

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH FOOTBALL: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **INCLUSÃO SOCIAL NO AMBIENTE ESCOLAR POR MEIO DO FUTEBOL: UMA REVISÃO BIBLIOGRÁFICA**

## **INCLUSIÓN SOCIAL EN EL ENTORNO ESCOLAR A TRAVÉS DEL FÚTBOL: UNA REVISIÓN BIBLIOGRÁFICA**



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### **ABSTRACT**

Football is a significant means of social inclusion within the sports context, especially for young people living in peripheral areas and urban centers. Cruz (2003) This article aimed to analyze school football as a tool for social inclusion. The methodology used was a Bibliographic Review, which according to Gil (2008) is a type of research based on the analysis of already published works, mainly scientific articles and books, with the objective of identifying the most relevant works for the research, examining the positions and conclusions of other authors. It was discussed how football, as a cultural phenomenon and a sport of great popularity, can contribute to the integration of students from different backgrounds, skills, and social contexts, promoting values such as respect, cooperation, and solidarity. Also addressed are the obstacles to inclusion, such as competitive culture, gender stereotypes, and structural limitations, in addition to proposals for more inclusive pedagogical practices. It is concluded that, with proper training, infrastructure, and ethical commitment, school football can be an important tool for building a more just, democratic, and inclusive school.

**Keywords:** School Football. Social Inclusion. Physical Education. Pedagogical Practices. Diversity.

### **RESUMO**

O futebol é um meio significativo de inclusão social no âmbito esportivo, especialmente para os jovens que vivem em áreas periféricas e centros urbanos. Cruz (2003) Este artigo teve como objetivo analisar o futebol escolar como ferramenta de inclusão social. A metodologia utilizada foi de Revisão Bibliográfica, que segundo Gil (2008) é um tipo de pesquisa baseada na análise de trabalhos já publicados principalmente artigos científicos e livros com o objetivo de identificar os trabalhos mais pertinentes para a pesquisa, examinando as posições e conclusões de outros autores. Discutiu-se como o futebol, enquanto fenômeno cultural e esporte de grande popularidade, pode contribuir para a integração de estudantes de diferentes origens, habilidades e contextos sociais, promovendo valores como respeito, cooperação e

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solidariedade. Também são abordados os obstáculos para a inclusão, como a cultura competitiva, estereótipos de gênero e limitações estruturais, além de propostas para práticas pedagógicas mais inclusivas. Conclui-se que, com formação adequada, infraestrutura e compromisso ético, o futebol escolar pode ser um importante instrumento para a construção de uma escola mais justa, democrática e inclusiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Futebol Escolar. Inclusão Social. Educação Física. Práticas Pedagógicas. Diversidade.

## RESUMEN

El fútbol es un medio significativo de inclusión social en el ámbito deportivo, especialmente para jóvenes que viven en zonas periféricas y centros urbanos. Cruz (2003) Este artículo analizó el fútbol escolar como herramienta para la inclusión social. La metodología empleada fue una revisión bibliográfica, que, según Gil (2008), es un tipo de investigación basada en el análisis de trabajos ya publicados, principalmente artículos científicos y libros, con el objetivo de identificar las obras más relevantes para la investigación, examinando las posturas y conclusiones de otros autores. Se discutió cómo el fútbol, como fenómeno cultural y deporte muy popular, puede contribuir a la integración de estudiantes de diferentes orígenes, capacidades y contextos sociales, promoviendo valores como el respeto, la cooperación y la solidaridad. También se abordaron los obstáculos a la inclusión, como la cultura competitiva, los estereotipos de género y las limitaciones estructurales, además de proponer prácticas pedagógicas más inclusivas. Se concluyó que, con una formación adecuada, infraestructura y un compromiso ético, el fútbol escolar puede ser un instrumento importante para construir una escuela más justa, democrática e inclusiva.

**Palabras clave:** Fútbol Escolar. Inclusión Social. Educación Física. Práticas Pedagógicas. Diversidad.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Social inclusion refers to a set of measures that aim to prevent the exclusion of people from the benefits of living in society. Currently, exclusion can be caused by several factors, including: social environment, educational level, age group, disabilities, gender, religion, and racial prejudices (Amaral; Burity, 2006). Mafra (2007) suggests that social inclusion is the integral participation of the individual in various aspects of life, such as economy, culture, politics, religion and the environment, even if he or she has been previously excluded for some social reason.

Social exclusion represents a great challenge in today's societies, where there are barriers that limit the population's access to basic and mandatory rights, such as education, health, leisure and social participation. According to data from the IBGE (2023), in Brazil, on average 20% of the population is living in a situation of social vulnerability, and thus faces several difficulties, directly and negatively impacting the integral development of individuals.

Thus, it is essential to carry out public policy programs so that the promotion of social inclusion is a reality for the population, mainly due to its importance in education and sports as essential tools for changes to occur and finally social transformation (Amaral; Burity, 2006).

Soccer, and sport in general, plays a fundamental role in Brazilian culture, being considered a means of integration and health promotion. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) emphasizes that physical activity is essential to prevent chronic diseases, improve mental health, and strengthen social bonds. However, access to these practices is not guaranteed for everyone, and it is necessary to implement inclusive strategies that ensure the full participation of children and young people in school and community environments (Darido; Rangel, 2019).

Football is a significant means of social inclusion in the sports field, especially for young people living in peripheral areas and urban centres. Cruz (2003) states that the practice of soccer makes these young people feel valued and integrated into society, which reinforces their sense of belonging. Cavalli (2007) states in a study that the interaction of children and adolescents with sports produces significant and rewarding changes in communities lacking opportunities.

In addition to improving health and reducing stress, sport is a cultural expression and a disciplinary factor that helps in social learning, teaching how to deal with victories and defeats, to accept differences and to recognize limits and abilities (Rocha, 2004). Health and physical education professionals consider sport an effective means of promoting social inclusion, contributing to the dissemination of ethical and moral goals and values.

In Brazil, famous worldwide for soccer, this modality attracts a lot, especially among children and young people who dream of pursuing a career in the sport in search of better living conditions for themselves and their families (Rodrigues et al., 2016). According to Lima (2014), soccer has established itself as an effective tool for social protection and rescue, keeping children and adolescents away from the streets and guiding them to more positive paths.

In this scenario, the school plays a fundamental role as a space for the construction of citizenship, and it is necessary to promote pedagogical practices that combat social inequalities and value cultural diversity. Physical Education, through soccer, has the ability to significantly assist in the inclusion of students in conditions of social vulnerability, with disabilities or who face socialization difficulties (Daolio, 2002; Betti; Zuliani, 2002).

However, in order to avoid risks of exclusion, such as valuing performance rather than participation and reproducing gender stereotypes (Kunz, 1994), it is necessary that sports activities in schools be carried out with an intentional pedagogical approach. The teacher acts as a mediator of these interactions, encouraging active participation and respect for diversity.

Considering the above, this article aims to analyze school soccer as an instrument of social inclusion, highlighting its possibilities, limitations and the obstacles that educators face.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This study is a Literature Review which, according to Gil (2008), is a type of research based on the analysis of already published works, mainly scientific articles and books, with the objective of identifying the most pertinent works for research, examining the positions and conclusions of other authors. The search was carried out in the SciELO, Google Scholar, LILACS, CAPES, SUCUPIRA databases using the following descriptors: "school soccer", "social inclusion", "Physical Education and inclusion", "sport and social vulnerability".

The selection criteria included:

- Articles published from 2000 to 2024;
- Texts accessible in full;
- Articles, dissertations and official documents that dealt with soccer in the school environment and its connection with social inclusion;
- Texts written in Portuguese.

Research that addressed soccer only in competitive or commercial contexts, with no direct connection to school physical education or social inclusion, was discarded.

After screening titles, abstracts and complete reading, 35 studies were found and only 17 were used for analysis and categorization of the themes, highlighting the pedagogical, social and cultural benefits of school soccer, in addition to the challenges faced in teaching practice.

### **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 SOCCER'S PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION**

Soccer is a sport that exerts great fascination and cultural influence, especially in the Brazilian context, where it is considered a national identity element. Its presence in the school environment goes beyond the simple recreational character, configuring itself as a powerful pedagogical tool capable of promoting social inclusion and the integral development of students.

The popularity of soccer allows it to be a democratic instrument, accessible to children and young people from different socioeconomic realities, which facilitates the integration and participation of historically excluded groups. Cruz (2003) emphasizes that soccer practitioners, especially those living in peripheries or vulnerable urban areas, when encouraged, feel valued and recognized, which strengthens their sense of belonging and self-esteem.

In the pedagogical sphere, school soccer enables the learning of fundamental motor skills, such as coordination, balance and agility, contributing to the physical development of students. However, its impact transcends the bodily aspect: the rules of the game and collective dynamics promote essential social skills, such as cooperation, respect for norms, solidarity, empathy and discipline (Darido; Rangel, 2019).

In addition, soccer stimulates the development of emotional skills, by requiring students to learn to deal with success and failure, frustration and overcoming, promoting resilience and emotional regulation. These experiences are essential for the formation of critical and autonomous subjects, prepared to face social and personal challenges (Cavalli, 2007).

Another important aspect is football's ability to be adapted to different audiences and contexts. The practice can be modified to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities, ensuring the full and effective participation of these students. This methodological flexibility makes soccer an inclusive modality, which values diversity and promotes equity (Gorgatti; Costa, 2013).

Soccer, therefore, is not just a physical activity, but a pedagogical space rich in possibilities for the promotion of social inclusion, cultural integration and the construction of democratic values. When conducted with pedagogical intentionality and social sensitivity, it

becomes a transformative instrument, capable of contributing to the formation of a fairer, more welcoming school committed to the integral development of all students.

Soccer, due to its universal popularity and practical simplicity, is a sport that naturally attracts the attention of students, especially in contexts marked by social vulnerability. Its insertion in the school curriculum goes far beyond the practice of physical activity: it becomes a space for social, cultural and affective learning.

Through soccer, it is possible to promote socialization among students of different backgrounds and abilities, providing an environment in which diversity is experienced and valued.

According to Darido and Rangel (2005), when well conducted, soccer stimulates fundamental values such as cooperation, mutual respect, solidarity and autonomy, promoting the construction of social bonds and the strengthening of the sense of belonging. This is especially relevant for students in vulnerable situations, who often face processes of exclusion in their communities and at school.

Soccer contributes to the integral development of students by integrating physical aspects — such as motor coordination, endurance and agility — with emotional and social development. The experience of the rules of the game, the need to act in a team and the management of emotions in the face of success and failure are powerful pedagogical elements for the formation of character and citizenship (Cavalli, 2007).

In addition, the modality stands out for its accessibility. Unlike sports that require expensive equipment or complex infrastructure, soccer can be played in varied spaces and with simple materials, which makes it a democratic tool for inclusion. This characteristic enhances its social function, especially in public schools and poor communities, where resources are limited.

Another aspect that reinforces the importance of school soccer is its cultural dimension. As a social phenomenon, soccer carries symbols, stories, and identities that are important to the social group. Daolio (2002) emphasizes that soccer should be understood as a cultural manifestation that directly influences the formation of the subjects, being a privileged channel for dialogue between the school and the sociocultural reality of the students.

In this way, school soccer not only promotes physical activity, but works as a space for social inclusion, learning and appreciation of cultural diversity, contributing to the construction of a more democratic and plural school.

### 3.2 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS IN THE PRACTICE OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SOCCER

Although school soccer has recognized pedagogical and social potential for inclusion, its practical implementation faces several challenges that can compromise the effectiveness of this instrument. One of the main obstacles is related to the traditionally competitive and exclusionary sports culture, which values victory and technical performance to the detriment of the participation and inclusion of all students.

This competitive paradigm, still very present in schools, can lead to the exclusion of students with lower motor skills, who feel unmotivated or even rejected during activities. The preference for more skilled students ends up reinforcing inequalities, hindering the construction of an inclusive and welcoming environment (Kunz, 1994).

In addition, gender stereotypes are persistent barriers in the practice of school soccer. The association of soccer with the male universe makes it difficult for girls to engage, who often face resistance or prejudice to participate in classes. This scenario reinforces gender inequalities and limits the scope of social inclusion in the school environment (Santos; Barbosa, 2022).

Another significant challenge lies in teacher training. Many Physical Education educators do not have specific preparation to deal with the diversity of needs and abilities present in classes, especially in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities or developmental disorders. The absence of adequate training makes it difficult to adapt practices and create strategies that guarantee access and full participation of all students (Almeida; Rocha, 2023).

Insufficient infrastructure and a lack of adapted material resources are other limiting factors. Many public schools face difficulties in offering adequate spaces, accessible equipment and pedagogical materials that enable the implementation of inclusive and diversified activities (Lima, 2014).

In addition to structural issues, there is also the risk of reproducing, within the school environment, the inequalities and prejudices present in society, such as racial discrimination, social exclusion and economic marginalization. Without a critical and intentional action by the teacher, sports practices can inadvertently strengthen these inequalities, becoming a space of exclusion instead of inclusion (Lima, 2014).

Therefore, overcoming these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, which involves continuing education for teachers, investment in infrastructure and resources, review of pedagogical practices, and the development of a school culture that values diversity, participation, and solidarity.

Despite the clear benefits of school soccer, there are numerous challenges for its practice to be effective as a genuine instrument of social inclusion. The first of these is the traditionally competitive culture that permeates the sport, where technical performance is often valued to the detriment of participation and inclusion (Kunz, 1994). This logic can lead to the exclusion of students with less ability, low motor coordination, or who simply do not adapt to the competitive profile, creating climates of segregation within classes.

Another crucial challenge refers to the gender stereotypes present in school sports practices. Football is still perceived by many as a male sport, which limits girls' participation and engagement. This perception reinforces gender inequalities and makes it difficult to build an inclusive and egalitarian environment (Santos; Barbosa, 2022).

In addition, teacher training represents a significant obstacle. Many educators do not receive adequate preparation to deal with the diversity of the classroom, which includes students with physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and multiple special educational needs. The lack of training to adapt classes and make practices accessible limits the full participation of these students, compromising the social function of sport (Almeida; Rocha, 2023).

Insufficient school infrastructure also limits the possibilities for diverse and inclusive practices. Inadequate spaces, absence of adapted materials and specific equipment make it difficult to implement methodologies that contemplate all students, especially in low-income public schools.

Another delicate point is the possible reproduction, within the school environment, of the social and cultural inequalities present in society. Without a critical and intentional action by the teacher, sports practices can reinforce prejudices, exclusions and inequalities, instead of promoting them to overcome and include them (Lima, 2014).

Therefore, for school football to fulfill its inclusive potential, it is necessary to overcome these challenges through teacher training, investment in infrastructure and a pedagogical culture based on respect for diversity and valuing everyone's participation.

### 3.3 THE ROLE OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER IN PROMOTING INCLUSION THROUGH SCHOOL SOCCER

The Physical Education teacher plays a central role in the mediation of school sports practices, being the main agent responsible for the effectiveness of social inclusion through soccer. Its performance goes beyond the transmission of techniques and rules, encompassing the development of pedagogical, ethical and social skills that promote equitable participation and the appreciation of diversity among students (Darido; Rangel, 2019).

Teacher training is essential for them to recognize and respect individual differences, promoting adaptations in activities to contemplate students with disabilities, motor difficulties, developmental disorders or different socioeconomic realities. Almeida and Rocha (2023) highlight that preparing for inclusion requires an interdisciplinary and reflective approach, which combines theoretical, practical, and ethical knowledge.

In addition, the teacher acts as a mediator of interpersonal relationships and the emotional climate of the class, creating a welcoming environment that favors dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. This mediation is essential for school soccer to stop being just a competition and become a space for social and emotional learning, where all students can feel valued and motivated to participate (Cavalli, 2007).

Another important aspect is the teacher's ability to integrate soccer with pedagogical proposals that transcend physical practice, promoting critical reflection on topics such as citizenship, cultural diversity, gender equality and combating prejudice. This approach expands the impact of sport, contributing to the formation of conscious and socially engaged subjects (Santos; Barbosa, 2022).

The teacher's work also involves collaborative work with the school community, families and other education and health professionals, strengthening support networks that expand the possibilities of inclusion and development of students. Intersectoral programs, such as the School Health Program (PSE), exemplify the importance of this articulation to enhance the effects of pedagogical actions (BRASIL, 2022).

Finally, the Physical Education teacher must be an agent of social transformation, committed to the construction of an inclusive and democratic school. This implies an ethical and political commitment, which is reflected in the constant search for professional updating, pedagogical innovation, and the promotion of practices that value diversity and guarantee the right to participation of all students in school soccer.

The Physical Education teacher is the main agent responsible for the transformation of school sports practices into truly inclusive spaces. To this end, their training must go beyond the technical knowledge of sport, also covering pedagogical, social and ethical skills, which enable them to mediate differences and promote mutual respect (Almeida; Rocha, 2023).

It is the role of the educator to adapt sports activities to the individual and collective needs of students, promoting the modification of rules, the use of cooperative games and strategies that encourage the participation of all, regardless of skill level, gender, physical condition or social origin. These adaptations not only facilitate inclusion, but also value diversity as an enriching element of the educational process (Darido; Rangel, 2005).

In addition, the teacher must be an agent of change in the school, promoting awareness of social and cultural issues, combating prejudices and stereotypes, and building a welcoming and safe environment for all. The teacher's performance goes beyond the walls of the court; He is an educator committed to the integral formation of students and to the construction of a democratic and inclusive school culture.

Articulation with families and the community is also essential to expand the impact of inclusive sports practices. The involvement of the various actors contributes to strengthening the students' sense of belonging, promoting positive social values and ensuring the continuity of actions beyond the school space.

Therefore, the role of the Physical Education teacher is strategic and multifaceted, requiring continuing education, social sensitivity and the ability to innovate and adapt practices, ensuring that school soccer is an effective tool for inclusion and human development.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

The analysis carried out in this article reinforces the importance of school soccer as a valuable tool for the promotion of social inclusion in the educational environment. By offering an accessible, culturally significant practice rich in pedagogical possibilities, soccer can be a powerful means to integrate students from different backgrounds, abilities, and socioeconomic contexts, contributing to integral and citizen education.

However, the realization of this potential requires a careful and intentional approach, which goes beyond the simple competitive and technical aspect of the sport. The challenges identified, such as the persistence of the exclusionary culture, gender stereotypes, insufficient teacher training and structural limitations, are real barriers that require joint efforts by educators, managers and public policy makers.

The role of the Physical Education teacher is central to this process, as it is up to him to mediate sports practices, adapt them to the needs of students, create welcoming environments and promote values such as respect, solidarity and cooperation. Their continued training, ethical commitment and collaborative work with the school community are fundamental to ensure that school football is, in fact, a space for inclusion and social transformation.

In addition, the articulation between school, family and community emerges as a strategic element to expand the impact of inclusive practices, strengthening social bonds and expanding opportunities for student participation and development.

Finally, this article points to the need for educational policies that encourage and support the adoption of inclusive pedagogical practices in school sports, with investments in

infrastructure, training and adequate materials. Thus, it will be possible to build a fairer, more democratic school committed to equity, in which school football effectively contributes to overcoming inequalities and promoting the well-being and quality of life of all students.

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