Analysis of inclusive practices in some university services

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Abstract
This work aims to investigate the main educational inclusion practices at the University of the Republic and more specifically at two of its services: the Faculty of Economics and Administration and the Faculty of Engineering. The qualitative research method was used, conducting a literature search, interviews, and analyzing the collected information. In recent years, inclusive practices have been carried out both at the central level of the University of the Republic and the analyzed services. However, these practices are not enough to transform educational systems and meet the needs of different students.

Keywords: Integration, Access to Education, Didactic Material.

1   Introduction

This work aims to analyze different inclusion practices at the University of the Republic (Udelar) and specifically in the services of the Faculty of Engineering (Fing) and the Faculty of Economics and Administration (FCEA). Information was collected from the Udelar website and the different services, and interviews were conducted with various actors, followed by an analysis of the collected information. The work is organized by presenting a conceptual framework, the main results obtained, and their analysis, to finally reflect on these practices and identify constraints and future research.

2   Theoretical framework

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (UNESCO, 2005, p 13)

According to the study conducted by Eleweke and Rodda (2001), there is evidence indicating that inclusive education policies are not satisfactorily implemented in

developing countries. Both authors point out that there are various factors that contribute to this inadequacy, such as the absence of support services, insufficient teacher training programs, lack of financial resources, absence of legislation, among others (Eleweke & Rodda, 2001, p. 113).

Luis Bracho-Fuenmayor et al. (2023) state that effective higher education from a justice perspective can be achieved through policies, plans, protocols, rules, and manuals that practically establish the inclusion of students with disabilities or any kind of diversity, providing opportunities considering that their limitations are partial and do not hinder their development in a university setting. The authors highlight the importance of providing fair, equitable, and equal treatment in terms of human rights, as the limitations present in students do not pose barriers to the necessary competencies for their education and personal and professional development (Luis Bracho-Fuenmayor et al., 2023, p. 213).

Udelar created the Central Commission on Disability Inclusion in 2018, which has as its main purpose to advise the Central Directing Council on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the university environment.

Its main actions are aimed at:

- Creating a protocol for inclusive education and employment inclusion for the university community of Udelar

- Generating mechanisms to improve accessibility conditions in services, with emphasis on physical, communicational, and attitudinal accessibility

- Generating mechanisms in Udelar for the reception and follow-up of inclusion processes for students, teachers, and non-teaching staff with disabilities. (Prorrectorado de Gestión de la Universidad de la República, n.d.)

3   Method

The qualitative research method was used. A literature search was conducted, and interviews were made with different actors, such as academic assistants and representatives of the Teaching Unit of Fing (UEFI). Finally, the collected information was analyzed.

A sample of 2 out of the 24 university services of Udelar was studied. The 2 selected services, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Economics and Administration, represent 6.9% and 16.2%, respectively, of the total active students at Udelar as of 2019.

4   Results

The main actions identified to achieve educational inclusion at both the Udelar and the analyzed services are detailed.

4.1   Actions at the Udelar level

Udelar has the following programs:

- Inclusion and Strengthening of Wellbeing Program which aims to promote equal access to education, work, and comprehensive health for the entire university community on equal terms.

- Academic Trajectory Support Program, which promotes democratization of access to higher education through support for educational trajectories by designing strategies that address material, economic and/or socio-familial vulnerabilities, cultural issues, disabilities, incarceration, gender, ethnic-racial background and human mobility situations, among others.
(Comisión Sectorial de Educación, s.f.)

Within this last program, the following stands out:

- "Uruguayan Sign Language Interpreters. This service seeks to contribute to inclusive education through planning, designing, and implementing strategies to support the educational trajectories of the deaf student population." (Comisión Sectorial de Educación, s.f.)

Courses for teachers on accessibility, communication, and planning have been developed, aiming to provide tools for building teaching plans from an accessibility perspective and to dynamize inclusive education processes.

Since 2012, the Open Commission on Gender Equity (CAEG) has been in place, implementing various strategies for addressing gender equity in university policies, in accordance with current national and international regulations on the matter.

It is worth noting the establishment of various campuses throughout the national territory, which enables students from different regions of the country to access education, thus democratizing knowledge. Examples of these campuses include the Regional University Center of the East (CURE, created in 2007), the North Coast University Center (CENUR, created in 2013), etc.

4.2   Actions at the level of the analyzed services

Both services have adapted their facilities, building ramps, bathrooms for disabled people, and installing special elevators for wheelchairs, among others.

Additionally, they have procedures in place for requesting accommodations in case of disability or dyslexia, and gender equity committees in each of them.

Although UEFI does not have a specific work line for the creation of inclusive teaching materials, the faculty has participated in the Virtual Inclusive Higher Education project - Latin America, for the creation of an accessible Virtual Learning Environment.

In the particular case of FCEA, it has a specific role within the Teaching Support Unit as a reference for students in prison, providing support throughout their trajectory.

Furthermore, since 2023, FCEA has a permanent recreation and care space for children between 3 and 12 years old who are under the care of students, teachers, staff, alumni, and third-party staff of FCEA and the Udelar community.

5   Discussion

It is observed that various inclusive practices are being implemented both at the central level of Udelar and within the faculties. However, there is still a lack of sufficient awareness about these issues to make them part of the university culture. This results in some practices being isolated, driven by individual teaching groups, with the support and guidance of the teaching support units in each faculty, but not in a widespread manner.

On the other hand, in the last 15 years, access to higher education has been facilitated for students from different regions of the country through the establishment of various university centers, which has promoted decentralization.

The presence of gender equity commissions at both the service level and Udelar level is highly valued as they play a crucial role in raising awareness and generating policies on these issues.

6   Conclusions

As UNESCO (2005) states:

Inclusive education, far from being a marginal issue that deals with how to integrate certain students into conventional education, represents a perspective that should serve to analyze how to transform educational systems and other learning environments in order to respond to student diversity. (p 15)

Therefore, it is necessary to continue working on the development of inclusive practices at the analyzed services and Udelar. To do so, it is essential to train teachers in these issues.

The efforts made by the university in recent years to support various programs for the inclusion of different university stakeholders are highly appreciated.

7   Limitations and Future Research

It would be desirable to expand this research to other Udelar services and delve into the survey of teaching practices such as the development of educational materials and the design of inclusive activities.

It would also be of interest to gather information about Udelar's future plans regarding these topics.

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