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Scientific articles

Desafíos para la inclusión en la universidad: percepciones estudiantiles en Sinaloa

Challenges for inclusion in the university: student perceptions in Sinaloa

***Desafios para a inclusão na universidade: percepções dos estudantes em
Sinaloa***

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Resumen

La educación inclusiva es clave para garantizar el acceso equitativo a la enseñanza y la participación activa de todos los estudiantes. Este estudio examina las percepciones de estudiantes de licenciatura en Educación y Pedagogía sobre las Barreras al Aprendizaje y la Participación (BAP) en el nivel superior. Con un enfoque cuantitativo y análisis descriptivo, se aplicó el *Index for Inclusion* a una muestra de 251 estudiantes. Los resultados revelan desafíos en la accesibilidad física, la cohesión institucional y las adaptaciones curriculares, junto con oportunidades para mejorar la gestión de la convivencia escolar, y la colaboración con familias. Estos hallazgos destacan áreas críticas para implementar prácticas inclusivas y subrayan la necesidad de un enfoque contextualizado que considere las características específicas del entorno universitario en Sinaloa. El estudio ofrece un diagnóstico integral que no solo evidencia las barreras existentes, sino que también ofrece recomendaciones concretas para fomentar una cultura educativa inclusiva.

Palabras clave: Educación inclusiva, Barreras al Aprendizaje y la Participación (BAP), Percepciones estudiantiles, *Index for Inclusion*.

Abstract

Inclusive education is essential for ensuring equitable access to teaching and active participation for all students. This study examines the perceptions of undergraduate students in Education and Pedagogy regarding Barriers to Learning and Participation (BLP) in higher education. Using a quantitative approach and descriptive analysis, the *Index for Inclusion* was administered to a sample of 251 students. Results reveal challenges in physical accessibility, institutional cohesion, and curricular adaptations, alongside opportunities to improve school climate management and collaboration with families. These findings underscore critical areas for implementing inclusive practices and highlight the need for a contextualized approach considering the specific characteristics of the university environment in Sinaloa. The study offers a comprehensive diagnosis that not only identifies existing barriers but also provides practical recommendations for fostering a more inclusive educational culture.

Keywords: Inclusive education, barriers to learning and participation (BLP), student perceptions, *Index for Inclusion*.

Resumo

A educação inclusiva é fundamental para garantir acesso equitativo à educação e participação ativa para todos os alunos. Este estudo examina as percepções de alunos de Bacharelado em Educação e Pedagogia sobre Barreiras à Aprendizagem e Participação (BAP) no nível de ensino superior. Utilizando uma abordagem quantitativa e análise descritiva, o Índice de Inclusão foi aplicado a uma amostra de 251 estudantes. Os resultados revelam desafios na acessibilidade física, na coesão institucional e nas adaptações curriculares, além de oportunidades para melhorar a gestão da convivência escolar e a colaboração com as famílias. Essas descobertas destacam áreas críticas para a implementação de práticas inclusivas e ressaltam a necessidade de uma abordagem contextualizada que considere as características específicas do ambiente universitário em Sinaloa. O estudo oferece um diagnóstico abrangente que não apenas destaca as barreiras existentes, mas também oferece recomendações concretas para promover uma cultura educacional inclusiva.

Palavras-chave: Educação inclusiva, Barreiras à Aprendizagem e Participação (BAP), Percepções dos alunos, Índice de Inclusão.

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Introduction

Inclusive education in university spaces has emerged as a central component in the transformation of contemporary educational systems, marking a paradigm shift in the way learning and diversity are conceived. This approach, promoted since the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, personal characteristics or socioeconomic contexts, have access to quality education that fosters their active participation, meaningful learning and sense of belonging within the educational community.

In this context, universities face the challenge of overcoming barriers to learning and participation (BLP), which go beyond the individual difficulties of students. These barriers represent obstacles derived from the organization, culture and institutional policies. According to Booth and Ainscow (2015), these barriers can be present in aspects such as physical accessibility, pedagogical practices and the attitudes of teaching and administrative staff. The identification and removal of these obstacles is essential to consolidate inclusive environments, particularly in higher education, where inclusive practices are often less developed compared to basic educational levels.

A crucial element for the implementation of inclusive education is student perception, as experiences and opinions about inclusion provide a unique and valuable perspective for evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of institutional policies and practices. Recent research has shown that these opinions not only reflect students' direct experience, but can also influence their engagement in learning, motivation, and sense of belonging (Sánchez, 2021; Quispe et al., 2023). Therefore, exploring how students perceive educational inclusion becomes a priority for institutions seeking to improve their inclusive models.

Another fundamental aspect in this debate is teacher training, both initial and ongoing, since teachers play a central role in the implementation of inclusive practices. Adequate teacher preparation in diversity-focused strategies directly impacts the quality of inclusive education, as well as the perception that students have of their educational environment (Campuzano & Cuéllar, 2021; Castillo & Bautista-Cerro, 2021). However, various studies have shown that many teachers lack the necessary training to meet the specific needs of their

students, which can lead to inconsistent pedagogical practices and negative perceptions among students.

In addition to teacher training, institutional policies also play a decisive role in creating inclusive environments. Although many universities have adopted inclusion policies, effectively implementing them remains a challenge. Lara et al. (2021) highlight that the lack of clarity in objectives and the absence of adequate resources are frequent barriers that limit the impact of these policies. On the other hand, collaboration between different educational actors, such as students, families, teachers and administrative staff, is a key factor in strengthening inclusion. González (2023) highlights that the lack of interaction between these actors can generate negative perceptions about inclusion, both in teachers and students.

The quality and accessibility of support services also significantly impact student perceptions of inclusion. Insufficient or ineffective services can contribute to negative experiences, reinforcing the importance of ensuring that such services are aligned with student needs (García et al., 2019). Furthermore, Quispe et al. (2023) emphasize that addressing structural and cultural barriers from a student-centered perspective is crucial to moving toward more equitable inclusive education.

This study aims to explore university students' opinions on educational inclusion, analyzing both strengths and areas for improvement in institutional practices and policies. Through a methodological approach based on the "Index for Inclusion", it is intended to offer a comprehensive diagnosis that allows universities to identify BLP and design effective strategies to overcome them. This analysis will not only contribute to strengthening inclusive educational models, but will also seek to promote a cultural change that values diversity as a strength and not as a challenge.

Ultimately, this work aims to generate a significant impact on educational practice and the development of inclusive policies, providing tools and recommendations that allow educational institutions to move towards a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable model. Inclusion in higher education should not be limited to the mere integration (presence) of students with diverse characteristics, but should focus on ensuring their active participation, full learning and general well-being within the university community.

The present study aims to:

1. To identify university students' perceptions of Barriers to Learning and Participation (BLP).

2. Evaluate areas of opportunity to strengthen educational inclusion at the university.
3. Analyze the impact of the identified barriers on the educational and academic experience of students.

Conceptual Bases for Educational Inclusion

Educational inclusion: definition and relevance

Educational inclusion is defined as an approach that seeks to ensure that all people, regardless of their abilities, background or educational needs, have access to quality education in an environment that promotes their active participation as well as their comprehensive development. This concept, framed by the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), has evolved to become a fundamental pillar in educational policies at a global level, reflecting a commitment to equity and social justice in the educational field.

Booth and Ainscow (2000), creators of the Index for Inclusion, argue that educational inclusion is not just a goal, but a "continuous process to identify and eliminate barriers to learning and participation." According to them, this implies transforming not only pedagogical practices, but also the cultures and policies of educational institutions to ensure an environment that values diversity as a strength.

The relevance of educational inclusion lies in its ability to transform teaching and learning dynamics, promoting an environment where differences are valued and diversity is encouraged. As Echeita (2020) points out, educational inclusion should not be limited to the physical integration of students with special educational needs, but should guarantee their full participation in the academic, social and emotional dimensions of the educational process. This approach not only benefits students with specific needs but also enriches the learning experience for all by fostering an environment of respect and collaboration.

In the Latin American context, educational inclusion has been the focus of attention in various policies and regulations. For example, Blanco (2006) points out that, although the region has made progress in the adoption of inclusive legal frameworks, "the effective implementation of educational inclusion remains a challenge due to the lack of resources, teacher training and curricular adaptation." In Ecuador, Proaño et al. (2023) highlight that, although there are laws that promote inclusion, it is necessary to implement specific programs and projects that effectively respond to special educational needs.

Furthermore, educational inclusion is also related to the need for curricular and methodological adaptations. Palacios-García (2024) emphasizes that, in order to serve students with special educational needs, it is essential to make adjustments to the curricular content and learning materials. These adaptations are not only essential to ensure that students can access the curriculum, but they also ensure their full participation in the educational process.

Educational inclusion has a significant impact on the social and emotional life of students. Blanco (2006) argues that educational institutions should promote an environment of harmonious coexistence and respect, where exclusion and segregation practices are eliminated. Antayhua (2024) reinforces this idea by pointing out that these actions not only contribute to the well-being of students, but also foster a culture of inclusion that can extend beyond the school environment, positively impacting society.

On the other hand, the implementation of inclusive policies faces considerable challenges. Mínguez et al. (2021) highlight that the lack of consensus on the definition of educational inclusion generates conflicts among teachers, who often feel overwhelmed by the workload and lack of preparation to serve students with specific needs. According to Echeita (2020), overcoming these challenges requires ongoing training strategies that allow teachers to acquire inclusive pedagogical skills and practical tools to implement these approaches.

Student perception of educational inclusion is also a crucial aspect. According to Rojas (2024), this perception can be influenced by factors such as university social responsibility and organizational management, suggesting the need to involve students in the design and implementation of inclusive policies. Booth and Ainscow (2000) reinforce this idea by pointing out that the voices of all educational actors, including students, must be central to the processes of transformation towards more inclusive models.

In conclusion, inclusive education is an essential approach that seeks to ensure that all students have access to quality education in an environment that promotes their participation and comprehensive development. For it to be effective, it is essential to overcome challenges such as lack of teacher training, limited resources and resistance to change. In addition, it must involve all educational actors to create a truly inclusive education system.

Barriers to learning and participation in higher education

Educational inclusion, as previously explored, is a process that seeks to ensure access, presence, participation and learning for all students in an environment that values diversity and eliminates barriers. However, these barriers, known as Barriers to Learning and Participation (BLP), are structural, cultural and pedagogical challenges that limit or prevent the inclusive educational experience in institutions. According to Booth and Ainscow (2000), BLP are elements present in the culture, policies and practices of institutions that hinder the full integration of all students. In the context of higher education in Latin America, these BLP acquire particular characteristics due to historical and structural inequalities.

Characteristics of barriers in higher education in Latin America

1. Socioeconomic barriers:
 - Socioeconomic inequality is one of the main barriers to access and permanence in higher education. Moreira (2021) points out that universities in the region are often associated with an intellectual elite, which makes it difficult to integrate students from disadvantaged communities. The lack of financial resources, scholarships and adequate academic support exacerbate these inequalities, increasing dropout rates.
2. Pedagogical and technological barriers:
 - The quality of education in many Latin American institutions is uneven, and the lack of teacher training in inclusive strategies exacerbates this situation. According to Tolmachev et al. (2021), the implementation of online learning, although promising, faces challenges related to quality and technological accessibility. This is combined with the lack of digital skills in both teachers and students, limiting effective participation.
3. Cultural and institutional barriers:
 - Discriminatory attitudes and resistance to change are persistent barriers in universities. Arocena and Sutz (2005) highlight that institutions are often trapped in traditional models that prioritise homogenisation over diversity. This resistance limits innovation in inclusive policies and hinders transformation towards more equitable environments.

Impact of barriers on students

Barriers to learning and participation not only affect students' academic experience, but also their emotional well-being and perception of educational quality. Johnson (2017) argues that a lack of resources and trained staff can lead to negative perceptions of institutions, affecting student motivation and engagement. As a result, many students drop out of school before completing their studies, perpetuating cycles of exclusion.

Strategies to overcome BLP

To move towards a more inclusive higher education, it is essential to address BLP in a comprehensive manner:

1. Inclusive policies:
 - Unceta et al. (2021) suggest that universities should adopt social innovation frameworks that foster collaboration between educational actors and ensure adequate resources for inclusion.
2. Teacher training:
 - Vaillant (2011) highlights the need for ongoing training in inclusive pedagogical strategies to empower teachers and improve their ability to address diversity in the classroom.
3. Inclusive digitalization:
 - According to Rama (2014), the virtualization of education offers opportunities to overcome physical barriers, but it is essential to guarantee equitable access to technology and training in its use.
4. Student Participation:
 - Ramírez (2022) highlights the importance of involving students in the design and implementation of inclusive policies, ensuring that their voices are heard.

Addressing BLP is an essential component for the effective implementation of educational inclusion in universities, since inclusion requires not only ensuring the presence of students, but also their active participation and academic success. Identifying and overcoming BLP is, therefore, an indispensable step in building more just and equitable educational systems.

Educational inclusion in Mexican universities

While the barriers described above are common features across Latin America, the Mexican case presents particularities that highlight the need for specific approaches. These particularities include a greater digital divide in rural areas, a significant underrepresentation of indigenous communities, and limited implementation of inclusive policies, despite existing legal frameworks.

Educational inclusion in Mexican universities is a highly relevant issue, as it addresses the need to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds or conditions, have access to quality education. In the national context, Barriers to Learning and Participation (BLP), such as socioeconomic inequality, lack of physical and technological accessibility, and negative attitudes towards diversity, limit the full participation of certain groups.

In Mexico, the General Education Law establishes that all people have the right to inclusive education, which implies the elimination of barriers that hinder their access and participation (Pozas, 2023). In addition, government programs such as the Educational Inclusion and Equity Program since 2014 seek to provide resources and support to universities to serve students with disabilities. However, their effectiveness is often limited by the lack of teacher and administrative training, which prevents these policies from being translated into effective inclusive practices (Martínez & Aguilera, 2019).

The BLP in Mexican universities are diverse. One of the main ones is the lack of accessibility. Many Mexican universities do not have adequate infrastructure for students with disabilities. According to Robles et al. (2022), physical and technological accessibility remains a significant challenge, especially on rural or older campuses. Furthermore, the lack of technological resources and adapted materials aggravates exclusion, especially in marginalized areas. On the other hand, negative attitudes also limit inclusion. Although teacher attitudes are not unique to Mexico, Alghazo and Gaad (2004) point out that the lack of training in inclusive education generates negative perceptions towards students with disabilities, which perpetuates exclusion in classrooms. Finally, the underrepresentation of marginalized communities is another challenge. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), the participation of indigenous communities and low-income students in higher education is significantly lower, resulting in alarming dropout rates (Pozas, 2023).

When comparing Mexico with other Latin American countries, it can be seen that, although there has been progress in the adoption of inclusive legal frameworks, the effective implementation of these remains a regional challenge. Ainscow and Miles (2008) highlight that, while some countries have made progress in teacher training and technological inclusion, Mexico faces more pronounced obstacles due to lack of resources and resistance to change in educational institutions.

Educational exclusion has significant consequences for students, both in their academic development and their emotional well-being. Students from marginalized communities have higher dropout rates than their peers, perpetuating cycles of inequality (Pozas, 2023). Furthermore, exclusion affects academic performance, which decreases opportunities for job and social integration.

In conclusion, educational inclusion in Mexican universities faces structural, cultural and pedagogical challenges that must be addressed through a comprehensive approach. Through the implementation of effective inclusive policies, ongoing teacher training, the integration of adapted technologies and the active participation of all educational actors, it is possible to move towards a more equitable and fair educational system.

This study not only seeks to contribute to the understanding of these barriers and opportunities, but also to offer information that can be used by educational institutions to design more effective strategies. Only through a joint commitment by institutions, teachers and students will it be possible to overcome existing barriers and ensure that all students have access to quality higher education.

Methodology

Study design

This study was developed using a descriptive quantitative approach, with the aim of analyzing the perceptions of university students regarding educational inclusion in their academic environment. This approach allowed us to identify patterns and trends in student responses, providing an initial diagnosis of the barriers to learning and participation (BLP) and the perceived strengths of the inclusive educational model.

Context and participants

The research was conducted at a public university in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico, during the 2023-2024 academic year. This institution is characterized by its orientation towards training professionals in the educational field, with a predominantly female student body, representing more than 90% of the total enrollment. This characteristic reflects a relevant dimension of the educational context.

The sample included 251 students of the Bachelor's Degree in Education and Pedagogy, distributed in semesters 2, 4, 6 and 8, aged between 18 and 24 years. A purposive sample was selected to ensure the inclusion of different formative stages and educational experiences in the analysis.

Data collection instrument

The instrument used was the Index for Inclusion, originally developed by Booth and Ainscow (2000) and adapted to Spanish by Echeita et al. (2011). This questionnaire, widely recognized for its usefulness in various educational contexts, is designed to assess perspectives on inclusion in educational institutions, structured in three main dimensions:

- Dimension A: Creating inclusive cultures.
 - A.1 Build community: Evaluate the level of mutual support, solidarity and sense of belonging within the institution.
 - A.2 Establish inclusive values: Measures the perception regarding the promotion of values that foster equity and respect for diversity.
- Dimension B: Develop inclusive policies.
 - B.1 Developing a school for all: Examines the perception regarding the existence of policies aimed at ensuring equity and participation for all students.
 - B.2 Organize support to address diversity: Analyze the effectiveness of resources and structures to address the specific needs of students.
- Dimension C: Develop inclusive practices.
 - C.1 Orchestrating learning: Evaluate the implementation of inclusive pedagogical strategies in classrooms.

- C.2 Mobilize resources: Measures the effectiveness in the use of educational resources to ensure active participation and meaningful learning.

The questionnaire consists of closed items organized on a five-level Likert scale, from "totally disagree" to "totally agree." For this study, the version adapted by Echeita et al. (2011) was adapted to the context of the public university in Sinaloa, considering the sociocultural and educational characteristics of the region. These adjustments were reviewed and validated by a committee of experts.

Study variables

The variables evaluated in this study were derived directly from the dimensions of the Index for Inclusion:

1. Inclusive cultures: Students' perceptions of building a supportive educational community and establishing inclusive values (Sections A.1 and A.2).
2. Inclusive policies: Student opinions on institutional policies aimed at ensuring equity and attention to diversity (Sections B.1 and B.2).
3. Inclusive practices: Perception of pedagogical strategies and use of resources to facilitate learning and active participation (Sections C.1 and C.2).

Each variable was measured through the corresponding items, aligned with the three main dimensions of the questionnaire.

The methodological design responds to the stated objectives:

- For Objective 1, the *Index for Inclusion* was used as the main tool to identify students' perceptions.
- For objective 2, a descriptive analysis of the data collected was carried out in order to evaluate areas of opportunity.
- For Objective 3, a qualitative and quantitative approach was used to analyze the impact of barriers on the learning experience and academic training.

Procedure

1. Planning:
 - The Spanish version of the Index for Inclusion adapted by Echeita et al. (2011) was selected and specific adjustments were made to adapt it to the university and regional context.
 - The adjustments were reviewed and validated by a committee of experts in educational inclusion.
2. Data collection:
 - The questionnaire was administered using Google Forms , which facilitated its accessibility and the voluntary participation of students.
 - Prior to application, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, the confidentiality of their responses was emphasized, and informed consent was obtained from each during a class.
3. Data analysis:
 - The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, such as frequencies, percentages, and distributions, among others, with the purpose of identifying general patterns in student perceptions.
 - This analysis focused on the three dimensions and the respective variables defined in the instrument.

Limitations of the study

Although the sample is representative of the students at the university analyzed, the results cannot be generalized to other institutions or similar educational contexts. Additionally, the use of a self-reported instrument may be influenced by subjective factors, which underlines the need to interpret the findings with caution and to complement them with studies in other educational environments.

Results

The detailed analysis of the instrument allowed us to identify the perceptions of university students regarding the Barriers to Learning and Participation (BLP) in their educational environment. The results are presented organized according to the three dimensions evaluated: creation of inclusive cultures, establishment of inclusive policies and development of inclusive practices.

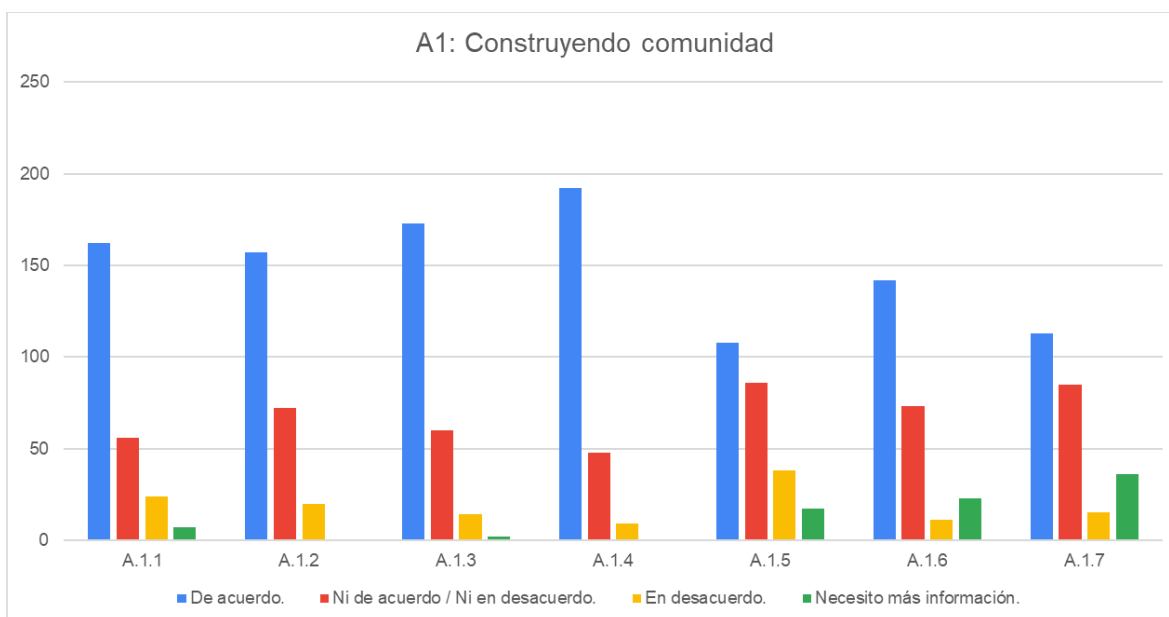
Dimension A: Creating inclusive cultures

Dimension A of the Index for Inclusion focuses on promoting fundamental values such as equality, participation, respect, trust and non-discrimination. These values strengthen interactions within the educational community and are essential to consolidate inclusive policies and practices.

In this dimension, students expressed a high level of agreement with items such as A.1.2 (Students help each other), reflecting positive opinions about collaboration between peers. However, items related to the interaction between the institution and families, such as A.1.5 (There is a relationship between staff and families), obtained a lower rating, indicating an area for improvement. (See figure 1)

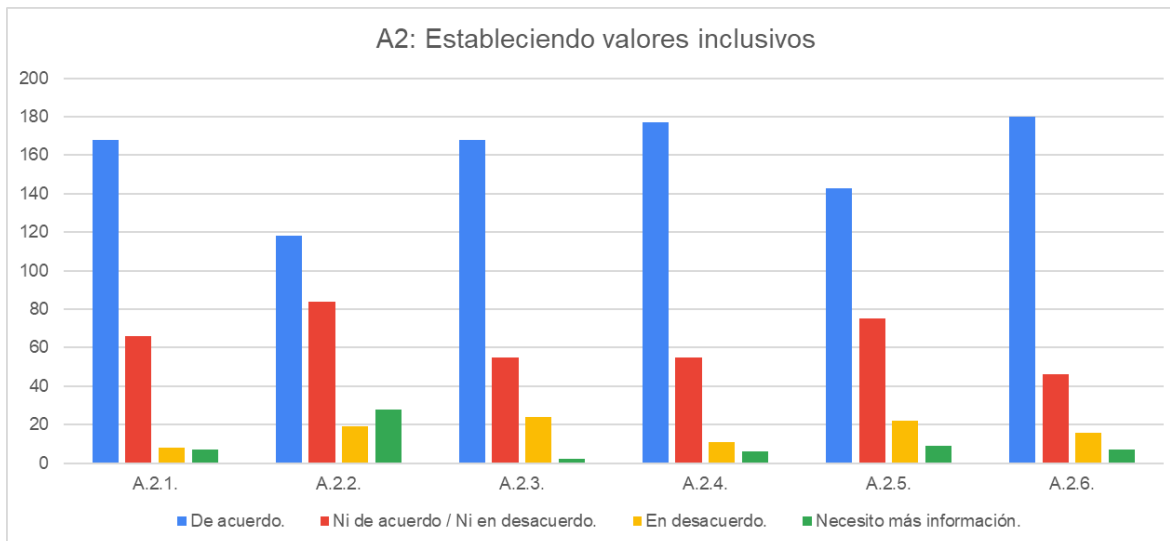
In the Establishing Inclusive Values sub-dimension, students agreed that staff make efforts to remove barriers to learning A.2.5 (Staff try to remove all existing barriers to learning and participation) and reduce discriminatory practices A.2.6 (The school makes efforts to reduce discriminatory practices). However, the perception of a shared inclusive philosophy among students, staff, and families was less consistent A.2.2 (Staff, Technical Council members, students, and families share a philosophy of inclusion), suggesting the need for a deeper focus in this area. In addition, students' perception of what is expected of them is highlighted in item A.2.1 (High expectations are held for all students). (See figure 2).

Figure 1. Student perceptions on building an inclusive community.



Note: Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2. Student perceptions on establishing inclusive values



Note: Source: Own elaboration.

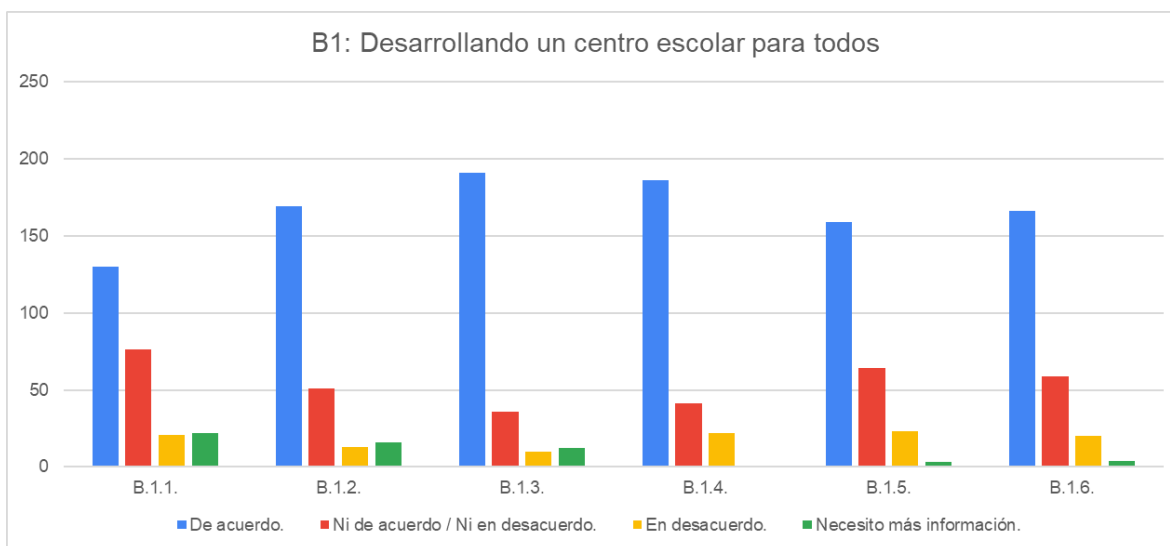
Dimension B: Establishing inclusive policies

Dimension B analyzes how institutions manage their policies to promote inclusion, transforming administrative processes and ensuring that practices are aligned with the principles of equity and diversity.

Students reported positive perceptions on items such as B.1.2 (Every new staff member is helped to settle into the school), indicating effective staff integration policies. However, B.1.4 (The school makes its facilities physically accessible to all) stood out as a critical area, with responses reflecting dissatisfaction regarding physical accessibility in educational facilities. (See Figure 3)

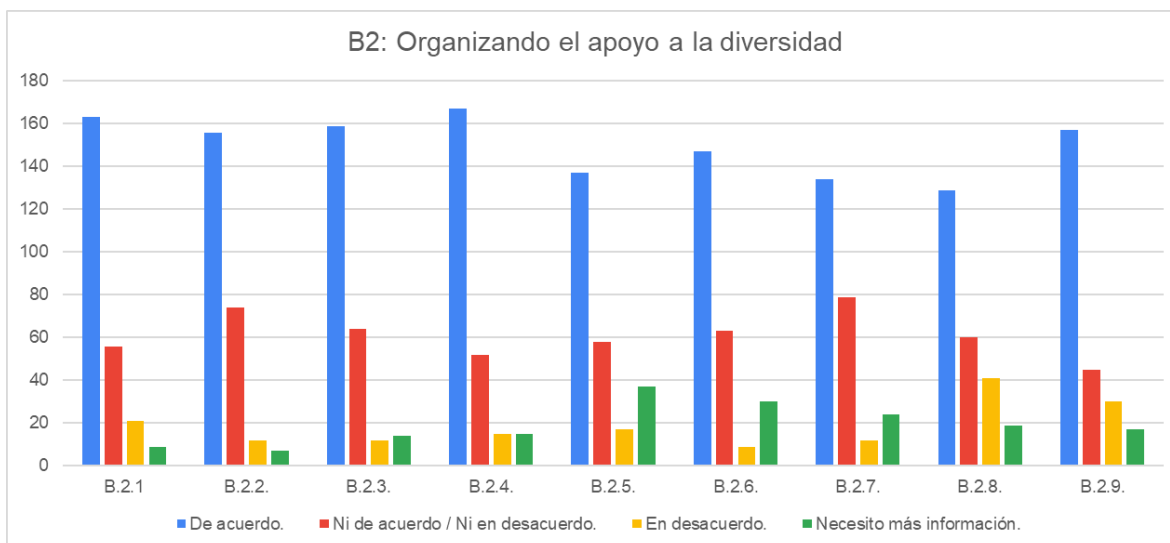
In the sub-dimension Organising support for diversity, students positively valued policies such as B.2.3 (Policies related to 'special educational needs' are inclusion policies). However, difficulties were also identified in their practical implementation. Specifically, a lack of coordination in educational support was observed. (See figure 4).

Figure 3. Student perceptions of facility accessibility



Note: Source: Own elaboration

Figure 4. Student perceptions of support for diversity



Note: Source: Own elaboration.

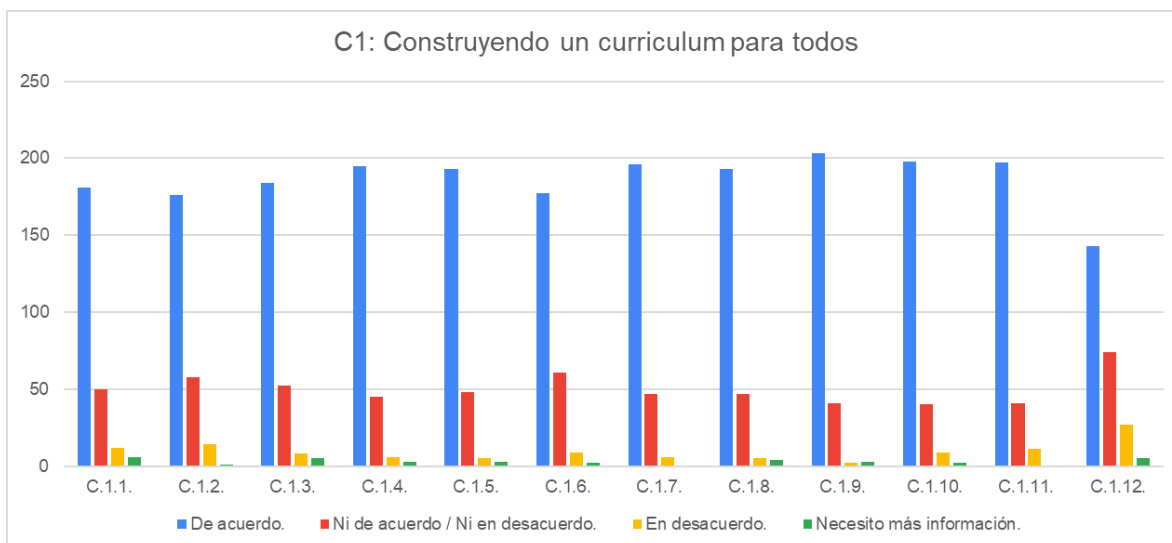
Dimension C: Developing inclusive practices

Dimension C explores inclusive pedagogical practices and how they ensure the participation of all students in the educational process. This aspect is fundamental to ensure that the educational curriculum responds to the needs of a diverse community.

Students perceived item C.1.1 (Classes respond to student diversity) positively, highlighting the effort to adapt teaching strategies to student diversity. Likewise, item C.1.7 (Discipline is based on mutual respect) was highly valued, indicating a positive environment for coexistence. However, items such as C.1.12 (Students participate in complementary activities) received lower ratings, indicating a need to adjust these activities to ensure more equitable participation. (See figure 5)

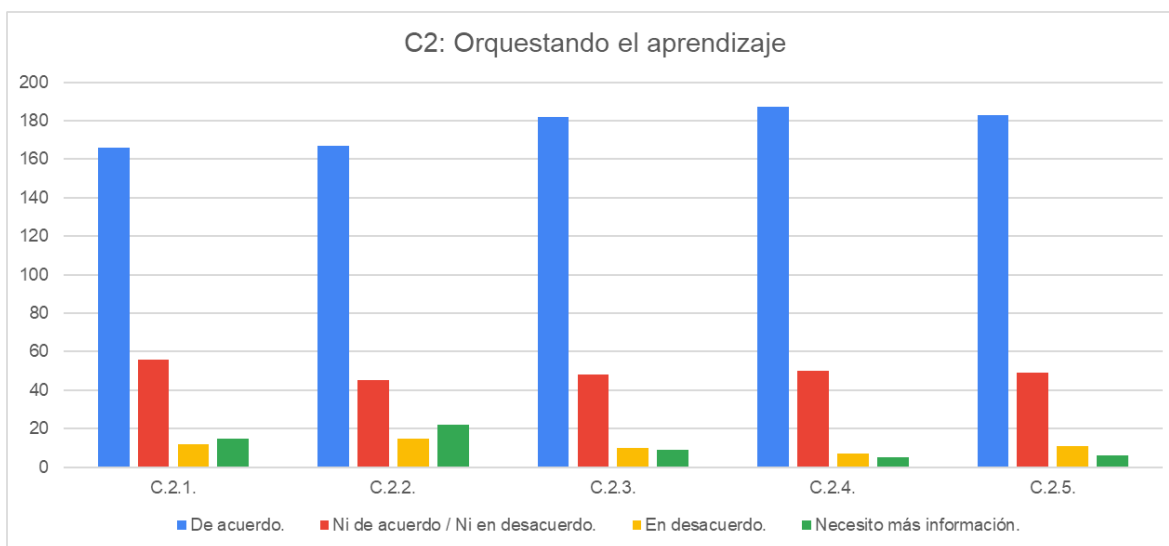
In the sub-dimension of Orchestrating learning, students considered that educational resources are distributed equitably C.2.1 (School resources are distributed fairly to support inclusion), although they identified that community resources are not fully leveraged to support inclusive learning, according to indicator C.2.2 (Community resources are known and leveraged) . (See figure 6).

Figure 5. Student perceptions on building a curriculum for all.



Note: Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 6. Student perceptions of learning orchestration.



Note: Source: Own elaboration.

In summary, the results reflect both strengths and challenges in the dimensions assessed by the Index for Inclusion. While students value institutional efforts to foster collaboration and eliminate barriers to learning, areas of opportunity persist, especially in physical accessibility, interaction with families, and participation in complementary activities. These findings offer a solid basis for discussion and for designing strategies to promote more effective educational inclusion in the university environment.

Discussion

Dimension A of the Index for Inclusion, “Creating inclusive cultures,” focuses on building values and relationships that strengthen the sense of belonging and collaboration in the educational community. This dimension is fundamental to fulfilling the study’s objective of analyzing student perceptions about barriers to learning and participation, specifically those related to interaction between peers, teaching staff, and families. The results show significant strengths in collaboration between students, as reflected in item A.1.2, where the majority expressed that students support each other. This indicates that the university culture fosters an environment of help and cooperation, aligned with core inclusive values. However, item A.1.5, related to interaction between staff and families, obtained lower ratings. This finding suggests a disconnect in the institution’s external relationships, pointing to a possible barrier to consolidating a complete inclusive community.

The findings are consistent with those proposed by Booth and Ainscow (2000), who highlight that inclusive values are essential to consolidate an educational community committed to inclusion. Furthermore, Ong et al. (2017) emphasize that collaborative spaces are key to strengthening the sense of belonging, especially in underrepresented groups, which aligns with the positive perceptions about student collaboration in this study; however, the disconnect observed between the institution and families reflects a similar challenge to that pointed out by Risner et al. (2020), who found that the lack of effective implementation of inclusive policies can limit the impact of diversity initiatives. This aspect is also related to the lack of resources and time to strengthen external relationships, as Casale (2024) points out.

Strengthening inclusive cultures at university requires specific actions. Promoting interaction between the institution and families, through workshops or joint activities, could improve this relationship and generate a broader sense of community. Likewise, teacher training in inclusive attitudes, as suggested by Krischler and Cate (2019), can have a direct impact on student perception, fostering a cohesive and respectful environment. Finally, the creation of collaborative spaces, such as mentoring or counter-spaces, could reinforce the active participation of students from diverse backgrounds (Ong et al., 2017), favoring differences to be perceived as a strength rather than a barrier.

In conclusion, Dimension A highlights significant progress in collaboration between students, but also identifies important challenges in interaction with families. It reflects the need to implement actions to strengthen inclusive values at all levels of the educational

community, connecting these findings with the barriers to learning and participation analyzed in the following dimensions.

Dimension B of the instrument, “Establishing inclusive policies,” examines how educational institutions develop and manage their internal policies to ensure the participation and learning of all students. In the context of the present study, this dimension is directly linked to the objective of identifying barriers to learning and participation in higher education. The results show that students perceive positive policies in certain aspects, such as support for new staff members (item B.1.2), suggesting efforts to promote effective integration into the university community. However, significant challenges are identified in the physical accessibility of facilities (item B.1.4), reflecting a structural barrier that limits the full participation of students with disabilities.

These barriers are consistent with those pointed out by Campo et al. (2020), who highlighted that the lack of physical accessibility not only affects academic activities, but also recreational activities, which are essential for the comprehensive well-being of students. Furthermore, Hadjidakou and Hartas (2007) emphasize that effective provision for students with disabilities depends on the accurate identification of their needs and the implementation of accessible services. The results of the present study reflect an inadequacy in these areas, which underlines the need for a more systematic approach to address physical and technological barriers on university campuses. On the other hand, Gaona (2023) mentions that the lack of flexibility in university environments, such as rigid schedules and limited resources, aggravates these barriers and hinders the educational experience of students with specific needs.

To overcome these challenges, various methodologies have proven effective in other contexts. Luna et al. (2021) suggest the implementation of accessibility audits as a key tool to identify deficiencies in facilities and establish concrete action plans. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of Latin American universities, where resources are limited and physical barriers persist. Furthermore, Collins et al. (2018) highlight the importance of training teaching and administrative staff on accessibility and inclusive education issues, which not only improves physical adaptations but also fosters more inclusive pedagogical methodologies. Ortiz et al. (2020) reinforce the need to promote an institutional culture that values diversity, arguing that awareness campaigns and workshops can significantly contribute to creating an inclusive environment.

Comparing these findings with other regions, it can be seen that universities in developed countries have implemented more effective policies due to specific legislation requiring accessibility standards. Hadjikakou and Hartas (2007) point out that these regulations have allowed significant progress in Europe, while in Latin America, universities face challenges related to lack of resources and resistance to change. This suggests that, although there are isolated efforts, a more coordinated and systematic approach is needed to ensure accessibility in universities in the region.

In conclusion, Dimension B reflects challenges in implementing inclusive policies at the university studied. While students value certain aspects, such as staff integration, physical barriers and lack of accessible resources persist as significant obstacles. It is essential that institutions adopt comprehensive actions, such as staff training and promoting an inclusive culture, to ensure that all students can fully participate in the educational environment.

Dimension C of the Index for Inclusion, “Developing inclusive practices,” focuses on how educational institutions adapt their teaching methods and curricula to ensure the active and equitable participation of all students. In this section, the results reflect positive perceptions regarding attention to diversity in the classroom, as observed in item C.1.1, where students valued that classes adequately respond to diverse needs. However, areas for improvement were identified, especially in participation in complementary activities (C.1.12) and in taking advantage of community resources to support inclusive learning (C.2.3). These results underline the need for a comprehensive approach to strengthen inclusive practices inside and outside the classroom.

These findings are consistent with those noted by González-Gil et al. (2019), who highlight that the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom depends largely on the training and willingness of teachers to address diversity. Trained teachers not only facilitate the learning of students with disabilities, but also foster an environment of respect and collaboration that benefits all students. Likewise, Guillén (2024) underlines that barriers arising from linguistic and cultural diversity can limit the ability of certain students to participate, which highlights the need to develop pedagogical strategies adapted to diverse contexts, ensuring their effective application. This approach includes the creation of accessible teaching materials and teacher training in inclusive methodologies.

Curriculum design is another fundamental aspect in promoting inclusive practices. According to Tovar and Sarmiento (2011), curriculum development should be a shared responsibility between teachers, students, and other educational actors, ensuring that

adaptations respond to the needs of all. Cueva (2024) argues that modifications in the planning, execution, and evaluation of educational activities are essential to address diversity, guaranteeing equitable access to the curriculum. However, significant barriers persist in this area. For example, Choque and Jáuregui (2022) identified that the lack of an adequate curriculum design can contribute to academic dropout, especially when subjects are perceived as excessively complex and students do not receive the necessary support. Likewise, Utreras (2021) points out that tensions between the academic and the emotional affect the ability of teachers to provide effective support, which underlines the importance of considering emotional well-being as an integral part of inclusive practices.

To address these barriers, it is crucial to implement effective strategies that promote educational inclusion. Scarpino and Johnson (2021) suggest that curricular design should recognize and value diversity, not only through adaptations in content, but also through methodologies that encourage active participation. Ongoing teacher training is also essential. Martínez et al. (2014) propose evidence-based education, using data to inform pedagogical decisions and ensure that inclusive practices are effective. Furthermore, Arvizu (2024) highlights the importance of adopting a contextualized approach that considers the cultural and social particularities of each institution, especially in the Latin American context.

In conclusion, Dimension C highlights both successes and challenges in inclusive practices at the university studied. Although students perceive positive efforts in addressing diversity in the classroom, barriers persist related to curriculum design, participation in complementary activities, and the use of community resources. Overcoming these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that include teacher training, curriculum redesign, and the promotion of an educational environment that values and respects diversity.

Conclusion

The results of this research confirm that inclusive education at the higher level faces significant challenges related to the coherence and effectiveness of its policies, practices and institutional values. While progress is being made in collaboration between students and in the perception of certain inclusive values, significant barriers persist, limiting the full participation of all students. These include poor physical accessibility of facilities and a lack of cohesion between the different educational actors. In addition, the limited use of community resources to promote inclusive learning is highlighted.

The analysis showed that, although inclusive policies are present in institutions, their implementation lacks consistency, which creates a disconnect between established objectives and the daily experience of students. This finding is consistent since it is noted that BLP are not only physical, but also cultural and structural. Likewise, students' perception reveals that current pedagogical practices are insufficient to guarantee an equitable experience, which reflects the need to strengthen curricular design and teacher training.

A notable contribution of this study is the focus on university students' perceptions, an aspect less explored in the literature on inclusive education. These insights offer a critical perspective on the specific barriers they face in their educational process; for example, the tensions between the academic and the emotional, and the limitations in participation in complementary activities. In this sense, it becomes evident that inclusive education should not be limited to guaranteeing the physical presence of students, but requires a deeper institutional commitment to transform educational policies, values and practices into concrete and sustainable actions.

The study highlights the importance of continuing to strengthen inclusive policies and practices in higher education, with a focus on overcoming the identified barriers and promoting an educational environment that values, respects and fosters diversity. Only through consistent implementation of these policies will it be possible to move towards truly inclusive education that enables equal participation and learning for all students.

In conclusion, this work responded to the stated objectives by identifying key student perceptions about barriers to learning and participation, assessing areas of opportunity to strengthen educational inclusion, and analyzing the impact of these barriers on their academic experience. The findings highlight the importance of a comprehensive approach that considers inclusive policies, practices, and values, reaffirming the need to strengthen inclusive education at the higher level.

Future Lines of Research

Throughout this study, several aspects were identified that open new opportunities for future research, closely related to the barriers and facilitators identified in the context of higher education. These include:

1. Evaluating the implementation of inclusive policies in different educational contexts: Examining how inclusive policies developed for higher education can be adapted and implemented at other levels of the educational system, such as basic and upper secondary education, allowing for a comparative view of the barriers and facilitators throughout the educational process.
2. Longitudinal studies on the impact of inclusive strategies: Conduct long-term research to evaluate how inclusive policies and practices affect academic performance, student engagement, and perceptions of equity across different cohorts of students.
3. Effectiveness of teacher training programs: Analyze the results of specific teacher training programs in educational inclusion, evaluating their impact on the creation of more equitable learning environments and on the design of inclusive curricula.
4. Curriculum design and diversity: Investigate how curricula can be designed or adapted to respond to the diversity of student characteristics and needs, with a focus on active participation and equitable learning.

These lines of research not only complement the findings of the present study, but also provide a basis for further advancing the understanding and improvement of inclusive education at various educational levels and academic contexts.

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