Comunicative Barriers and Communication Facilitators in Higher Education: Experiences and Perceptions of Students in a Disability Situation and Teachers in the Metropolitan Region of Chile

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Abstract.
This study aims to characterize the communication barriers experienced by students in a disability situation and understand the perception of teachers about the communication barriers faced by students in a disability situation in university contexts. For this purpose, the study has a qualitative methodological design. The semi-structured interview technique was used online, with a sample size of 8 participants in total, comprising an equal number of students in a disability situation and teachers. Both groups were from universities located in the Metropolitan region of Chile. A thematic analysis of the interviews was carried out. The results indicate the presence of physical, psychological, semantic, administrative, and digital communication barriers that affect students' participation and learning in the university environment. Moreover, the study reveals facilitators to mitigate the negative impact of these barriers on the academic and social dimensions for university students in a disability situation. The study's findings highlight the urgent necessity to develop facilitators of communicative accessibility in the context of higher education. This is crucial to promote the full participation of people in a disability situation.

Keywords: higher education, communication studies, inclusive education, accessibility.

1 Introduction

In Chile, despite the existence of rights and laws that support people in a disability situation and aim to enhance accessibility, higher education students face attitudinal, organizational, learning and participation barriers (Victoriano, 2017). These barriers hinder their access and participation in the educational system, especially in higher

education, consequently impairing their full social participation (NCBDDD, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to contribute to generating solutions that improve accessibility to higher education, particularly in the communicative dimension. The objective of this study is to recognize communicative barriers faced by students in a disability situation in university contexts in the Metropolitan Region of Chile.

2 Theoretical Framework

Throughout history, various conceptual frameworks have been developed regarding disability. This study aligns with the model of the social production of disability, whose premise is that disability is a social construction. This means that the limitations on social participation and equal opportunities faced by people in a disability situation are not a result of their personal characteristics, but rather are created by society (Victoria, 2013).

The United Nations recognizes the right to education of persons with disabilities in article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It emphasizes that participating States shall ensure their general access to higher education (UN, 2008). To guarantee this right, it's essential that education services fulfill the principle of universal accessibility.

Several authors have proposed dimensions for studying accessibility, with SENADIS (2016) outlining physical, attitudinal, and communicative dimensions. This research focuses on the communicative dimension. According to Toste and Pérez (2021), communicative accessibility is the condition that environments, processes, goods, products, and services must meet to transmit information clearly and comprehensibly. Therefore, disregarding this dimension of accessibility could lead to barriers in interpersonal communication, written communication, non-verbal communication, and virtual communication (Peñas and Hernández, 2019).

3 Methods

A qualitative study was conducted from an epistemological standpoint according to a hermeneutic paradigm. Information was collected using the semi-structured individual interview technique. The sample size consisted of a total of 8 participants, comprising an equal number of students in a disability situation and teachers, both groups from universities in the Metropolitan Region. There were no specific age or gender preferences, and interviews were conducted online. Non-probabilistic discretionary sampling was employed. The sample size was chosen to prioritize interpretative depth over statistical representativeness. Following data collection, a textual transcription of each interview was performed, and a thematic analysis was conducted.

4 Results

Both students in a disability situation and teachers pointed out various aspects related to communication barriers and communication facilitators they have experienced or observed in university contexts. Among the barriers mentioned, physical infrastructure

barriers were identified that hinder access to information in classes, interpersonal communication, and learning. Psychological barriers were also noted, which affect the teacher-student trust relationship and communication, stemming from the perception of the lack of importance of necessary adjustments and support.

Besides, semantic barriers were reported, such as lack of awareness about diversity and inclusion, and the absence of the use of inclusive language by teachers and authorities. Likewise, administrative barriers such as lack of preparation of the universities for adjustments managing.

Regarding digital barriers, issues were found with the accessibility of digital study materials, as well as with the platforms serving as official channels for institutional communication and the daily-use communication platforms. Finally, discrimination was recognized as a communication barrier present in university contexts.

As for communication facilitators, infrastructure that enhances access and reduces noise was identified. Empathy, willingness to help and the presence of safe spaces for communication with teachers and classmates were indicated as psychological facilitators. Semantic facilitators were indicated as inclusive language training and its effective use by teachers and students. Furthermore, the presence of action protocols enabling the implementation of adjustments and a diverse range of information dissemination methods is recognized as an administrative facilitator. Finally, the availability of technological resources and training in their utilization were identified as digital facilitators.

5 Discussion

Regarding communicative accessibility in education, SENADIS (2016) proposes that educational institutions themselves must implement measures to ensure the progress of people in a disability situation within the educational system. However, upon analyzing the results obtained from the interviews, various communication-related challenges in this context became evident. The participants stated the actions taken by universities are insufficient. Greater efforts are needed from these institutions to effectively ensure the students' learning and participation.

Law 20.422 (2010) stipulates that people in a disability situation possess the entitlement to equal opportunities in order to eradicate any form of discrimination based on disability. However, this study revealed the persistence of various communication barriers within university contexts, hindering the right to equal opportunities.

6 Conclusions

The specific objectives of this study were to characterize the communicative barriers experienced by students and to recognize the perception of teachers about the communicative barriers faced by students in a disability situation. These objectives were achieved through various reports provided by the participants. These reports revealed that students in a disability situation encounter inadequate communicative accessibility for their university development due to a variety of barriers. Participants also noted the lack of inclusive spaces within the university, and how these barriers

impact the motivation of students to attend and participate in classes.

Addressing communication barriers is both a necessity and a request from students in a disability situation. Hence, it is of utmost importance to consider and implement the different solutions proposed by the participants in order to address the communication barriers. Finally, the findings of this research can contribute to the inclusive development of universities, particularly in enhancing their support programs for students in a disability situation.

7 Limitations and Future Research

This study exclusively focused on university population, excluding students in a disability situation and teachers from Professional Institutes and Technical Training Centers. Alongside this, only universities within the Metropolitan Region were considered, hence information from other contexts was not investigated. It is relevant that future research delves into communicative accessibility within the mentioned population and contexts.

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