



SITUATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN BRAZIL AND CANADA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has placed the world in a public health emergency since the beginning of the year 2020, posing a challenge to education, especially to Special Education. This study aimed to analyze the situation of special education in Brazil and Canada during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research was part of a postdoctoral project in education. Methodologically, it is an international comparative study in education. It was carried out from April 2020 to November 2021, based on a literature review and official documents. The search was carried out in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and in the Institute of Educational Sciences (ERIC), and 233 articles were found. After analysis and following the inclusion criteria, 217 articles were excluded. In the end, 16 studies were selected. The results show that the more structured the educational system and Special Education, the greater the chances of success. In addition to returning to face-to-face classes earlier, Canada also provided more support for families and students, but it was still insufficient. In both countries, children with disabilities are in a fragile situation owing to social isolation. Aspects such as choice of tools, internet connection quality, user skills, virtual spaces for collective support, school and family communication, strengthening of special education policies and programs, adequate support, among others, led to the success of remote education. This research is intended to contribute to an increase in the number of studies in Brazil and abroad, serving as a basis for the scientific production of other international comparative studies.

Keywords: Covid-19, special education, comparative study, literature review, Brazil and Canada

Introduction

The situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has had different impacts on people's lives in different parts of the world. When it emerged in China in 2019, no one imagined it would spread beyond the boundaries of Southeast Asia. At that time, measures such as isolation and extensive testing were adopted, with hopes that they would be enough. However, this is not what happened; a highly transmissible virus and a world where the flow of people from one country to another is constant facilitated the establishment of a public health emergency situation. The world scenario has worsened, as became evident in Europe, North America, Africa, and South America.

Worldwide, this situation brings different impacts to continents and countries, and in this case, the socioeconomic factors are determinant. When it comes to developing countries,

e.g., Brazil, the population is more vulnerable when compared to that of developed countries, and in the sub-Saharan region of Africa, health conditions are even more alarming, because the population's vulnerability is even greater (Arroio, 2020; Santos et al., 2020).

The data as of November 20, 2021 has confirmed 256 million cases of Covid-19 and 5.13 million deaths worldwide. Brazil, a country with 210.1 million inhabitants, had 22 million cases and 612,000 deaths caused by Covid-19. Canada, on the other hand, is a country with a population of 37,703,512 and there were 1,765,164 cases and 29,485 deaths from Covid-19 (World Health Organization 2021). The proportional comparison has shown 5.14% of the Brazilian population versus 2.33% of the Canadian population, as regards the number of cases; as far as number of deaths is concerned, 0.12% of the Brazilian population versus 0.06% of the Canadian population. These data enable the detection of several implications of Covid-19 on the Brazilian and the Canadian societies. The numerous effects include: protection; homeschooling; inequality in access to remote education; childcare issues; access to health; the economic crisis (Oleschuk, 2020; St-Denis, 2020; Unesco, 2020a).

An important implication was the strict isolation measures, which directly interfered with people's well-being. At the educational level, the measures were diverse: for example, the closing of schools, or reduced schedules and rotation among groups; strict operation protocols to control the virus; among others. As one of the measures of social isolation, an average of 1.6 billion students in the world have stopped going to school and are home-schooled in more than 190 countries (Unesco, 2021). School shutdowns affect not only students' learning, but also their socio-emotional aspects. In addition, as schools closed, teachers had to adapt to remote teaching and families had to bear the structure and support for homeschooling (Mustafa, 2020).

With all the changes in education, several countries have implemented supportive actions. In Scotland, the government created a program for volunteers to provide support to families; in Jamaica, the government implemented online platforms that provided educational, dietary, and health guidance; in China, the government implemented sanitary, educational, and health measures to ensure well-being; in the United States, remote teaching was monitored and districts were required to create strategies to ensure educational performance; in New Zealand, a range of library and classroom materials were released for free virtual reading; in Brazil, the state authorities created online teaching platforms, and support materials and teacher training were provided; in Canada, educational institutions reorganized themselves in a short period of time, and significantly increased the capacity to teach remotely; also, curricula were made more flexible (Lingjie & Zhanfang, 2020; Santos et al., 2020; Unesco, 2020b).

According to previous studies, school shutdowns have caused negative results in student learning, especially for economically disadvantaged students. Some reasons are: parents' difficulty in keeping up with school assignments, lack of access to digital platforms, lack of human interaction, teachers' and students' lack of digital skills, inappropriate learning methodologies for remote teaching (Martinez et al., 2021; Mikušková & Verešová, 2020; Mustafa, 2020).

While school education had problems worldwide to reorganize itself during this period, the prevailing hypothesis was that the problems are even greater when taking into account the perspective of Inclusive Education and attempting to ensure the right to education for people with disabilities. Thus, this study aimed to analyze the situation of special education in Brazil and Canada during the Covid-19 pandemic, based on a comparative study. The main research question was: What was the situation of special education in Brazil and Canada during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Research Methodology

General Background

This comparative study in education aims to identify the similarities and differences that are the result of the dialectical relationship between global and local (Tan et al., 2016). In this study, the method was employed to organize, study, and analyze scientific and informative articles and legislations regarding Brazilian and Canadian special education during the Covid-19 pandemic, comparing the actions taken to ensure the learning of students targeted by special education. The comparison was done between Brazil and Canada because the Canadian public school system is a high-quality system that Brazil wants to emulate. Furthermore, in both countries, public schools are the responsibility of the provinces/states, and schools were closed for a long period during the pandemic.

Published articles were searched in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and the Institute of Education Sciences (ERIC) from April 2020 to November 2021, using the search words Covid-19 and special education. Searches were also performed on the official websites of the Ministries of Education of the two countries.

Instrument and Procedures

The survey was conducted from April 2020 to November 2021. To answer the research question, a review of the literature was performed. The search for articles was performed by two authors/evaluators who discussed the intersection of the following descriptors: in Portuguese corresponding in English: "covid-19" and "special education". Thus, the bilingual vocabulary (English/Portuguese) was used – Descriptors in Thesaurus, available in the databases Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and the Institute of Education Sciences (ERIC). In addition, the official websites of the ministries of education of the two countries were searched.

Data Extraction

At first, the descriptors were "covid-19" and "special education". A total of 11 and 222 articles were found in the SciELO and in ERIC databases, respectively. The next step was to carry out subsequent, independent, individual readings of the titles and of the abstracts, respectively, without identifying the authors or platforms used for the publication of the studies. Two researchers were in charge of article selection, following the previously established eligibility criteria.

After analysis of the titles and abstracts, articles that had Brazil and/or Canada as a spatial cutout were selected. The search resulted in 31 articles that actually dealt with special education during the Covid-19 pandemic in both countries. The 31 articles were read in full and 16 of them were used, as shown in Table 1 (Results section). Next, the official websites of the Ministries of Education of the two countries were searched.

Brief introduction to Brazil and Canada

Brazil and Canada were part of this research. The interest was to understand how education authorities the two countries organized themselves to provide educational assistance to Special Education students (Robson et al., 2014). This information was collected in articles and through the analysis of legal and guiding educational and Special Education documents during the pandemic period. Importantly, the pandemic period continues, despite being more controlled.

Brazil is a country with 210.1 million inhabitants, with a territorial area of 8,515,767.049 km² according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2021). In Canada, there are 37,703,512 inhabitants, in a territorial area of 9,985,000 km² (<https://countrymeters.info/pt/Canada>). Brazil's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018 was R\$6.9 trillion, and the country ranked 79th in the Human Development Index (HDI). A report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pointed out that Brazil had the 2nd highest concentration of income in the world, with 1/3 of all wealth in the hands of the richest 1% (UNDP, 2019). Canada's GDP, on the other hand, was approximately \$1.627 trillion, and the country ranked 13th in the Human Development Index (HDI) with a high index, with only 8% of the population living below the poverty line (UNDP, 2019).

Brazil is a federative republic made up of 26 states and the Federal District, where Brasília, the capital of the country, is located. The Federative Republic of Brazil is a presidential republic, and although it is divided into states, it has a central government; all the states are subordinated to the Federal Constitution of Brazil and to the federal legislation.

Canada, on the other hand, is made up of ten provinces and three different territories. The provinces have a certain degree of autonomy from the federal government, with their own laws and taxes. Territorially, autonomy from the federal government is smaller. Canada is a constitutional monarchy and a federal state with a democratic parliament. In addition to the power of a monarch, there is that of the constitution, enforced by the country's prime minister. The capital of the country is Ottawa, located in the province of Ontario (Berg & Bernd, 2017).

For this reason, Canada has significant differences in the administration of the different districts, since the provinces have a certain degree of autonomy from the federal government, with their own systems and laws, including those relative to education.

Research Results

During the research, in a first search with the descriptors "covid-19" and "special education", 233 articles were found in the databases. In the first stage, the titles and abstracts of the works were read. After this reading, 202 articles were excluded because they were not studies in either Brazil or Canada. At the end of this first stage, 31 articles remained, which were read in full; 15 of them were excluded for dealing with studies on gender, immigrants or ethnicity.

Table 1 describes 16 studies selected after screening with data corresponding to: author, title, year of study. The studies are shown in the Table in the order in which they appear in the discussion.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Studies

Nº of the Study	Authors/Year	Title
Study 1	Rodrigo Mendes Institute (2020)	Protocolos sobre educação inclusiva durante a pandemia da Covid-19: Um sobrevoo por 23 países e organismos internacionais. [Protocols on inclusive education during the Covid-19 pandemic: An overflight by 23 countries and international organizations]
Study 2	Arruda, E. P. (2020)	Educação Remota Emergencial: elementos para políticas públicas na educação brasileira em tempos de COVID-19 [Emergency Remote Education: elements for public policies in Brazilian education in Covid-19 times]
Study 3	Torres, J. P., & Borges, A. A. P. (2020)	Educação especial e a Covid-19: o exercício da docência via atividades remotas [Special education and Covid-19: the exercise of teaching via remote activities]
Study 4	Conde, P. S., Camizão, A. C., & Victor, S. L. (2020)	Pandemia e atividades remotas: possibilidades e desafios para a educação especial [Pandemic and remote activities: possibilities and challenges of special education]
Study 5	Silva, K. W., Bins, K. L. G., & Rozek, M. (2020)	A educação especial e a Covid-19: aprendizagens em tempos de isolamento social [Special Education and Covid-19: Learning in Times of Social Isolation]
Study 6	Neta, A. D. S. O., Nascimento, R. D. M. & Falcão, G. M. B. (2020)	A educação dos estudantes com deficiência em tempos de pandemia de Covid-19 [The education of students with disabilities in times of the Covid-19 pandemic]
Study 7	El-Zraigat, I., & Alshammari, M. (2020)	The Psychological and Social Effects of COVID-19 Outbreak on Persons with Disabilities
Study 8	Best, L. A., Law, M. A., Roach, S., & Wilbiks, J. M. P. (2020)	The Psychological Impact of COVID-19 in Canada: Effects of Social Isolation During the Initial Response
Study 9	Wotto, M. (2020)	The future high education distance learning in Canada, the United States, and France: Insights from before Covid-19 secondary data analysis
Study 10	Van Nuland, S., Mandzuk, D., Tucker Petrick, K., & Cooper, T. (2020)	Covid-19 and its effects on teacher education in Ontario: a complex adaptive systems perspective
Study 11	Frenette, M., Frank, K., & Deng, Z. (2020)	School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic
Study 12	Russo, K., Oliveira Soares, R., Magnan, M. O., & Borri-Anadon, C. (2020)	Droit à la santé ou droit à l'éducation? Inégalités en éducation pendant la première vague de la Covid-19 au Québec

Study 13	MacDonald, M., & Hill, C. (2021)	The educational impact of the Covid-19 rapid response on teachers, students, and families: Insights from British Columbia, Canada
Study 14	Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, D. (2021)	'Homeschooling' and the COVID-19 Crisis: The Insights of Parents on Curriculum and Remote Learning
Study 15	Shafer, K., Scheibling, C., & Milkie, M. A. (2020)	The Division of Domestic Labor before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada: Stagnation versus Shifts in Fathers' Contributions
Study 16	Riegel, A. B., Marques, L. N., & Wuo, A. S. (2021)	Legislation that guides teaching for students with disabilities in times of pandemic – COVID-19

Discussion

To analyze the situation of Special Education in Brazil and Canada in times of pandemic, a brief overview is presented for educational policies focused on inclusive education in these countries. In both countries, educational policies are the result of the process of internationalization of the right to education and the political, economic, and social specificities of each country. As a common ground, in both countries the goal of educational policies is the schooling of people with disabilities in regular education, but the Brazilian special education policy, from the perspective of inclusion, is more recent than Canada's: almost 30 years apart (Kassar et al., 2019; Smith, 1981).

Since the 1980s, Canada has made it compulsory for people with disabilities to be included in school. There are several support programs for students with disabilities, different support systems, and the receipt of resources for Special Education. In Brazil, however, the support system for students with disabilities is a sore point, and resources are divided between public and private education, which makes it extremely dependent on the dominant political positions (Han, 2018; Kassar et al., 2019; Smith, 1981).

In the vast majority of districts in Canada, the school structure is able to guarantee access and permanence of students with disabilities in the regular school, and the programs provided for in the special education policy guidelines articulate the individual processes proposed for students with disabilities and the class process (Alberta, 2013, 2016; British Columbia, 2016; Ontario, 2017; Québec, 2006). In Brazil, despite the policy providing for this articulation, the school system has difficulties in implementing this proposal (Brazil, 2008). However, regardless of the scope of the educational policy in Brazil or in Canada, the person with disabilities has a very diverse demand for support. As it is not possible to separate education from other policies and living conditions, people with disabilities living in Brazil have greater vulnerability compared to people with disabilities in Canada, which has a higher human development index (HDI) and greater guarantees of human rights (Dantas, 2017).

The Covid-19 pandemic, since the beginning of the year 2020, has triggered a Public Health Emergency situation, and the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the severity of the disease caused by the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). This situation has brought about a great transformation in the lives of people from different countries; undeniably, the greatest impacts have been found to occur for the most socially vulnerable people. In Brazil, which has great social inequality, most inequalities refer to access to the Internet and to equipment, as well as the condition to acquire digital skills (Rodrigo Mendes Institute, 2020).

Special Education and the Pandemic in Brazil

According to data from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira [INEP], 2020), in Brazil, there are more than a million students with some kind of disability enrolled in regular classes. It seems logical that social isolation increases exclusion. In Brazil, the federation shared with the states and municipalities the responsibility for organizing the implementation of educational activities. Face-to-face classes were suspended in virtually all states, and one of the alternatives was remote classes. Children started to study online, and traditional face-to-face classes were shifted to the virtual environment. According to a research study by Rodrigo Mendes Institute (2020), in Brazil there is a lack of infrastructure for homeschooling and based on the Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação (TIC) Domicílios survey [a survey on the use of Information and Communication Technologies in Brazilian households], it was found that “among the C class households, 43% had a computer and Internet access, and 33% had only Internet connection [without a computer]. Most households in classes D and E had neither access to a computer nor to the Internet (58%)” (Instituto Rodrigo Mendes, 2020, p.6). These data show that, in Brazil, exclusion begins with access to remote education.

In Brazil, special norms were adopted for the pandemic period. Following the timeline of the documents, Arruda (2020) stated that a precise and cohesive proposal was not instituted at the federal level. This can be seen in the ordinance nº 343/2020, which institutes remote teaching (Portaria n. 343, 2020), and the provisional measure nº 934, which determines as flexible the mandatory number of school days (Medida Provisória n. 934, 2020). Then, the National Council of Education (CNE) issued Directive no. 5, which reorganized the calendar and the workload for remote activities (Parecer CNE/CP n. 5, 2020). The document includes Special Education students, and explicitly guarantees the provision of specialized educational care (AEE), with support for families, the development of individual teaching plans, and support for more specific actions such as the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), alternative communication or special systems for students with disabilities (Parecer CNE/CP n. 5, 2020). Following the timeline, Directive no. 11 (Parecer CNE/CP n. 11, 2020) provides guidelines for classes and pedagogical activities in the context of the pandemic. While the opinion report states that students in Special Education must follow the same rules for returning to classes, it provides a series of guidelines on physical contact, the use of masks, etc., simplifying the issue of people with disabilities. In August 2020, Law No. 14,040 established special educational standards to be adopted during the state of public calamity (Lei n. 14.040, 2020).

The schools closed in March 2020 and so far, (March 2021) the return has been still partial. In most states, only private education has returned, and in a hybrid format. This situation shows the lack of infrastructure in the Brazilian educational system (e.g., in certain areas, schools do not have internet access and/or computers), and lack of training on hybrid teaching for teachers.

Analyzing the situation of Special Education in Brazil during the pandemic, a survey conducted with 1,133 Special Education teachers of Basic Education, in June 2020, concluded that 96.6% were performing activities at home, and of these, 85.7% had no experience in online classes and almost 50% classified their use of digital technology as regular. In this survey, 84.6% of teachers said they had technological equipment available at home, but 55.7% said they needed to share the use of it with others. Of the Special Education teachers 83.6% said that remote classes increased their working hours. The results show that the content was not being adequately learned and 72.5% believe that the content will have to be taught again (Torres & Borges, 2020).

In Brazil, in addition to the direction given by the federation, the states and municipalities also had a great contribution in the normalization and effectiveness of remote learning; for example, the municipality of Vila Velha, in Espírito Santo, approved the Municipal Ordinance

no. 009/2020, which implemented a virtual learning platform; the state of Sergipe approved the Ordinance no. 2235/2020/GS/SEDUC, which regulated non-presential school activities; the state of São Paulo approved Decree no. 59.774 of September 17, 2020, which regulated remote activities and their operationalization; the state of Rio de Janeiro approved Law no. 8802/2020, which adopts remote education and provides guidelines; the state of Rio Grande do Sul approved Decree no. 55. 240, of May 10, 2020, which institutes the Controlled Distancing System and the Joint Ordinance no. 01/2020, which provides on the measures to be adopted by all Educational Institutions (Conde et al., 2020; Lei n. 8802, 2020; Decreto n. 55.240, 2020; Portaria Conjunta 01, 2020; Decreto n. 59.774, 2020; Portaria n. 2235/2020/GS/Seduc, 2020).

Despite the several ordinances, decrees and norms of the states and municipalities all provided for remote learning as the only alternative for all levels of education by 2020, there were differences in the platforms made available, in the provision of virtual environments, in the support given to students who had no access to the Internet or equipment, among others. The same prerogatives apply to the target students of Special Education.

Still on the situation of Special Education in Brazil, after a study, Instituto Rodrigo Mendes prepared a Protocol on Inclusive Education during the Covid-19 pandemic (2020). The document gives a warning about the importance of health care and education for special students. It emphasizes as important points the fact that therapeutic and health services for people with disabilities were discontinued, monitoring was difficult to implement for some disabilities, and peer relationships were disrupted (Rodrigo Mendes Institute, 2020). Studies such as by Neta et al. (2020), Silva et al. (2020), Mohan et al. (2020), highlight the importance of therapeutic supports, social interactions, and individualized programs for Special Education students and indicate that remote classes can considerably affect populations that face disadvantages such as Special Education students, as well as the fact that these students have had negative impacts when classes in their schools were suspended. It is also worth mentioning that the Specialized Educational Service, which is the biggest pedagogical support tool for students with disabilities in Brazil, in most states, has encountered many difficulties in becoming effective during remote education activities. There are different reasons, for example, teachers' training on the use of digital technologies, students' access to the Internet and technological equipment, students' ability, the support from their families, among other points (Neta et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2020).

A committee in the field of education in Brazil launched a Covid-19 guide, with guidelines for Special Education from the perspective of inclusion. The guide (available at: <https://campanha.org.br/acervo/>) is targeted at families, the school community, and government agencies, and aims to provide information and advice on Special Education in the inclusive perspective in the pandemic period and on social distancing. The guide brings together documents, videos, websites, and complementary materials to support the education of people with disabilities.

Special Education and the Pandemic in Canada

The Covid-19 outbreak has caused many challenges of various kinds, such as economic, health, educational, and emotional ones. Numerous studies, e.g., that of Güzel et al. (2020), El-Zraigat and Alshammari (2020), analyzed social, psychological, and emotional situations during isolation and found their negative effects on social and emotional development. The fact of having a disability does not put individuals at risk of contracting Covid-19 nor worsens the disease. What may put a person with a disability at risk is his or her health status. However, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 has increased stress and has been the cause of many psychological problems, and people with disabilities suffer more from social isolation, especially since their social lives are already very restricted (El-Zraigat & Alshammari, 2020).

In March/April 2020, Canada shut down schools and day care centers, among other places, as a measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The measure has caused psychological distress in Canadians, including depression and fear. Increased psychological distress impacts people's lives and social relationships (Best et al., 2020).

A Canadian study conducted with 1,381 participants from March 31 to April 15, 2020, a period of social distancing, aimed to identify psychological distress, satisfaction with life, and social connection during the first moments of isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic in Canada. The main results found that the impact was negative, causing psychological distress, especially in the most economically vulnerable people, and that programs should be offered to help these individuals at risk, including targeted activities that could increase socialization, thus creating collective resilience (Best et al., 2020).

Another study involving Canada, the United States, and France compared trends in technology use, the technological environment, and the habits of higher education students, and their respective consequences for distance learning (Wotto, 2020). Methodologically, a systematic literature review was conducted. In all three countries, there was an increase in the number of online platforms, with online courses and accredited systems. In the United States, both public and private institutions argue that technological transformations are the result of many factors and that distance learning after Covid-19 has been shown to be a growing alternative because it creates new spaces. Another aspect perceived in the United States is a great tendency towards internationalization. In France, the national strategy is mainly focused abroad. In Canada, there was a great growth of distance learning and strategies and learning materials and demands were developed in training institutions. The study shows that Distance Learning in Canada is growing; however, Canadian as well as French institutions are expected to update their procedures in the international scenario (Wotto, 2020).

In the Canadian context, education is part of the federal system of shared powers; the constitution provides that each Province and territory can make laws, for example, for Education; they are responsible for organizing education at the elementary, secondary and tertiary levels, along with the ministries of education. Therefore, there are several differences in education policies between the provinces and territories (Government of Canada, 2020).

Of Canada's 37,703,512 inhabitants, four provinces, together, account for approximately 30,500,000 of these inhabitants, namely, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Alberta, which will be particularly addressed in the discussion on Special Education and Covid-19.

In the most densely populated of the provinces and territories, Ontario, primary and secondary schools were closed from March and reopened in November 2020. Classes at universities only returned in September 2021. In view of the shutdown, schools, libraries, and various educational spaces began to operate online (Office of the Premier 2020).

In Ontario, teacher trainers have also been called upon to contribute to solving the challenges posed by the Covid-19 crisis. Internet access rates in Ontario indicate that 12% of Ontario households are underserved or unserved, making it difficult to access remote classrooms. According to Van Nuland et al. (2020), some issues greatly affected learning in remote teaching, e.g., "1) access to effective online connection and support, 2) educator professional development for online learning, 3) conversion of face-to-face courses to successful online courses, and 4) the recognition of student teachers' practical experiences" (p.442).

The closing of schools has had an impact on the learning and school performance of school-age children. In addition to internet access and mastery of technological tools, an important factor is the amount of time a student devotes to instruction. According to Frenette et al. (2020), performance in reading, math, and science is associated with the amount of time a student devotes to them, and those who devote less have worse performance. With schools closed, students who cannot participate in remote learning, regardless of the reason, miss out on many learning activities. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate on the effectiveness of the

activities that are offered in this teaching model. In addition, the level of parental involvement in their children's learning activities is an important aspect. Previous studies show that the success of students in the classroom is related to the way parents are involved in learning activities; in the case of remote learning, the role of parents is even more important (Hasler Waters et al., 2014). Therefore, it is not difficult to predict that low-income families, and/or families of children and adolescents with disabilities, owing to their need for different methods and resources, will find it more difficult to cope with remote learning (Frenette et al., 2020).

The second most populous province, Quebec, has an educational policy in which Special Education has a goal of including students with disabilities in the regular classroom. However, among the four districts addressed, Quebec's Special Education policy is the least structured one, with the fewest resources, methods, and supports (Québec, 2006).

The province suspended classes in elementary and secondary schools in March 2020 and reopened them in November 2020, but daycare centers started to be reopened in June 2020. During the shutdown, remote learning was offered, with many digital platforms with activities and guidance for families (Québec, 2021).

According to Russo et al. (2020), since the 1990s, educational inequalities have been increasing in Quebec's educational system. The study found that children who had learning disabilities before the pandemic and students adapting to school were found to be more vulnerable during the pandemic. These students needed extra support, but they were not offered it during the pandemic.

The provinces of British Columbia and Alberta have similar population numbers, in the range of four million. In British Columbia, the Special Education policy is also based on the inclusive perspective. Its documents outline the process of inclusion, assessment, tracking and monitoring, and the support mechanisms that are available (Alberta, 2013; British Columbia, 2017).

With the spread of Covid-19 in the province of British Columbia, daycare centers and schools were closed, but their return occurred sooner than in other districts in Canada. In the first plan to reopen in June 2020, daycare centers for children of essential workers and online classes from Kindergarten to Grade 12 were announced, and the return to face-to-face classes was optional. The return occurred slowly, with limited student numbers and reduced hours (British Columbia, 2021).

A survey carried out with teachers and parents in British Columbia showed that during school shutdowns both teachers and parents felt confused about teaching practices. Both the "learning continuity" at home and the return to the classroom were confusing to the participants. The parents emphasized the school's delay in answering e-mails, and the concern about their children's learning. The families felt overwhelmed and said that the situation was unmanageable on several occasions, but at the same time they affirmed that the fact that their children were at home also brought positive points, for example, it strengthened the bond between parents and children. The teachers, on the other hand, reported missing the group meetings, and increased stress was noted by both groups. The participants also highlighted that they felt deeply concerned when the children had learning difficulties or needed additional educational services (MacDonald & Hill, 2020).

In Alberta, similarly to other districts, children and adolescents with disabilities are included in regular school. There is a legislation in place to regulate and guide how these students can be supported in school (Alberta, 2016). Alberta Education has produced a series of resources that include information and strategies to support the diverse learning needs of children and students in Special Education from Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.

With the pandemic, classes in Alberta were interrupted and remote teaching was adopted. Classes for students from kindergarten to grade 12 had a resumption plan divided into phases, which had specificities as to age, schooling, etc. Classes resumed in June 2020; however, only

in September 2020 did the restrictions ease. The precautions were established by the Ministry of Education, and among the many actions was a family orientation guide, i.e., a health checklist that was applied to all students. As for Special Education students, the rules were the same and school authorities were supposed to ensure the full participation and inclusion of students with disabilities when they returned to class, and for those who needed specialized supports and services, plans were to be developed to ensure their inclusion (Alberta, 2020, 2021).

A published case study looked at the experiences of ten parents of children in elementary school programs in Alberta, Canada. The article reports parents' perceptions of homeschooling and the Covid-19 crisis, especially with regard to distance learning and the importance of social interaction. Parental support is an important factor in the education of children. Despite recognizing that parents are very important in children's learning, the pandemic has imposed home education on parents (Fontenelle Tereshchuk, 2021).

In Alberta, as well as across Canada, schools have the inclusive teaching perspective, whose underlying principle is that all children should be in school, regardless of their difficulties or disabilities. Teachers who are qualified to work in Special Education have been prepared for individualized classrooms, and this improves teachers' performance (Fontenelle Tereshchuk, 2021). Since before 2013, teachers in Alberta have been making use of technology for learning (Alberta, 2013), but they were not prepared for the scope of technology use ultimately required during the pandemic.

Finally, the main conclusions are: 1) parents felt tired and even overwhelmed by having the obligation to take care of their children's emotional and academic needs; 2) communication between school and family did not meet all needs; 3) technological difficulties were highlighted by teachers and family members, and the distance learning process made this evident; 4) the curriculum needs to be re-designed to suit distance learning; 5) children being left out of school impacted the mental health of parents and children; 6) school boards and schools did not provide adequate support for teachers and parents; 7) parents believe that, comparatively, remote learning is not as effective as classroom learning; 8) lack of social interaction had negative impacts on children (Fontenelle Tereshchuk, 2021; Shafer et al., 2020).

Conclusions and Implications

Although Covid-19 affected both countries, the conduct adopted in the two countries was different in many respects. An important point to ensure education in times of crisis is legislation. It can be seen that the Special Education legislation in each country and what it could guarantee to students with disabilities was a determining factor in the support that was given to these students during this pandemic period. The more structured the educational system and the Special Education services are, the more chance of success there will be in times of crisis.

Canada, in addition to returning to face-to-face classes earlier, also offered more support for families and students, but as shown by research, it was not enough. Factors such as the type of online platforms, technological availability, user ability, parental supervision, appropriate teaching methodologies for remote learning, balancing the routine, etc. are determining factors for efficient learning in non-face-to-face education.

In Brazil, face-to-face classes have not been resumed yet; most states have not managed to guarantee the Specialized Education Service, which differs from that of Canada, whose documents make it clear that students with disabilities should be guaranteed the return to face-to-face classes in the same way as any other students.

It is a consensus that children with disabilities, under social isolation, were left in a situation of fragility owing to the interruption of school and therapeutic activities, the restriction of interaction with peers, the overload of activities borne by the families, and the absence of solution for the situation.

The studies and legislation under analysis involved different educational issues facing the covid-19 pandemic, and based on the study of the situation of Special Education in the two countries, it can be concluded that in situations of remote education, the following points are important: 1) the choice of tools; 2) quality of Internet connectivity; 3) teachers' and students' knowledge of digital abilities; 4) variation of resources among different platforms, video-classes, printed materials, different methodologies, applications, etc.; 5) recognition of students' psychosocial situation; 6) creation of collective virtual spaces to support students and their families; 7) planning of the teaching program; 8) recognition students' individual needs to offer appropriate support; 8) creation of different means of communication between the school and the family; 9) support to teachers; 10) training on the use of digital tools; 11) monitoring of teaching; 12) combination of different approaches and different media; 13) alternation of synchronous and asynchronous classes; 14) very well-defined rules about the conduction of classes and activities; 15) offer of different types of exercises; 16) offer of feedback to students; 17) attention to the development of students' self-regulation and metacognitive skills; 18) sharing of experiences.

The main limitation of this research is the fact that the search for articles was not carried out in other databases, which otherwise would have benefited from contributions on this topic published by other authors and in other studies.

Regarding contributions, it is noteworthy that the theme is contemporary and therefore there is little research to date. The present study is aimed at collaborating with the growth of theoretical or empirical studies in Brazil and abroad. The findings of the research show what the support strategies were and how interventions were carried out with students with disabilities in both countries. It also made it possible to advance the state of the art in the area by identifying the gaps and challenges posed by this health crisis. The study developed can serve as a basis for other comparative studies, which are extremely necessary in scientific production at a global level.

In a pandemic scenario, one should be more empathetic and supportive, to welcome the differences, to understand the historical, social, political and educational dimensions experienced by people with disabilities. There are still many issues to be researched about Special Education and the demands imposed by the pandemic. This study is expected to encourage the debate on inclusive public policies and on the low supply of services and contribute to the creation of a more just society.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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