Inclusión educativa: descripción de barreras por diversidad lingüística y cultural

Educational inclusion: description of barriers due to linguistic and cultural diversity

Inclusão educacional: descrição das barreiras decorrentes da diversidade linguística e cultural

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Resumen

En el presente artículo se analizan las percepciones de estudiantes y docentes universitarios en torno a la presencia de barreras por diversidad lingüística y cultural en la educación superior. Para ello, se empleó una metodología mixta, específicamente mediante una encuesta y una entrevista en profundidad. El análisis de la encuesta se efectuó a través de estadística descriptiva, mientras que en las entrevistas se examinó el contenido para detectar las principales contribuciones de los informantes. Los principales demuestran que la percepción de discriminación por género y origen étnico está presente tanto en estudiantes como en docentes. Además, se observa la exclusión de estudiantes por parte de docentes, la cual es percibida y explicada por estos últimos como un entramado de relaciones actorales. En conclusión, el estudio identifica barreras como el origen étnico, la lengua materna, el género y el empleo que algunos estudiantes desarrollan simultáneamente con su formación universitaria.

Palabras clave: inclusión educativa barreras lingüísticas, barreras culturales, educación universitaria.

Abstract

This article presents the results of a research with the objective of analyzing the perceptions of university students and teachers about the presence of barriers due to linguistic and cultural diversity in higher education. The methodology used was mixed, where the survey and in-depth interview were the main techniques used. The analysis of the survey was carried out by descriptive statistics and the analysis of interviews, by content, detecting the main contributions of the informants. Among the main results, the perception of discrimination due to gender and ethnic origin is present in both students and teachers. The presence of discrimination or exclusion from students to teachers is present and is perceived and explained by the teachers themselves as a network of actor relationships. In conclusion, in the study, barriers are perceived such as ethnic origin, mother tongue, gender and employment that some students develop at the same time as their university education.

Key words: educational inclusion linguistic barriers, cultural barriers, university education.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as percepções de estudantes universitários e professores sobre a presença de barreiras devido à diversidade linguística e cultural no ensino superior. Para tal, foi utilizada uma metodologia mista, nomeadamente através de um inquérito e de uma entrevista em profundidade. A análise da pesquisa foi realizada por meio de estatística descritiva, enquanto o conteúdo das entrevistas foi examinado para detectar as principais contribuições dos informantes. Os principais mostram que a percepção de discriminação baseada no género e na origem étnica está presente tanto nos alunos como nos professores. Além disso, observa-se a exclusão dos alunos pelos professores, percebida e explicada por estes últimos como uma rede de relações de atores. Em conclusão, o estudo identifica barreiras como origem étnica, língua materna, género e emprego que alguns estudantes desenvolvem simultaneamente com a sua formação universitária.

Palavras-chave: barreiras linguísticas de inclusão educacional, barreiras culturais, ensino universitário.

Introduction

Mexico is a country characterized by its high ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, with states that are home to a significant indigenous population, which usually must face linguistic and cultural barriers in various aspects of life. In this sense, this document presents the results of a research whose main objective was to analyze the perceptions of university students and teachers regarding the presence of these barriers in higher education with the purpose of promoting student inclusion and improving educational quality in those institutions.

On this topic, there are multiple factors that hinder efforts to guarantee the right to education in indigenous populations or those with high ethnic and cultural diversity, which range from those external to educational institutions to those related to the educational processes within them. Both types of factors reduce the opportunities for access and permanence in the formal educational system at all levels. In fact, the lack of specific understanding of cultural and linguistic factors constitutes an obstacle to understanding social dynamics, including the right to education, and makes it difficult to achieve inclusive education (IE), a term that is linked to the concept of *barriers. for learning and participation* (Booth and Ainscow, 2000).

Now, in the case of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FCS) of the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH), it has a high proportion of indigenous students in its enrollment, and one of the requirements to graduate is mastery of the English language. , which is relevant, given that Spanish proficiency is not prioritized in this student population. Given the context and area of influence of the faculty, it is crucial to consider this need as part of the elements that will promote educational inclusion.

However, when the population faces barriers that make it difficult to access certain levels of education, their right to academic training is being violated. Therefore, the use of concepts as *barriers to learning and participation* is closely linked to the need to address diversity, which includes differences in gender, abilities, social, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic origin (Covarrubias, 2019).

Until now, few investigations have been carried out on the barriers in university education, since most of the attention has focused on basic and upper secondary education, as well as on education for students with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to identify these barriers and understand the perceptions of the actors involved to address these problems in university spaces.

Method

This research was developed at the Faculty of Social Sciences of UNACH (FCS) using a mixed approach. The techniques to collect information were the survey and in-depth interview. Specifically, the methodology was divided into three stages:

1. Stage of theoretical review, analysis, and discussion of the concepts of *linguistic barriers* and *cultural barriers,* as well as the identification of other related ones that should be considered in the collection of perceptions of university students and teachers.

2. Field work with enrolled and active university students (n = 100), without distinction of gender, to whom a survey was applied that included the following elements:

   a. Identification of perceptions about the presence of linguistic and cultural barriers in the university environment.

   b. Experience of educational barriers in their daily activities within university education.

The survey was carried out digitally and the following inclusion criteria were established: being university students or teachers, without distinction of age, gender, or ethnic group. The selection of participants was carried out using the snowball technique, in which the initial participant, selected by the researcher, recommended another participant, and so on. The instrument used was a questionnaire of perceptions about educational, linguistic, and cultural barriers. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

3. Field work through in-depth interviews with teachers (n = 12) through which the following aspects were addressed:

   a. Identification of linguistic and cultural barriers to learning and student participation.

   b. Perception of discrimination and/or exclusion in the student and teaching population.

A descriptive statistical analysis was used for the survey, supported by a bibliographic review and a phenomenographic approach to the findings. This made it possible to purchase matrices of agreements and discrepancies between respondents; In addition, the context where the study was developed was considered.

Finally, for the in-depth interviews, the content analysis technique was used to detect points of agreement and discrepancy, as well as the main contributions of the participants.

This allowed for a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences expressed by the interviewees.

Results

The first breakdown of results corresponds to the findings derived from the theoretical review, analysis and discussion of the concepts *linguistic barriers* and *cultural barriers,* which are presented below.

León (2007) and De la Cruz Flores (2022) maintain that education is both an individual and supra-individual whole, characterized by its dynamism and its exposure to rapid changes. In this context, cultural needs have always been identified as relevant, which underlines the importance of understanding culture at both an individual and collective level.

Inclusive education (IE) is part of a human rights model that recognizes education as a universal right, without distinctions or exclusions. This approach is reflected in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in the New Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2019), where EI is recognized as a fundamental right for all people. Thus, this is presented as a system that seeks to offer education to everyone, in a context of acceptance and respect for diversity.

Now, from the EI approach, the concept of *barriers to learning and participation* (BAP) is developed, which, according to Booth and Ainscow (2000), is part of the index for inclusion or guide for EI. In other words, the existence of these barriers has a direct impact on the educational field, where students may be excluded from a homogeneous curriculum that does not respond to the diversity of users.

Barriers, therefore, are defined as obstacles that hinder or prevent learning, participation, and coexistence in conditions of equity, and can be classified into several types (López, 2011):

1) Political barriers, related to educational laws and regulations that may be contradictory.
2) Cultural barriers, which cover aspects such as ideas, beliefs, behaviors, interactions, paradigms, and languages, and are subdivided into attitudinal and ideological barriers.
3) Didactic barriers, linked to aspects such as competitiveness, curriculum, organization, and professionalization.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) (2018) identifies three main types of barriers, addressed by the educational system:

1. Attitudinal barriers, related to attitudes of rejection, segregation, exclusion, or overprotection among the actors in the educational process.

2. Pedagogical barriers, which refer to educators' conceptions of their actions and teaching-learning practices that do not correspond to the needs of the students.

3. Organizational barriers, which have to do with order and stability in work routines, the application of rules and the distribution of space and furniture.

For its part, Covarrubias (2019) proposes the following categorization of barriers:

1. Cultural barriers, which encompass aspects such as ideas, beliefs, behaviors, interactions, paradigms, and languages, and are subdivided into attitudinal and ideological barriers.

2. Political barriers, related to the regulations and legislation that govern the educational life of institutions, meeting the needs of inclusion and diversity.

3. Practical barriers, which are divided into accessibility practices and didactic practices, the latter related to teaching-learning processes.

The previous classifications demonstrate the importance of recognizing the complexity and diversity of these barriers from their origin, since this conditions actions to generate educational quality strategies. In accordance with this idea, throughout the 20th century, and so far in the 21st century, there have been significant advances in the identification and understanding of the factors that act as barriers to the achievement of teaching-learning processes. as well as to achieve quality education at all levels, hence concepts such as *barriers to inclusion have been proposed* (González -Gil *et al.*, 2019). This reflects the need to reflect on the care processes, identification of barriers and forms of exclusion that hinder the right to education for all.

In the specific field of higher education, and despite being a fundamental right, barriers persist that make access to this educational level difficult and hinder the achievement of quality education. These barriers can be related to gender issues, as well as geographical, economic, social, and cultural elements. Therefore, it is crucial to carry out studies that identify and understand the dimensions of these barriers, to contribute to the achievement of educational quality at all levels.

In this regard, Martell León (2020) maintains that the history of education for vulnerable and at-risk groups has been marked by the search to eliminate segregation, discrimination, and exclusion within classrooms. However, more studies have been carried

out on learning problems in groups with disabilities and on inclusion in general than research focused specifically on educational inclusion at the higher level. Furthermore, indigenous groups that live in a globalized and predominant world show vulnerability in school environments, as is the case in Mexico, where despite the fact that the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States recognizes the presence of 11 linguistic families, 68 linguistic groupings and 364 linguistic variants (National Institute of Indigenous Languages [INALI], 2009), education is taught homogeneously and in Spanish. This linguistic diversity is a reality that influences education, since the mother tongue of young people who attend different educational levels is often different.

In short, the elimination of barriers to learning and participation is closely linked to attention to diversity, which encompasses people with diverse conditions associated with abilities, social, economic, cultural, and linguistic contexts, who have been excluded from the standardized curriculum and whose specific needs have been ignored.

This reality highlights the need to move towards balanced development where everyone can participate, in a context marked by globalization. Therefore, it is a collective responsibility to seek ways to achieve inclusive educational processes in the broadest sense of the term. Identifying the barriers that stop or eliminate this possibility is the first step to finding alternatives for action that address this problem and allow equitable, inclusive, and responsible education to become a reality.

Now, regarding the students' perception of the presence of linguistic and cultural barriers in university education, the results show the following: based on the general description of the students surveyed (n=100), the survey was carried out with an equitable distribution by gender, with an average age of 20 years (age range between 18 and 28 years).

Regarding the place of origin, 56% come from San Cristóbal de las Casas, where the Faculty of Social Sciences (FCS) is located; 33% come from various municipalities in Chiapas, while the remaining percentage comes from the states of Oaxaca and Mexico City. Regarding language, 27% have an indigenous Mayan language as their mother tongue, mainly Tsotsil, Tseltal and Chol.

The respondents come from bachelor's degrees in economics, sociology, and history, and are currently studying the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 8th semesters. Of them, 65% consider that the university, and in particular the degree they are studying, positively meets their expectations. Likewise, they perceive their teachers favorably, as they consider that they contribute widely to their professional training (77%).

Students also indicate that they have chosen to study at university because they want to develop professionally (92%). Only 31% think that they also do it to satisfy their parents' expectations. It is relevant to mention that 50% would have preferred to study another career, although the majority claim to be motivated to continue with their chosen career.

Regarding learning English (table 1), students perceive the obligatory nature of this language, but at the same time they recognize that they like it (73%), find it useful (96%) and consider it necessary above any other language. language (89%).

Table 1. Perceptions of university students regarding learning the English language

Perception	% of students surveyed
They perceive it as a mandatory activity	100
They like to learn English	73
He serves them	96
They need it before learning any other language	89

Source: self-made

Regarding the situation of students who also work, 46% of those surveyed play both roles, which makes it difficult for them to fulfill their university activities. In fact, 39% indicate that this issue represents a barrier.

On the other hand, 13% perceive discrimination based on gender, while 24% consider that there is discrimination based on ethnic origin. These data are corroborated with respect to perceptions of exclusion; Only 27% of those surveyed believe that it is more difficult for women to complete their university studies. Regarding the concept of *student inclusion,* it is about guaranteeing the right to quality education for all students under equal conditions, although 39% affirm that this is not carried out.

Furthermore, although many students do not perceive exclusion, a percentage do feel excluded, either due to gender (8%) or ethnic origin (24%). Finally, this group of respondents does not perceive discrimination from students towards teachers.

Perception of teachers regarding the presence of linguistic and cultural barriers in university education

The teaching staff interviewed (n = 12) have an average age of 58 years, with ages ranging between 38 and 67 years, equally distributed in terms of gender. Nine of them are from the state of Chiapas, Mexico, one from the state of Jalisco, Mexico, and one teacher is from Santander, Colombia. The experience of having teaching staff who know the context from its origin facilitates a greater understanding of the processes and needs but can also lead to the naturalization of obstacles to equal access to education at all levels, which can be in a lack of visibility of possible barriers.

Regarding the level of education, 72.7% of the teachers interviewed have a doctorate, while the rest have a master's level of education. It is relevant to highlight that all the women interviewed have a doctorate degree, which indicates an increase in the presence of them with the highest level of education. The teachers are assigned to the Sociology, Economics and History degrees, and have an average teaching experience of 18 years, with a range that goes from 10 to 35 years.

Many teachers perceive positively the fulfillment of their expectations by the institution where they work. However, some subject-based hires consider that this type of employment relationship limits their opportunities for solid academic growth, which influences their negative perception of meeting expectations. Despite this, all those interviewed expressed feeling satisfied with their teaching activities in the groups assigned to them.

Teachers' perceptions regarding the commitment and dedication that students assign to their professional training are mostly negative since they believe that this commitment on the part of students with themselves is lacking. They also observe that students carry out their professional studies mainly in search of personal development, although to a lesser extent also to please their parents.

Regarding the difficulty in understanding students whose native language is other than Spanish, most teachers find this situation difficult. However, in relation to the requirement to learn English as part of undergraduate studies, the interviewees agree that, although this language is useful for professional development, it should not be an indispensable condition, especially given the characteristics of the context and the nature of the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FCS). Therefore, they suggest that the

university should focus on teaching foreign languages, as well as indigenous dialects or languages of the region, in addition to Spanish for indigenous students.

Unlike the perceptions of young people, almost half of the teachers interviewed consider that women continue to face difficulties in pursuing university studies. Although equal access by gender is sought, some teachers believe that it has not yet been achieved satisfactorily.

Finally, regarding student inclusion, those interviewed agree that it refers to the right to quality education for all students under equal conditions, but some of them believe that, although student inclusion plans have been defined, they have not yet been defined. are implemented satisfactorily.

Discussion

In the present study, teachers do not identify a strong motivation and commitment on the part of students towards their professional training. However, it is crucial that university professors have the commitment to train professionals capable of facing their life projects and stimulating motivation in them, since, for Franco López (2021), this last element is the driving force that generates dynamics that favor the quality of the educational process and favor the future development of the student as a professional.

In fact, this aspect is closely related to school dropout, which, according to Erazo and Rosero (2021), whether voluntary or not, is mainly due to the lack of vocational guidance and motivation, which highlights the need to offer vocational guidance to all students, from secondary education to university education.

On the other hand, the results on students' perception regarding the importance of learning the English language at the university are encouraging. In this regard, it is evident that this language is essential in contemporary societies to facilitate communication in various areas, such as cultural, economic, social, and scientific areas.

Likewise, regarding the condition of students to also have a job, according to Cruz Piñeiro *et al.* (2017), those who play both roles experience tensions and sacrifices in both areas. However, paradoxically, they also feel satisfied and proud. In other words, students who combine work with their studies strive to fulfill both responsibilities without considering it necessary to abandon either of them, which demonstrates their commitment in both areas.

On the topic of exclusion, it was evident that inequality and discrimination based on ethnicity and gender are present in social and university contexts, which arises largely from the lack of information on topics such as respect, equity, equality, and violence (Fandiño,

2014). This underlines the importance of raising awareness among teaching staff on these issues and implementing strategies to improve coexistence within the university community and prevent discriminatory behavior.

Finally, it is evident that indigenous students arrive at university with deficiencies in their command of Spanish, which constitutes a barrier to their academic success. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the presence of these linguistic barriers and dedicate the necessary attention to overcoming them.

Conclusions

Understanding the perceptions among the various social actors and finding improvement mechanisms to address these problems in university spaces is vital to ensure quality educational processes, that is, where the human and cultural aspects are considered in their entirety, and not in fragmented way. In this sense, inclusive education (IE) emerges as part of a model that recognizes the human right to education for all people, without distinction or exclusion.

To achieve this purpose, however, the barriers that hinder or prevent learning, participation, and coexistence in conditions of equity must be considered. In fact, in culturally diverse environments, such as the case study, these barriers manifest themselves in ways such as ethnic origin, native language, gender, and the employment situation of some students.

On the other hand, it should be noted that although many students show interest in their professional development and are motivated by the career they have chosen, a considerable proportion of them would have preferred to study another specialty. This perception contrasts with that of teachers, who consider that students lack commitment to their professional training.

Regarding learning English, students say that they like it and find it useful for their professional development. For their part, teachers maintain that although it is important to teach foreign languages, the university must also prioritize attention to the indigenous dialects or languages of the region, as well as Spanish for indigenous students.

Finally, the presence of discrimination based on gender or ethnic origin is clearly perceived among both students and teachers. Furthermore, the latter recognize the existence of discrimination or exclusion of students towards them, which they defend as a complex process of relations between the various social actors present in these educational spaces.

Future lines of research

For future research, it is necessary to carry out comparative analyzes between urban and rural areas on the perceptions regarding the barriers to accessing university education. Furthermore, it is necessary to delve deeper into the presence of discrimination or exclusion of students towards teachers, as well as strategies to address this problem.

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