



### **'With arms wide open'. Inclusive Pedagogy in Higher Education in Spain**

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Abstract:	<p>This study sheds light on how to develop inclusive pedagogy in higher education, from the point of view of 42 inclusive faculty members from 6 Spanish universities. A qualitative methodology was used through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data analysis was inductive, using a system of categories and topics. The results reveal that the faculty members which develop inclusive pedagogy in general have beliefs linked to the social model of disability and inclusive education approaches. They do not usually have specific training or knowledge about disability. They design their curricula in a flexible and open way to accommodate all students. They show a positive attitude toward students with disabilities and use diverse and participatory teaching methodologies, giving prominence to students. These data are consistent with those found in previous studies and offer keys to those faculty members who are interested in developing an inclusive pedagogy at the university.</p>

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**Points of interest**

- This paper examines in detail how faculty members of six faculties of educational sciences develop a theoretical framework comprising beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions.
- The research has found that faculty members hold beliefs about disability based on the social model of disability and inclusive approach.
- In general, inclusive faculty members' knowledge of disability and attention to diversity issues is scarce.
- The design of courses and teaching programmes led by inclusive university faculty is characterised by being open, flexible and providing clear and detailed information to students.
- Faculty who develop inclusive pedagogy use varied, participative and active methodologies, which are combined with a positive and approachable attitude towards students with disabilities.

## ‘With arms wide open’. Inclusive Pedagogy in Higher Education in Spain

**Abstract:** This study sheds light on how to develop inclusive pedagogy in higher education, from the point of view of 42 inclusive faculty members from 6 Spanish universities. A qualitative methodology was used through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data analysis was inductive, using a system of categories and topics. The results reveal that the faculty members which develop inclusive pedagogy in general have beliefs linked to the social model of disability and inclusive education approaches. They do not usually have specific training or knowledge about disability. They design their curricula in a flexible and open way to accommodate all students. They show a positive attitude toward students with disabilities and use diverse and participatory teaching methodologies, giving prominence to students. These data are consistent with those found in previous studies and offer keys to those faculty members who are interested in developing an inclusive pedagogy at the university.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Pedagogy, Higher Education, Disability, Faculty Members, Qualitative Method

### Introduction

The 2030 Agenda promotes a global plan for the recognition of the rights of all people and the construction of an integrated society that respects the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination (United Nations 2015). In this regard, the European Union is clearly committed to inclusive education in the framework of higher education. It proposes the creation of support plans and university services to improve access and educational inclusion for non-traditional students, including students with disabilities. In

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3 the case of Spain, Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013 on the rights of people with disabilities  
4 and their social inclusion and Organic Law 4/2007 on Universities explicitly mention the  
5 inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education, establishing the guarantee of equal  
6 opportunities and non-discrimination toward them. Clearly, this legislation has been a step  
7 forward in the regulation of equity and quality for people with disabilities. However, it is  
8 still clear that the inequalities derived from disability are the least institutionally addressed  
9 situations, and this problem is absent in the proposals and analyses of university policies,  
10 university practices and ongoing faculty training. In this sense, Gibson (2015) and Weedon  
11 and Riddell (2016) point out that the university has not yet adopted adequate strategies to  
12 include students with disabilities, and that there are still difficulties for the access and  
13 retention of these students. Therefore, inclusive education is still a challenge to be  
14 overcome by contemporary universities.

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17 In the 2020/2021 academic year, a total of 23,851 students with disabilities enrolled  
18 in Spanish universities, which represents a rise of approximately 11% compared to the  
19 2019/2020 academic year, in which 21,435 students enrolled. Students with disabilities  
20 represent 1.5% of all Spanish university students. (Universia Foundation 2021). The  
21 opportunity to study at university is an empowering experience for most students; however,  
22 students with disabilities face more difficulties in this experience than their peers with no  
23 disabilities (Fuller, Healey, Bradley, and Hall 2005).

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26 In recent years, there has been a growing interest in knowing what participation is  
27 like and what characterises the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education  
28 (Fuller, Riddell, and Weedon 2009; Riddell, Tinklin, and Wilson 2005), since universities  
29 of high quality are inclusive (Gairín and Suárez 2014).

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3 Inclusive pedagogy has been identified as a pedagogical approach that can favour  
4 the path towards an accessible university designed for all, avoiding the exclusion of certain  
5 students, as it contemplates and offers a wide range of learning and participation  
6 opportunities through an inclusive, fair and equitable social system (Florian 2015).  
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12 From this approach, the decisions that are made are determined by the knowledge,  
13 competences and actions of the faculty, the values and beliefs about the students and the  
14 teaching and learning process, and by social processes and influences (Alexander 2004).  
15  
16 Likewise, from this approach, diversity is embraced as an inherent human characteristic and  
17 disability is seen as a positive asset rather than as a problem (Booth and Ainscow 2002;  
18 Sapon-Shevin 2013). In this sense, inclusive pedagogy connects with the contributions of  
19 Gale and Mills (2013) and with the proposals of Florian (2014) and Rouse (2008), and it is  
20 articulated in a framework of analysis that encompasses four dimensions: beliefs,  
21 knowledge, designs and actions. In this framework of analysis, the *beliefs* of the faculty  
22 refer to the conceptions, principles or maxims that lead them to design and develop  
23 teaching projects in which all students are included, responding to individual differences,  
24 but preventing students from feeling singled out for being treated differently (Florian  
25 2014). This dimension is particularly important given that beliefs are closely linked to  
26 faculty practice (Sansom 2020) and are often stable personal appraisals that are difficult to  
27 change (Göransson and Nilholm 2014).  
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47 *Knowledge* refers to the theoretical, policy or legislative approaches that lead  
48 faculty members to support inclusive pedagogy. There is considerable evidence on the lack  
49 of training for faculty members on disability and how to respond to the needs of students  
50 with disabilities (Hsiao, Burgstahler, Johnson, Nuss, and Doherty 2019; Sánchez-Díaz and  
51 Morgado, 2021). Lombardi, Murray, and Gerdes (2011), Moriña and Carballo (2018) and  
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3 Murray, Lombardi, Seely, and Gerdes (2014) point out that this training not only improves  
4 teaching practice and faculty' own attitudes, but also directly benefits students. In this  
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6 sense, Rouse (2008) states that faculty members should have knowledge related to different  
7  
8 teaching strategies, disability and the needs that students may have, how students learn and  
9  
10 how to monitor their learning, classroom organisation and management, finding external  
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12 support, identifying and assessing difficulties, and even knowledge of the legislative and  
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14 political context.  
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19 With regard to *design*, this dimension includes all the considerations that faculty  
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21 take into account when planning their faculty projects in order to make them accessible.  
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23 Sometimes the rigidity of the curricula and study programmes can be a barrier for students  
24  
25 with disabilities (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014). A proactive approach to designing study  
26  
27 programmes would help to eliminate this rigidity. In this context, Universal Design for  
28  
29 Learning (UDL) becomes especially relevant. Teaching should be designed based on  
30  
31 principles of UDL (which will be outlined later in the paper), prior to classroom practice,  
32  
33 fully considering diversity, in order to prevent every student from being left out, thus  
34  
35 allowing and guaranteeing accessibility and participation for all students (CAST 2018;  
36  
37 Hromalik, Myhill, and Carr 2020; Seale, Colwell, Coughlan, Heiman, Kaspi-Tsahor, and  
38  
39 Olenik-Shemesh 2020).  
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44 The last dimension included in the framework of analysis of inclusive pedagogy  
45  
46 refers to *actions*, that is, those affective, emotional and teaching-learning strategies put into  
47  
48 practice in the development of faculty projects. From this approach, as from constructivism  
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50 (Cubero 2005; Vigotsky 1978), students are conceived as the protagonists of their own  
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52 learning, and faculty members as guides and mediators.  
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3 There are few studies that focus on analysing how faculty work in inclusive  
4 teaching practices. The evidence found indicates that these faculty members are  
5 characterised by empathy, closeness, flexibility, accessibility and sensitivity to the needs of  
6 all their students (Sánchez-Díaz and Morgado 2021; Stein 2014). In terms of the  
7 development of teaching practice, the affective and emotional component stands out in  
8 them. Authors such as Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting (2019) indicate that relationships  
9 based on closeness and trust with students promote feelings of belonging in them.

19 Inclusive faculty members tend to use and develop active pedagogies and  
20 methodologies with a focus on student learning and participation. In short, inclusive faculty  
21 members implement many of the principles underpinning effective learning, such as  
22 promoting the participation and active role of students, using a variety of media to provide  
23 subject content and employing constructivist approaches to learning (Hofstädter-Thalmann,  
24 Rotgans, Aybar, and Nordquist 2022) They are also characterised by the use of diverse  
25 methodologies, consider different assessment systems and make adjustments to educational  
26 materials to respond to students' needs (Sandoval, Morgado, and Doménech 2020; Cotán,  
27 Aguirre, Morgado, and Melero 2021; Lorenzo-Lledó, Lorenzo, Lledó, and Pérez-Vázquez  
28 2020; Yvonne, Tikhonova, Gagnon, Battalova, Mayer, Krupa, Lee, Nimmon, and Jarus  
29 2020). In this regard, Kioko and Makoelle (2014) and Reupert, Hemmings, and Connor  
30 (2010) emphasise that inclusive faculty are characterised by developing flexible educational  
31 practices, providing their students with materials and resources to support their learning,  
32 presenting subject content through different channels and in an accessible way, using  
33 different methodologies and teaching techniques to respond to the needs of all their  
34 students.

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3 This work aims to study the experiences of university faculty who design and  
4 develop their teaching programmes based on inclusive pedagogy, in order to be able to  
5 offer examples of good practice to faculty on how to develop inclusive pedagogy.  
6  
7 Specifically, the aim is to achieve the following objectives: (1) to discover the beliefs of  
8 inclusive faculty about disability and the reasons that lead them to respond to the needs of  
9 students with disabilities; (2) to analyse the knowledge of faculty about inclusive education  
10 and disability in the university context; (3) to find out the aspects that faculty take into  
11 account in the design of their teaching programmes to make them inclusive; and (4) to  
12 examine the actions that faculty implement in their classrooms to meet the diversity and  
13 needs of students with disabilities.  
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## 28 **Method**

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30 This paper is part of a larger research project entitled "*title and reference removed*  
31 *for anonymous review*", which is focused on the beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions of  
32 faculty members who carry out inclusive practices. The biographical-narrative method was  
33 used to give a voice to inclusive faculty previously identified by students with disabilities.  
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40 Initially, we requested the collaboration with colleagues with knowledge and  
41 experience based in the Disability Support Services (DSS) of the participating universities,  
42 who contacted the students with disabilities to inform them about the project. The students  
43 who agreed to participate were asked to name the faculty members who had facilitated their  
44 inclusion during their time at the university. To this end, they were provided with a set of  
45 criteria that these faculty members had to meet (Moriña, Cortés-Vega, and Molina 2015):  
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47 *they believe in the possibilities of all students; they facilitate learning processes; their*  
48 *teaching is active, using different methodological teaching strategies; they show concern*  
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3 *for their students' learning; they show flexibility, with a willingness to help; they motivate*  
4 *students; they maintain close relationships and favour interactions between students; they*  
5 *make you feel that you are important, that you are one more in the classroom; they allow*  
6 *students to participate in the class and build knowledge together; the communication they*  
7 *maintain with you and your classmates is horizontal (rather than hierarchical).*

14 In addition, the snowball technique (Dusek, Yurova, and Ruppel 2015) was used.  
15 Specifically, different members of the university community (faculty members, students  
16 and other agents) were asked to inform students with disabilities that they knew about the  
17 project.  
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### 23 ***Participants***

24 A total of 65 faculty members who taught in the faculty of Educational Sciences at  
25 10 Spanish universities were contacted. Finally, 42 faculty members from 6 Spanish  
26 universities (3 in Andalusia, 2 in the Community of Valencia and 1 in Madrid) participated.  
27  
28 The participants were selected exclusively by students with disabilities.  
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31 Regarding the profile of these faculty members, 17 (40.5%) were men and 25  
32 (59.5%) were women. In terms of age, they ranged from 33 to 59 years old, with a mean  
33 age of 41.2 years. The participants had an average of 15.8 years of teaching experience,  
34 ranging from 7 to 32 years. All participants had previous experience with students with  
35 disabilities.  
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### 46 ***The Spanish university context***

47 Since the creation of the European Higher Education Area, official university  
48 degrees are divided into Undergraduate Studies (4 years) and Postgraduate Studies:  
49 Master's Degrees (1-2 years) and Doctoral Studies (3-4 years).  
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3 In Spain, all public universities, by law (Organic Law 4/2007 on Universities), must  
4 have DSS for students with disabilities. The colleagues with knowledge and experience  
5 based in these offices provide students with disabilities the necessary resources for the  
6 development of their learning process and, when necessary, advise faculty members on the  
7 different reasonable adjustments to be applied.  
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14 In order to access these adaptations, certain conditions must be met. Firstly, students  
15 with disabilities need to show evidence of having a Certificate of Disability, which  
16 officially accredits the legal status of a person with a disability. The degree of disability is  
17 expressed as a percentage and the disability is recognized from a degree equal to or greater  
18 than 33%.  
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26 Secondly, university students with disabilities can decide whether or not to disclose  
27 their disability during the enrollment process and whether or not to allow the university to  
28 share their situation with the DSS. When students disclose a disability, DSS informs them  
29 of the resources available at the university.  
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35 Only when the students request subject-related support does the DSS notify  
36 members of faculty that they have a student with a disability in their classroom, what their  
37 needs are and what support they require.  
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#### 42 *Data collection instruments and procedure*

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44 Two ad hoc interviews were designed for the study. The first interview explored  
45 faculty members' beliefs about attention to diversity and their knowledge of disability. The  
46 second interview analysed, firstly, the considerations that faculty took into account when  
47 designing their faculty programmes to make them inclusive, and, secondly, the actions they  
48 carried out in their subjects to respond to the needs of students with disabilities.  
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3 The interviews were conducted by members of the research team who had  
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5 previously been trained for this task. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face  
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7 (n=34), 6 were conducted via Skype and 2 via telephone. The interviews lasted an average  
8  
9 of 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the prior consent of the faculty for  
10  
11 the recording and use of the data for research purposes. This study complied with the  
12  
13 ethical requirements approved by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.  
14  
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### 16 17 ***Data analysis***

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19 The interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analysed using an inductive system of  
20  
21 categories and **topics** that allowed organising and making sense of the information collected  
22  
23 (Miles and Huberman 1994). The information was processed using MaxQDA qualitative  
24  
25 data analysis software.  
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28  
29 Four categories were established: (1) beliefs about disability; (2) disability-related  
30  
31 knowledge; (3) design of faculty projects; and (4) faculty practices in the classroom. The  
32  
33 'beliefs about disability' category comprised seven **topics** organised in two subcategories.  
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35 The subcategory conceptions of disability included:  
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- 38 • Medical model
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- 40 • Social model
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- 42 • Inclusive education approach.
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45 The subcategory reasons to respond to students with disabilities included:

- 46 • Previous experiences
- 47
- 48 • Faculty/researcher profile
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- 50 • Teaching/regulatory responsibility
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- 52 • Influence of attitude on student learning.
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3 The disability-related knowledge' category comprises eight topics organised in three  
4 subcategories. The subcategory inclusive education contained:

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- 8 • Knowledge of the principles of inclusive education
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- 10 • Poor, erroneous or inaccurate knowledge of inclusive education.
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12 The types of disability subcategory comprised:

- 13
- 14 • General knowledge about disability and types
- 15
- 16 • Knowledge related to the concept of diversity
- 17
- 18 • Poor, erroneous or inaccurate knowledge about disability and types of disability
- 19
- 20
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22 Lastly, the subcategory needs and support included:

- 23
- 24 • General knowledge about needs and support
- 25
- 26 • Special importance of positive attitude towards needs and supports
- 27
- 28 • Poor knowledge about needs and supports
- 29
- 30

31 The 'design of faculty projects' category involved three topics:

- 32
- 33 • General aspects of faculty planning
- 34
- 35 • University regulations
- 36
- 37 • Sensitivity to emotional aspects
- 38
- 39

40 The fourth category 'faculty practices in the classroom' covered three topics:

- 41
- 42 • Teaching staff role
- 43
- 44 • Methodological issues
- 45
- 46 • Faculty attitude
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## 50 51 52 **Results**

### 53 54 *What are the faculty's beliefs about disability?*

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3 The first objective of this investigation was to find out what beliefs faculty members  
4 have about disability and why they respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The  
5 results indicate that there is diversity in the participants' understanding of disability. A  
6 small minority used the deficit model to refer to disability, relating it in terms of deficits,  
7 difficulties and limitations, and placing the causes of disability in the individual.  
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14 *"I understand disability as a person who finds it more difficult, for whatever reason,*  
15 *to adapt to everyday life, any kind of thing, either because they are in a wheelchair*  
16 *and can't get on the bus as easily, or because of some other kind of problem, not*  
17 *being able to enjoy some aspects of life in the same way as people who don't have a*  
18 *disability" (Faculty 41).*  
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26 The rest of the faculty either understood that disability had its origin in society  
27 (social prejudices and inaccessibility of the environment), placing themselves within the  
28 social model of disability, or they linked it to the approaches of inclusive education, from  
29 which diversity is understood as a positive quality and an inherent human characteristic.  
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35 *"Look, disability causes me a lot of reflection because it seems to me that it is an*  
36 *issue that has been used to exclude many people from society because of their*  
37 *physical or psychological characteristics. What worries me is concern, but concern*  
38 *because it seems to me that the society we are building is not prepared to accept*  
39 *diversity" (Faculty 24).*  
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47 The faculty that started from inclusive education approaches conceived disability as  
48 a concept that encompasses people with different abilities and related it to terms such as  
49 equality, equity and challenges.  
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3 *"The idea of diversity, of difference, comes to mind. Maybe some special needs, but*  
4 *I'm telling you, we all need special help at some point and they wouldn't call us*  
5 *disabled" (Faculty 33).*  
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10 The participants offered very diverse and varied reasons for describing what led  
11 them to respond to the needs of their students with disabilities. Many argued that they had  
12 previous experience with students, friends or family members with disabilities.  
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17 *"You have a student in the classroom who has some diversity and, well, you have to*  
18 *try to treat all your students equally, in the sense that they all get the competences*  
19 *that they are all supposed to develop. You are responsible for helping them to*  
20 *achieve those competences. But there is no difference in the treatment of a person*  
21 *with a disability and a non-disabled person" (Faculty 22).*  
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28 Other faculty argued that their beliefs about caring for disabled students were  
29 closely linked to their training, teaching or research profile.  
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32  
33 *"I am a psychologist by training and my discipline and work make me sensitive to*  
34 *all diversity and all minority groups, including students with disabilities" (Faculty*  
35 *29).*  
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40 One issue that made them concerned about and responsive to the needs of these  
41 students was compliance with the principle of equity, which led them to strive to provide a  
42 teaching that met the needs of all students, regardless of whether or not they had a  
43 disability. This position differs from the principle of equality, which advocates treating  
44 every student in the same way, irrespective of their individual characteristics.  
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51 They also referred in their arguments to the attention to diversity and inclusion of all  
52 students. In this respect, many faculty members stated that they strive to respect their rights  
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3 and interests. They also considered it a teaching obligation and responsibility to respond to  
4  
5 the needs of all students in order to comply with regulations.  
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8 *"I try to meet the needs of all my students as much as possible, and it is true that*  
9  
10 *when there are some students who have a disability, I try to treat them with respect*  
11  
12 *and try to offer them the best teaching and the best of my teaching... they can be*  
13  
14 *people with or without disabilities "* (Faculty 6).  
15

16  
17 Most of the participants felt that their attitude toward students with disabilities had a  
18  
19 positive influence on their learning, promoting their interest, motivation, involvement,  
20  
21 academic performance and enhancing the positive relationship between faculty and  
22  
23 students.  
24

25  
26 *"I think it has a big impact on their motivation, because they often tell me: I came to*  
27  
28 *the university today to attend your class"* (Faculty 27).  
29

30  
31 *"I think it is fundamental. Creating an atmosphere of trust, in which mistakes are*  
32  
33 *not seen as failures, that they have a leading role, that they know that you care*  
34  
35 *about them, and that what they are doing is something that makes sense, is useful*  
36  
37 *and can help them in the future, because that is the basis, and thus learning flows"*  
38  
39 *(Faculty 22).*  
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#### 41 42 ***What knowledge do faculty members have about inclusive education and disability?*** 43

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45 The second objective of this study was to analyse the faculty's knowledge of the  
46  
47 concepts of inclusive education and disability, the types of disability and the needs and  
48  
49 support that university students with disabilities may require.  
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52 In relation to the concept of inclusive education, slightly over a third of the  
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54 participants were aware of the principles of inclusive education and had a good theoretical  
55  
56 understanding of the term. Specifically, they indicated that inclusive education was about  
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3 addressing the learning needs of all students, thereby reducing any possible exclusion in the  
4  
5 teaching-learning process.  
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8 *"I believe that inclusive education is about responding to diversity and educational*  
9  
10 *needs, at all levels and for successful learning. That would be inclusive education:*  
11 *the response to all types of students in order for them to achieve their objectives"*  
12  
13 *(Faculty 35).*

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17 *"Education should reach out to all students. It must offer the same opportunities for*  
18  
19 *everyone, that everyone has the same possibilities to acquire knowledge of a subject*  
20  
21 *- or whatever they are doing - and to reach their full potential" (Faculty 42)*  
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24 The rest of the participants either did not know the term, did not provide an accurate  
25  
26 definition, or had a misconception of the concept of inclusive education.  
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29 *"Well, I've never really heard of it. I understand that it refers to integrating students*  
30  
31 *with disabilities, but I'm telling you, it's not the area I've worked in" (Faculty 25).*  
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34 Regarding the participants' knowledge about disability and the types of disability,  
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36 most of them had very general knowledge about it, either because they had had previous  
37  
38 experience with students with disabilities, or because they had received training and  
39  
40 information on this issue. Some faculty also had more knowledge about diversity than  
41  
42 about disability.  
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45 *"Well, I don't know anything beyond the different types of disabilities, that is,*  
46  
47 *physical disability, intellectual disability, what I call psychosocial disability,*  
48  
49 *psychological disability, the types of disabilities that we saw in the course and how*  
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51 *to react to disability, but yes, I believe I still know less than I think I know" (Faculty*  
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53 *7).*  
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3 *"I start from the notion that there is no such thing as a person with a disability, but*  
4 *that all of us have a certain condition of diversity. Thus, there are people who need*  
5 *some reinforcement in certain spaces, areas, teaching methodology, assessment,*  
6 *etc., and other people who also need it in other ways. Maybe they have some*  
7 *difficulties that year, or they have health problems" (Faculty 12).*

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15 Some participants admitted that they had no specific knowledge about disability and  
16  
17 its types. Some of them even had misconceptions or very superficial conceptions about the  
18  
19 concept.

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21 *"I think I am totally ignorant and, many times, I am afraid to say the word*  
22 *disability, because I don't know if it is a disability or if I am saying something*  
23 *wrong, because, I tell you, I am ignorant. I don't have a clear concept. [...] I*  
24 *understand that there are two types: intellectual and physical. But, I tell you, I don't*  
25 *know" (Faculty 2).*

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33 Finally, with regard to knowledge about the needs or support required by students  
34  
35 with disabilities, approximately half of the faculty were aware of some of the needs of these  
36  
37 students and the possible support available in the university context. In addition, some  
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39 faculty indicated that the key to the inclusion of these students was a positive attitude on the  
40  
41 part of the faculty, rather than specific knowledge of these issues.

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44 *"At the institutional level, there is a diversity service, a disability service, a legal*  
45 *service, a psychological service, the equality unit... there are a series of mechanisms*  
46 *in place for situations that produce inequality. And within the classroom, well,*  
47 *whatever the students tell you they need at that moment" (Faculty 12).*

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3 *"There are times when they don't need anything that another classmate doesn't*  
4 *need. They need an accessible faculty member, who explains things they don't*  
5 *understand, who explains and reaches the students" (Faculty 29).*

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10 *"The main support is your understanding, once you are understanding... Your*  
11 *support, your attitude toward them, right? (Faculty 23).*

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14 Finally, the rest of the faculty did not know what needs students with disabilities  
15 might have or what support or help they could count on.

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19 *"For what I know very little about, I tell you, what I did at the time was to find my*  
20 *own way and try to get help. The University includes it in its statutes but I don't*  
21 *know how it is materialised" (Faculty 9).*

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28 ***What are the considerations that inclusive faculty take into account in their subject***  
29 ***design?***

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33 The participants referred to some of the considerations they took into account in the  
34 design of their subjects in order to make them inclusive. Most participants saw their  
35 planning as dynamic and open-ended, and thus changeable both before and during the  
36 course. However, some faculty indicated that they had no possibility to modify the planning  
37 of their subjects because it was already determined by the coordinators or by the faculty  
38 teams who had previously taught the subjects.

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46 *"The guide at my university is standardised; there are specific regulations, there are*  
47 *numbered headings, they are filled in. Then there are headings in which we can*  
48 *intervene a little more, such as the contents, and we have to share them with our*  
49 *colleagues in the department. Therefore, faculty guides tend to be very generic"*  
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56 *(Faculty 13).*

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3 Specifically, among the aspects to which they paid most attention before starting the  
4 course, they highlighted the importance of contemplating university regulations and clearly  
5 stating the contents and competences to be achieved. The participants pointed out that they  
6 made an effort to include in the teaching plan all the information related to learning content  
7 and its practical application, activities, methodology, timetable, assessment systems and  
8 possible adjustments to be made to respond to the particular needs of the students.  
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12 *"I start from the standards, i.e., the objectives and competences to be achieved.*  
13 *Then I try to design my work proposal, that is, organisation, methodology,*  
14 *assessment... in a way that it accommodates all students regardless of their*  
15 *circumstances and characteristics. Participatory methodology, combining various*  
16 *ways of working... every year I try to improve, update, bring in new material,*  
17 *references..." (Faculty 29).*  
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22 In particular, these faculty members paid special attention to ensuring that their  
23 subject designs were open and flexible, that the information was clear and detailed, and that  
24 it was adapted to the degree programme and to the characteristics of the students taking  
25 their subject. They also stressed the importance of the faculty's planning being sensitive to  
26 the emotional and motivational aspects of the students.  
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31 *"Two points: one, to create scenarios that are open enough to allow us to develop*  
32 *the projects we want to do. Two, to give us time to relate our proposals to the*  
33 *students' interests. The programme is at the heart of the subject design" (Faculty*  
34 *18).*  
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38 *"That they know what is known about the subject, that they can access the*  
39 *knowledge in the most agile, fast and educational way possible. I also need students*  
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3 *to feel that they are the protagonists of the learning process and that there is a*  
4  
5 *continuous evaluation process, continuous feedback" (Faculty 24).*  
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7  
8 ***How do faculty members address the diversity and needs of students with disabilities?***  
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10 The fourth objective of this study was to find out how inclusive faculty worked in  
11 the classroom. The results obtained allow us to describe how the faculty behaved in the  
12 classroom with their students and the methodologies they used to teach.  
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17 With regard to teaching behaviour, the results indicate that these inclusive faculty  
18 members showed a lot of enthusiasm when teaching, fostered motivation and curiosity in  
19 their students and used humour to generate optimism in their classrooms. They were also  
20 respectful, trusting, approachable and accessible to their students. They also strived to be a  
21 role model for their students and to provide them with active communication and  
22 continuous feedback.  
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31 *"If you are passionate about what you do, they get infected immediately" (Faculty*  
32  
33 *39).*  
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36 *"Everything is based on respect. Positively reinforce any proposal, thank them for*  
37  
38 *their participation, always try to give them feedback on what they do..." (Faculty*  
39  
40 *30).*  
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43 *"Look, there is a simple strategy, like trying to get along with the student, respecting*  
44  
45 *them and being patient with them. Learn the students' names; it's amazing how*  
46  
47 *things change. If you manage to create that atmosphere, then the learning is more*  
48  
49 *likely to flow" (Faculty 22).*  
50

51 The faculty understood that learners have an active role in the teaching and learning  
52 process. This led them to work in the classroom through various methodological strategies,  
53  
54 such as the use of debates, applied content, team work, etc., and to use participatory  
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3 methodologies, such as Cooperative Learning, Peer Learning, Interactive Lessons, Project-  
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5 Based Learning, Problem-Based Learning, Flipped Classroom, Gamification, etc.  
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8 *"I really like cooperative learning with students, and it works very well for me, as*  
9  
10 *well as working on educational coaching, which is related to conflict resolution. I*  
11  
12 *also like to listen to the students and that they participate in the teaching processes,*  
13  
14 *as its protagonists, and the faculty is the one who guides them" (Faculty 6).*  
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16  
17 Finally, it should be noted that the participating faculty generally had a positive  
18  
19 attitude toward making reasonable adjustments in the classroom to meet the needs of their  
20  
21 students.  
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23  
24 *"I am strongly in favour of curricular adaptations because, in my opinion, if some of*  
25  
26 *the contents cannot be seen by a student with a disability in the same way as*  
27  
28 *another without disabilities, this student with a disability does not have the same*  
29  
30 *opportunities to pass the exam. This applies to all subjects" (Faculty 42).*  
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### 33 34 35 **Discussion and conclusions** 36

37  
38 Inclusive pedagogy is an alternative scenario for organising learning in a way that it  
39  
40 welcomes all learners. Its configuration in four dimensions -beliefs, knowledge, designs  
41  
42 and actions- allows approaching educational inclusion from an integral and holistic  
43  
44 perspective, making it possible to understand all those issues that, to a greater or lesser  
45  
46 extent, facilitate inclusive educational processes in the classroom. This study sheds light on  
47  
48 how inclusive pedagogy is developed in the context of higher education. The first aim of  
49  
50 this study was to understand inclusive faculty's *beliefs* about disability and the reasons why  
51  
52 they respond to the needs of students with disabilities. The results indicate that most of the  
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54 faculty member had a conception of disability that is linked either to the social model or to  
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3 inclusive education approaches. In a previous study by Martins, Borges, and Gonçalves  
4 (2018), it was found that the majority of the faculty viewed disability from a medical  
5  
6 (2018), it was found that the majority of the faculty viewed disability from a medical  
7  
8 model. However, the data from the present study suggest that changes are occurring in the  
9  
10 way people with disabilities are being welcomed in the university context, and that faculty  
11  
12 are beginning to show more positive attitudes toward students with disabilities (Benkohila,  
13  
14 Elhoweris, and Efthymiou 2020; Lipka, Khouri, and Shecter-Lerner 2020).

15  
16  
17 The reasons for faculty responding to the needs of their students with disabilities are  
18  
19 very diverse. The reasons found include compliance with university regulations, their  
20  
21 teaching and research profile, and their previous experience with people with different  
22  
23 types of disabilities. Regarding this last reason, the faculty members involved in this study  
24  
25 have had experiences with students with visible (physical, visual, etc.) and non-visible  
26  
27 (autism, mental health disorders, etc.) disabilities. In relation to the group of students with  
28  
29 non-visible disabilities, it is important to bear in mind that these students tend not to  
30  
31 disclose their disability for fear of social rejection, a situation that prevents them from  
32  
33 accessing the supports they need (Nolan and Gleeson 2017).

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38 The fact of having previous experience with people with disabilities is linked to an  
39  
40 increase in faculty members' sensitivity and empathy, and correlates positively with the  
41  
42 development of positive attitudes towards students with disabilities (Alghazo 2008). This  
43  
44 last issue is particularly important for the participating faculty members, as they believe  
45  
46 that having a positive attitude towards students with disabilities increases their motivation  
47  
48 and interest in learning. These findings are supported by Benkohila, Elhoweris, and  
49  
50 Efthymiou (2020) and Moriña (2019), who argue that positive faculty attitudes have great  
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52 benefits for students' learning, especially for students with disabilities, such as improved  
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54 academic performance and increased interest and motivation to study.  
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3 The second aim of this study was to analyse the faculty's *knowledge* of inclusive  
4 education, disability and types of disability, and the needs or support that students with  
5 disabilities may require at university. The results reveal that the majority of participants had  
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The second aim of this study was to analyse the faculty's *knowledge* of inclusive education, disability and types of disability, and the needs or support that students with disabilities may require at university. The results reveal that the majority of participants had scarce or very superficial knowledge about inclusive education, disability and types of disability. In general, the knowledge they had on these issues came from their previous experience with people with disabilities or was closely related to their teaching and research profile.

An interesting finding is that some faculty members defined disability in terms of diversity, understanding that every human being is different and unique and, therefore, individual differences should be conceived as opportunities and not as problems, as Sapon-Shevin (2013) states.

Through their previous experience with people with disabilities or their training, half of the participating faculty were aware of some of the needs and supports that students with disabilities may require. The other half had no such knowledge.

This lack of disability-related knowledge has been found in similar studies with inclusive university faculty from other fields (Carballo, Aguirre, and López-Gavira 2021; Carballo, Orozco, and Cortés-Vega 2021), which indicates that the need for training in disability is an issue to be considered. In the face of this lack of specific knowledge, the faculty emphasised that what is really important is to show a positive attitude and to consider that it is generally not necessary to make major adjustments to meet the needs of these students. This is supported by Sánchez-Díaz (2021) and Mbuyha (2019), who argue that the adjustments needed by these students are usually related to access to the curriculum, without the need for major accommodation to their subjects or the physical environment.

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3 Two main considerations can be drawn from these results. The first is related to the  
4 idea that inclusive pedagogy can be developed without having very specific knowledge  
5 about disability. The second consideration suggests that specific training on disability  
6 would facilitate the practice of inclusive pedagogy, as it would allow faculty members to be  
7 aware of the needs that these students may require and to offer the support they need. If we  
8 want higher education to become more inclusive in the near future, university faculty in all  
9 subject areas should be trained in disability (Rouse 2008) and on how to develop teaching  
10 practices based on inclusive pedagogy. In this line, Lombardi, Murray, and Gerdes (2011),  
11 Carballo, Aguirre, and López-Gavira (2021) and Murray, Lombardi, Seely, and Gerdes  
12 (2014), state that training on disability improves the teaching practice and attitude of  
13 faculty, which has a direct impact on all students.

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15 The third objective of this study was to find out what aspects faculty members take  
16 into account in the *design* of their subjects in order to make them inclusive. The results  
17 show that the inclusive faculty members designed their subjects in such a way that the  
18 curriculum was open and dynamic, including information on the content, activities,  
19 calendar, methodology and assessment presented concisely and clearly in faculty guides  
20 and projects. In this line, Spratt and Florian (2015) state that the practice of inclusive  
21 pedagogy requires careful decision-making based on subject knowledge and teaching  
22 processes, thus ensuring that all students participate in them, without exclusion. The fact  
23 that the subjects were designed to be flexible made it easier for the faculty to reflect and  
24 make decisions and adjustments, considering the compliance with university regulations  
25 and the characteristics of all their students, with no exceptions.

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27 This is directly in line with the principles of UDL, which provides students with  
28 different alternatives for access, representation, and participation, thus recognising the



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3 different ways in which students learn (CAST 2018). In this sense, the training of faculty  
4 on UDL and, specifically in the university environment, on Universal Instructional Design  
5 (UID), would favour the design of programmes, curricula, and accessible materials for the  
6 learning of all students -including those with disability- without the need for major  
7 additional adjustments (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2021; Lombardi, Vukovic,  
8 and Sala-Bars 2015), such as making work deadlines more flexible, extending the time  
9 allowed for assessment tests, providing adapted material, etc.

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19 Inclusive faculty members consider their students as the true protagonists of the  
20 learning process (Huber 2008), as proposed by constructivism (Cubero 2005; Vygostky  
21 1978). Thus, faculty members strive to consider in their designs, in addition to the active  
22 role of learners, relevant issues such as emotional and motivational aspects that are  
23 intervening in the quality of their learning (Booker and Campbell-Whatley 2018). In short,  
24 in a context where students feel understood, respected, welcomed and safe, they develop  
25 more and better learning (Booker and Campbell-Whatley 2018).

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35 Finally, the last aim of this paper was to examine the *actions* that faculty members  
36 take to promote inclusion. It was found that the attitude of the faculty toward their students  
37 was one of the fundamental keys to developing an inclusive pedagogy. In line with  
38 previous studies (Sánchez-Díaz and Morgado 2021; Thomas 2016), these faculty members  
39 are characterised by being enthusiastic, respectful and accessible. They are faculty who  
40 generate a climate of trust in their classrooms, making use of humour and encouraging their  
41 students' motivation and curiosity to learn. They also strive to provide active  
42 communication and continuous feedback to their students and to be a point of reference for  
43 them. In this sense, Stein (2014) highlights the role played by the human and personal  
44 characteristics of the faculty in the academic success of students. Aguirre, Carballo, and  
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3 López-Gavira (2020) point out that, to develop inclusive practices at university, it is  
4 essential to address the emotional aspects involved in the learning processes. All this  
5 connects directly to one of the underlying educational principles of ecological theory, the  
6 "curriculum for caring" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). From this principle, in order to make  
7 education more honest and effective, the curriculum should be developed to care for people  
8 and it underpins the fostering of attitudes of respect, tolerance, and solidarity.  
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11 In relation to faculty methodologies, the participants tended to use and develop  
12 active methodologies, focusing their faculty practices on student learning and participation.  
13 They used diverse methodologies and assessment systems and made adjustments to  
14 teaching materials in order to respond to the needs of their students (Sandoval, Morgado  
15 and Doménech 2020; Lorenzo-Lledó, Lorenzo, Lledó, and Pérez-Vázquez 2020; Yvonne,  
16 Tikhonova, Gagnon, Battalova, Mayer, Krupa, Lee, Nimmon, and Jarus 2020). These  
17 actions are closely related to constructivist instructional models, where the faculty is  
18 conceived as a guide and orientator, whose role is to facilitate and encourage the  
19 construction of new learning in students (Cubero 2005; Vygotsky 1978).  
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23 These participatory, active and collaborative methods are, in turn, preferred by  
24 students, increasing their motivation, participation and fostering meaningful, accessible and  
25 relevant learning (Hitch, Macfarlane, and Nihill 2015; Huguet, Pearse, Noè, Valencia,  
26 Castillo, Jiménez, and Patiño 2020). These methodological strategies develop students'  
27 sense of engagement (Almarghani and Mijatovic 2017). Therefore, active pedagogies that  
28 promote meaningful and constructive learning are considered essential to achieve  
29 educational inclusion (Thomas 2016) and generate interaction and participation among  
30 students, all of which act as facilitators for students with disabilities (Sandoval, Morgado  
31 and Doménech 2020; Moriña and Orozco 2021; Stentiford and Koutsouris 2020). Thus,  
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3 active pedagogies are identified as methodological strategies that promote autonomy,  
4 involvement, and active participation of students in the construction of meaningful and  
5 reflective knowledge, always starting from their own experience. The specific pedagogical  
6 strategies identified in the participants' teaching practices include problem-based learning,  
7 cooperative work, case studies, flipped classroom, project-based teaching and service-  
8 learning (Moriña 2021).  
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### 16 17 18 19 **Limitations, strengths and future research**

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21 This paper provides an approach on how inclusive pedagogy is developed by faculty  
22 members who teach in Educational Sciences. One limitation of the study was to consider  
23 the participants as a single group, without taking into account the different areas of  
24 knowledge from which they came from, gender differences or the different types of  
25 disability of the students. These are all interesting issues to consider in future research, with  
26 the aim of making further progress in the knowledge of inclusive faculty practices in higher  
27 education.  
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37 **Despite these limitations, the study has identified strengths that deserve to be**  
38 **highlighted.** Firstly, the participating faculty were selected as inclusive faculty by  
39 university students with disabilities, which provides substantial guarantees for the results  
40 presented. Another strength of the study is related to its impact. The results provide  
41 examples of good practice on how inclusive pedagogy is developed in university  
42 classrooms, and, therefore, they contribute to the progress toward a more inclusive  
43 university education.  
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### 56 **Final considerations: Towards Genuine Inclusion at University**

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3 Inclusion in the university context requires an approach based on the ecological  
4 model, in which all the elements that influence the real inclusion of all students are taken into  
5 account. Changes are therefore needed at classroom, institutional and political levels.  
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10 This work allows us to draw conclusions with **transferability** mainly at the level of  
11 the classroom (microsystem), on how to practice inclusive pedagogy in university  
12 classrooms. Furthermore, the results obtained have clear implications for universities to  
13 continue on the path of inclusion.  
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19 One of the main conclusions drawn from this study is that in order to understand  
20 inclusive pedagogy it is necessary to **take into account its different dimensions and their**  
21 **interconnectedness**. Thus, a faculty member who wants to practice inclusive pedagogy must  
22 reflect on his or her beliefs, knowledge, subject design and actions.  
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28 Inclusive pedagogy, however, is not the sole responsibility of faculty members. The  
29 lack of training that faculty members have in the field of disability (types, needs, UDL, etc.)  
30 highlights the need for university policies (macro-system) to include ongoing training plans  
31 in this area. These training plans should be oriented towards awareness-raising and training.  
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39 And to make them effective, they must be accompanied by incentives for faculty members.

40 Finally, the data found have clear implications at the institutional level (exosystem).  
41 On the one hand, universities must articulate measures that guarantee compliance with these  
42 policies by making the necessary human, economic and material resources available to the  
43 university community in order to achieve the full inclusion of all students. On the other hand,  
44 it should be noted that the development of inclusive pedagogy can be extrapolated to other  
45 areas related to university life outside the classroom, such as professional internships,  
46 mobility programmes, programmes for the transition to and promotion of employment, etc.  
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3 This would contribute to universities welcoming all students, without exceptions,  
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5 with arms wide open.  
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