrees with a statement favorable to inclusion or agrees with a statement unfavorable to inclusion. The value 3 is assigned when the respondent agrees with a statement favorable to inclusion or disagrees with a statement unfavorable to inclusion. The value 2 is assigned when the respondent indicates that he or she does not know how to give an opinion on the content of the statement.

Subsequently, inferential statistical analyses are conducted to compare participants with and without previous contact with people with disabilities within each Brazilian region. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test is applied, considering the nonparametric characteristics of the data and the ordinal structure of the scale scores. The level of statistical significance is established at $p \leq .05$.

Still on the data collection instrument, it has been used in several studies, demonstrating consistency and reliability in the results obtained with the analyzed population, particularly considering the appropriate language used to engage with children and adolescents (Souza, 2014; Souza, 2019; Conceição; Souza, 2022).

Regarding the ethical aspects of the study, it is important to highlight that all standards established by Resolution No. 466/2012 (Brasil, 2012) concerning ethical research with human subjects are respected. The study is conducted following approval by the Ethics Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects⁵ and with the consent of both the guardians and the participating children and adolescents.

RESULTS

From the tabulated data, we seek to examine whether students who reported previous contact with people with disabilities present more favorable social attitudes than those who do not report such contact. Therefore, the arrangement of the groups is reorganized, bringing together those who report previous contact in one group and those who report no previous contact in another group, as presented in Table 2.

⁵ Approval number from the Research Ethics Committee: 0542/2012.

Table 2 - Distribution of scores on the Children's Social Attitudes Scale according to the contact variable

Regions	Variable contact	N	Variation (min / max)	Average	Dispersion (q1 / q3)
North	<i>No contact</i>	12	33 - 55	40	39 – 46.75
	<i>Contact</i>	119	13 - 58	46	41 – 52.5
Northeast	<i>No contact</i>	16	32 - 55	48	45 – 50
	<i>Contact</i>	57	28 - 60	49	44 – 54.5
Midwest	<i>No contact</i>	11	35 - 53	39	37.5 – 45.5
	<i>Contact</i>	63	30 - 58	49	45.75 – 54.25
Southeast	<i>No contact</i>	36	28 - 58	42	39 – 47
	<i>Contact</i>	68	33 - 60	49	44 – 54
South	<i>No contact</i>	18	24 - 57	47	38.75 – 52
	<i>Contact</i>	100	24 - 60	50	42 – 55

Source: The authors.

The Wilcoxon test indicates no statistically significant differences between the scores of children with and without contact in most regions of Brazil, including the North ($p = 0.6953$), Northeast ($p = 0.6112$), Midwest ($p = 0.1230$), and South ($p = 0.7019$). These findings suggest that contact, considered in a broad and undifferentiated manner, does not automatically correspond to more favorable social attitudes toward inclusion. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with contact hypothesis literature, which highlights that the impact of contact on attitudes is often contingent upon the quality, frequency, and context of interactions, as well as the social and cultural environment in which they occur. The lack of significant differences may indicate that these conditions were not met or that other mediating factors play a role.

The divergent result in the Southeast region ($p = 0.0110$) stands out as statistically significant, suggesting that children with contact in this region demonstrate distinct scale scores compared to those without. This finding aligns with studies showing that contact can reduce prejudice, promote empathy, or enhance understanding when certain conditions, such as positive interactions or equal status among groups, are present. The Southeast region is one of the most developed areas in Brazil, with greater access to resources. Beyond these aspects, educational initiatives aimed at transforming social attitudes and conceptions stand out, focusing on actions such as Informative Programs for Social Attitude Changes toward Inclusion and inclusive pedagogical programs (Vieira; 2017; Conceição; Souza, 2022). These initiatives seek to reduce prejudice and, more importantly, to broaden discussions on diversity and inclusion within both educational and social contexts. Such factors may have contributed to the creation of a social environment where contact had a more significant influence on children's attitudes or perceptions. These factors may have contributed to creating a social context where contact had a more substantial influence on children's attitudes or perceptions. Such factors may contribute to the creation of a social environment where contact exerts a more significant influence on children's attitudes or perceptions.

Additionally, it is important to note that merely sharing physical spaces, without intentional pedagogical support, may not be sufficient to transform children's attitudes and behaviors. Positive

attitudes emerge when contact is accompanied by mediation, reflection, and supportive experiences, allowing children to reshape previous conceptions and develop empathy. In this way, the role of the educator as a facilitator of interactions becomes central, ensuring that interactions are constructive and aligned with inclusive values. Conversely, spontaneous interactions without guidance may reinforce stereotypes or maintain social distance.

The regional variation in results underscores the importance of considering contextual and cultural factors when analyzing the effectiveness of contact as a mechanism for social change. While the Southeast displays a significant result, the lack of differences in other regions suggests that the impact of contact is not uniform across Brazil. Structural inequalities, regional disparities in education, and social dynamics might mitigate the influence of contact in other parts of the country. For example, in areas with less exposure to diversity or fewer opportunities for meaningful contact, its transformative potential may remain limited.

It is also essential to recognize that children's perceptions about differences are influenced by broader social contexts, including family and community narratives. School practices should therefore be aligned with the cultural reality of their surroundings, fostering dialogue beyond the classroom and strengthening cooperation with families. When educational initiatives meaningfully engage both school and community spheres, the potential for attitude change becomes greater and more sustainable.

These findings highlight the need for further research into the regional and contextual factors that mediate the relationship between contact and attitudes. It would be valuable to explore whether differences in socioeconomic conditions, educational systems, or the nature of interactions explain the divergent results in the Southeast. Additionally, interventions aimed at fostering positive contact must consider regional disparities to be more effective, tailoring strategies to specific cultural, social, and economic contexts. This perspective reinforces that the effects of contact are not uniform but are shaped by regional factors and broader societal dynamics that influence children's attitudes and behaviors.

This aligns closely with Gordon Allport's (1954) theory of intergroup contact, which posits that favorable interactions between members of different groups can reduce negative attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices. Allport's framework suggests that such interactions, when structured under appropriate conditions, promote the development of empathy and understanding toward diverse groups. Applying this theory to the context of contact with individuals with disabilities underscores the importance of creating environments where meaningful and positive interactions can flourish, particularly when regional and systemic factors are taken into account.

Studies such as Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) have shown that intergroup contact can promote more positive attitudes, increased acceptance, and greater willingness to interact with people with disabilities. Furthermore, contact can help minimize misperceptions about people with disabilities, enabling the development of attitudes of acceptance towards those who are different.

Children also form understandings about disability through symbolic experiences, including media representations. Thus, direct contact is enhanced when supported by educational narratives that challenge stereotypes and present positive models of diversity. School-based programs that integrate cooperative activities and storytelling centered on human diversity can therefore be powerful tools to complement real-life interactions and stimulate more empathetic attitudes.

Studies are also identified that do not find positive relationships between prior contact and social attitudes toward inclusion. For example, the study developed by Vieira and Denari (2012) analyzes the effects of an informative program addressing intellectual disability through educational and playful strategies on children's conceptions, feelings, and attitudes toward inclusion. Regarding the relationship between prior contact and social attitudes, the author does not find significant results in this regard.

A study conducted in Spain evaluates the effects of an inclusive race on the social attitudes of 170 students. Although participants show positive attitudes and interest in similar events, participation alongside individuals with disabilities does not change their attitudes, particularly among male students and those who are more competitive (Martínez-Morales; Martínez-Gallego; Ramón-Llin, 2024).

It is believed that contact alone cannot guarantee acceptance, but coexistence and the way it is managed and mediated can make this possible (Vieira, 2017). In this regard, it is suggested that positive experiences with people with disabilities can lead to the development of an environment of greater acceptance. The school environment is an important space that can promote reflection and debate through positive experiences in relation to differences. In this context, the way the teacher manages the classroom and interpersonal relationships to favor the creation of a more welcoming environment, can promote a difference in the way students perceive the topic.

If a student perceives a person with a disability as aggressive and does not act otherwise, they will possibly develop feelings of fear, which do not allow them to have a healthy relationship with the person with a disability or even with someone close to them (Souza, 2019).

Semmel and Dickson (1966), when comparing the reactions of a total of 457 students between 8 and 12 years old, with and without disabilities, obtained one of the positive results to question the possibility of having direct contact with people with disabilities, within the school context. For them, contact can influence not only the conception of the person they live with, but it can also expand positive meanings about differences in general, that is, the positive attitude does not depend on the contact with the person with a disability itself, but on the quality that you have with this contact.

Delgado-Gil *et al.* (2023) emphasized the importance of teachers working on cognitive aspects related to disabilities in the classroom, providing explanations about the conditions of their peers' conditions, support needs, and adaptations, enabling students to better understand the experiences of their classmates.

Ribeiro *et al.* (2023) underscore the importance of cooperative activities among children to develop empathy and combat discrimination. Similarly, Olaleye *et al.* (2012) reinforce the importance of

interventions that encourage diverse interactions among students and promote greater integration. Alnahdi (2019) highlights that as contact increases through daily interactions at schools, stereotypes are progressively deconstructed.

As highlighted by Allport (1954), the quality of interaction is a primary factor in the development of attitudes of acceptance towards people belonging to different groups. In this sense, the school can play an important role in providing an educational environment that favors positive contact relationships with people with disabilities. Furthermore, encouraging classroom discussions on the topics of diversity and inclusion can be an alternative that enables the construction of more positive interpersonal relationships. However, discussion or debates are not enough, so it is equally important that teachers focus on the quality of mediation to enable students to reflect on these themes in order to promote changes in acceptance and reduce prejudice towards people with disabilities.

Taken together, the present findings suggest that the central issue is not merely whether contact occurs, but how it occurs, under which conditions, and with what pedagogical and institutional support.

CONCLUSION

The results identified in this study highlight the relevance of continuing to investigate the relationships between contact with individuals with disabilities and social attitudes toward inclusion, particularly under the specific social and institutional conditions emphasized in later developments of Allport's Contact Hypothesis. Previous studies on this relationship have yielded inconclusive findings, underlining the necessity for more in-depth investigations that can shed light on these correlations. In the present study, significant associations were identified only in some contexts, suggesting that contact does not operate uniformly across settings and cannot be assumed, by itself, to produce more favorable attitudes. Further exploration is needed to understand the specific factors that may influence these relationships, as well as the broader implications for fostering inclusive societies. Understanding how different forms and frequencies of contact shape attitudes could offer valuable insights into how inclusion can be promoted effectively across various settings, particularly in educational environments.

Additionally, the conditions under which contact with individuals with disabilities occurs appear to significantly affect social attitudes toward inclusion. Given this, schools must take an active role in evaluating how they can cultivate an educational environment that fosters thoughtful engagement with disability-related issues. This involves not only incorporating disability awareness into curricula but also ensuring that teachers receive adequate training to approach the subject from an inclusive perspective. Moreover, future research should aim to explore how schools can be structured to encourage these types of reflections, thereby contributing to the development of inclusive educational settings that benefit both students and the broader community. By considering factors such as the duration, type, and context of interactions with individuals with disabilities, future studies could further clarify which specific conditions promote positive social attitudes.

In addition to these considerations, future studies could expand their scope by investigating the role of virtual and digital interactions in shaping attitudes toward disability and inclusion. With the growing prevalence of online learning environments and social media, children and adolescents are increasingly exposed to representations of disability through digital platforms. Exploring whether virtual contact generates similar or distinct effects compared to face-to-face interactions would provide valuable insights into contemporary social dynamics and the evolving nature of socialization. This line of inquiry could also examine how inclusive digital educational tools, such as accessible learning platforms and disability-themed pedagogical materials, contribute to fostering empathy and awareness.

Another promising avenue for future research involves examining cross-cultural perspectives on inclusive attitudes within educational settings. Given that values, educational policies, and cultural norms vary widely across contexts, comparative studies could help identify which cultural conditions most effectively promote inclusive mindsets. Such research might explore how cultural beliefs about disability, diverse educational systems, and varying levels of public awareness campaigns influence young learners' attitudes. These investigations could also support the development of context-specific interventions that respect cultural diversity while advancing global commitments to equitable education and inclusion.

Furthermore, expanding research to examine the personal variables influencing children and adolescents' social attitudes toward inclusion is essential. Much of the existing literature focuses on teachers' attitudes, but studying the attitudes of young learners themselves will provide crucial insights into creating more inclusive environments that cater to the needs of all participants. Variables such as age, socioeconomic background, and personal experiences with disability may play a significant role in shaping attitudes, making it essential for future studies to explore these factors in greater depth. The findings from such research could inform more targeted interventions that seek to address negative biases and encourage empathy and understanding from an early age.

In addition to focusing on students and teachers, future research should also consider the role of family and community in shaping social attitudes toward inclusion. Families, as primary socializing agents, may influence how children perceive disability and inclusion, potentially reinforcing or challenging the attitudes developed at school. Investigating the interplay between school, home, and community perspectives on inclusion could provide a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing social attitudes and inform more comprehensive approaches to fostering inclusive communities. By broadening the scope of research to include these multiple layers, future studies will contribute to the development of more effective strategies for promoting inclusion in diverse educational and social contexts.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences, the convenience sample may limit generalizability, and the use of self-reported measures may be influenced by subjective perceptions or social desirability. In addition, the attitude scale was undergoing validation at the time of data collection, and the contact indicator did not capture qualitative dimensions such as reciprocity, voluntariness, or quality of interaction. These aspects

may help explain why contact showed limited effects in much of the Brazilian sample, suggesting that superficial or weakly supported interactions may not fulfill the facilitating conditions proposed by Allport, such as cooperation, equal status, and institutional support. Future research may therefore benefit from longitudinal and mixed-method designs capable of examining how school climate, teacher mediation, institutional resources, and regional inequalities shape the relationship between contact and attitudes across different Brazilian contexts.

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