

Spanish Faculty Members Speak out: Barriers and Aids for Students with Disabilities at University

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Abstract

Through the voice of faculty members, this article analyses the barriers and aids that students with disabilities encounter at university. As part of the study, we conducted interviews with 119 faculty members from 10 Spanish universities. We then analysed the data using an inductive system of categories and codes. The results are presented in relation to two topics: *barriers* and *aids* to learning and participation. Some of the barriers identified included physical obstacles, faculty, peers, and a lack of resources and information; and some of the sources of aid and support were disability offices, peers, human and external resources, faculty and the university itself. The study shows how each faculty member's unique experience determines their view regarding potential barriers and aids for university students with disabilities. Indeed, throughout the article, it becomes clear that what are perceived by some as barriers are regarded by others as supports.

Keywords: Faculty members, Higher Education, Disability, Barriers, Aids, Spain

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Introduction

Universities have a responsibility to seriously rethink their policies and practices so as to ensure real inclusion and guarantee that everyone, without exception, can feel truly recognised and welcome, and can learn, participate and succeed (Lourens and Swart 2019). In the case of students with disabilities (we use the term students with disabilities instead of disabled students because we believe it to be more inclusive), higher education represents an important opportunity (Lipka, Forkosh, and Meer 2019). Obtaining a university degree may improve their job prospects, offer them important social benefits and help them overcome challenges and achieve more independence and a better quality of life (Järkestig et al. 2016; MacLeod et al. 2018).

In the specific case of Spain, just like in other international contexts, the number of students with disabilities is increasing (Fundación Universia 2018). Nevertheless, despite the existence of legislation designed to foster inclusion, encourage the setting up of disability support services in universities and ensure increased resources, many people with disabilities still have difficulty remaining at university long enough to successfully complete their studies (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2019).

Moreover, the transition to university can sometimes become a replica of the exclusion already experienced in previous stages of education (Ben-Nain et al. 2017), with students with disabilities having to invest more time and effort than their peers in establishing relationships with the environment, adapting to the demands of higher education and meeting academic requirements (Järkestig et al. 2016; Langørgen and Magnus 2018; Lipka et al. 2019). In fact, despite efforts to move towards more inclusive universities, learning spaces continue to make adaptations aimed only at a minority (Collins, Azmat, and Rentschler 2019). Moreover, students with disabilities may trust in their own capacity, but the institution itself often forces them to question

whether they are indeed valid and ‘deserving’ of reasonable adjustments (Langørgen and Magnus 2018).

Unless it is designed to be accessible to all, any institution, or indeed any space, can be ‘disabling’ or can render someone ‘disabled’. Faculty members can also become accomplices to this segregation if they do not opt for a ‘curriculum for all’. The ‘social model of disability’ (Oliver 1988) posits that disability is not an individual problem, but rather derives from the collective response of society (Gallagher, Connor, and Ferri 2014), and Barrie (2013) argues that an inclusive society will only be socially just when differences are accepted, valued and celebrated. Thus, disability originates from the social barriers that the environment creates in relation to the person (O’Byrne, Jagoe, and Lawler 2019). In short, disability is not intrinsic; rather, this identity is constructed from the oppressive visions and attitudes that others have had and still have about it (Cunnah 2015). For these reasons, universities have a responsibility to reduce stigmas and to rethink their future learning environments so as to ensure that there is room for everyone.

In this context, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Higher Education, which is based on the inclusive pedagogy approach, proposes that the curriculum should be designed so that everyone is able to access and participate in it (Waitoller and Thorius 2016; Yusof, Chan, Hillaluddin Ahmad, and Saad 2019). If the design does not incorporate the principles of Universal Design, some students may be excluded and others will be required to make an extra effort to adapt to the demands of the institution (Larkin, Nihill, and Devlin 2014).

In relation to research into barriers and aids (by *barriers* we mean those obstacles to inclusion that hamper or limit learning, belonging and active participation, under equal conditions, during educational processes; by *aids*, we mean those elements

of the educational context which foster students' social and educational inclusion in the classroom), many international studies have analysed, through the voices of students with disabilities themselves, the barriers (Moriña & Perera, 2018; Lourens and Swartz 2019; Martins, Borges, and Gonçalves 2018; Vlachou and Papananou 2018) and aids (Bunbury 2018; Garrison-Wade 2012; Lombardi, Murray, and Kowitt 2016; Stein 2014) identified in the university environment. The findings indicate that students with disabilities frequently encounter a diverse range of barriers in this context, with Mullins and Preyde (2013) arguing that their specific type depends on the individual nature of the impairment. Nevertheless, these authors agree with Hong (2015) and Vlachou and Papananou (2018) in that the most striking are the social barriers generated by negative perceptions of disability among peers and faculty. According to Lane (2017), students with disabilities have restricted social relationships, a circumstance which in turn leads to a greater risk of failure and dropout. Bunbury (2018), Martins et al. (2018), Osborne (2019) and Sakiz and Saricali (2018) add that many barriers are also erected by faculty members as a result of their lack of knowledge about, limited training in and poor sensitivity to disability, and their unwillingness to provide resources and make reasonable adjustments in their subject and its evaluation.

Ambati and Ambati (2013), Babic and Dowling (2015), and Sakiz and Saricali (2018) highlight the physical and architectural barriers generated by the exclusionary organisation of the education system and limited access to resources and institutional support. Other authors have also pointed out the excessive bureaucracy and the lack of information that students have about their rights and the support services which are available at university (Hong 2015; Strnadová, Hájková, and Květoňová 2015).

In short, although, as Lourens and Swartz (2019) and Sakiz and Saricali (2018) state, there are still multiple barriers to be overcome before we can start talking about

the full inclusion of students with disabilities at university, there are also studies that point to a series of aids or supports identified by this student body in their university pathways, one of the main ones being peers (Agarwal, Calbo, and Kumar 2014; Babic and Dowling 2015). According to students with disabilities, this support, which is both practical and emotional in nature, is the most positive aspect of their academic experience (Vlachou and Papananou 2018). Some findings even indicate that it was precisely this support that prevented some students from dropping out and helped them achieve academic success, since their peers did not limit themselves to just lending class notes, etc., but rather acted as staunch defenders of their rights (Lombardi, et al. 2016; Strnadová et al. 2015).

Faculty can also be a help. In particular, the kind of faculty member who most helps students succeed is characterised by being a loving and flexible professional (Couzens et al. 2015). In this sense, Stein (2014) adds that these faculty members not only employ effective teaching methods, but are also understanding and empathic. They reply to emails, care about providing help and know about disabilities. Bunbury (2018) concludes that faculty members who engage in inclusive curriculum design benefit all students.

Students with disabilities themselves can also be a support. Strnadová et al. (2015) stress that their resilience, optimism and planning during their time at university are the ingredients required for them to complete their studies. Likewise, Babic and Dowling (2015), Couzens et al. (2015) and Lombardi et al. (2016) highlight other supports, such as the involvement and help of the family.

At an institutional level, Getzel (2008) points out that students with disabilities benefit most from those faculties that have a greater awareness and knowledge of educational needs and Universal Design for Learning. Other studies have identified

disability support staff, coordination between formal national government systems, and financial support such as education and transport scholarships as facilitators for students with disabilities (Babic and Dowling 2015; Strnadová et al. 2015).

However, although there are many studies focusing on students with disabilities, few have sought to analyse the barriers and aids from the perspective of academics, and those which have generally tend to explore their knowledge of legal issues and their willingness to make reasonable adjustments (Cook, Rumril, and Tankersley 2009), teaching attitudes towards disability and inclusive practices (Lombardi et al. 2016), past experiences with disability and training in inclusive education and disability (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2019; Love et al. 2015) or UDL (Davies, Schelly, and Spooner 2013).

In order to fill the gap identified in the literature regarding what barriers and aids faculty members perceive when students with disabilities study at university, in this paper we aim to answer the following research questions: 1) What obstacles to learning and participation do students face at university?; and 2) What facilitators are available to foster their educational inclusion?

Method

Participants

The results presented here form part of a broader research project entitled “Inclusive Pedagogy at the University: Faculty Narratives” (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of Spain) which analyses the beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions of faculty who practice inclusive pedagogy. Other results of this study can be consulted in Moriña (2019a) or Carballo, Cotán, and Spínola (2019).

In this study, we explore only the results pertaining to knowledge. To guarantee the suitability of the sample, participating faculty members were nominated exclusively

by their students with disabilities. The disability offices that participated in the study sent out the project information to students with disabilities from all areas of knowledge and requested their voluntary collaboration to nominate faculty who, from their point of view, engaged in inclusive pedagogy.

A total of 119 faculty members from 10 Spanish universities participated in this research project. Of these, 24 were academics from the area of Arts and Humanities (20.16%) (Participants P1 to P24), 14 were from Engineering and Sciences (11.76%) (P25 to P38), 16 from Health Sciences (13.44%) (P39 to 54), 25 from Social and Legal Sciences (21, 01%) (P55 to P79), and 40 from Education Sciences (33.61%) (P80 to P119). As regards gender, 58.33% were men and 41.66% were women. The majority were aged between 36 and 60, although seven were under 35 years old (7.78%) and four were over 60 years old (4.42%). Most had over ten years' experience (68.35%), with only six (6.25%) having less than five years' and 24 having between five and ten (25.4%). All participants had experience in responding to the needs arising from disability. Of these, sensory (visual and hearing) disabilities were the most frequent (40.97%), followed by physical (23.68%), mental (the term *mental* covers a wide range of conditions -anxiety, autism spectrum disorder, depression and bipolar disorder, among others- included in the DSM-5, American Psychiatric Association 2013) (18.79%), poor health (10.52%) and learning disabilities (6.01%).

The context of Spanish universities

The participants in this study were faculty members from ten public universities. In accordance with that established within the European Higher Education Area, official university degrees are divided into three cycles: undergraduate (3 or 4 years), Master's (1 or 2 years) and Doctorate (3 to 5 years).

In Spain, all universities have disability offices, and 21,435 students with disabilities are currently enrolled on degree courses (Fundación Universia 2018). The disability offices ensure that students with disabilities obtain the resources they need for their learning process and advise academic staff on the reasonable adjustments required in certain cases.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

Interviews comprised two open-ended questions: 1) What barriers do you think students with disabilities encounter when they go to university? and 2) What supports are available to students with disabilities when they go to university?

Most of the interviews were held face-to-face (n=89). However, 18 participants conducted their interviews via Skype and 12 over the telephone, due to the impossibility of attending in person. All interviews were audio recorded and participants gave their written consent to both the recording and the use of the data collected for research purposes. The study also met the ethical requirements established by the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness.

Data Analysis

We transcribed the interviews and used a qualitative data analysis technique involving an inductive system of categories and codes to give meaning to the information collected (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). Two categories were established: barriers and aids. The ‘barriers’ category comprised nine codes: architectural barriers, faculty, peers, bureaucracy, information, human resources, material resources, institution, and society. The ‘aids’ category encompassed 11 codes: disability support service, peers, faculty, administrative staff, family, students with disabilities, human resources in the classroom, material resources, resources outside the university, scholarships, and institution.

Results

Barriers to Learning and Participation

The faculty members interviewed identified multiple barriers that students with disabilities encountered at university. However, for the majority of interviewees from the different areas of knowledge, the most significant barriers were physical, although they also pointed out that they might depend on the specific type of impairment in question. They stated that many common spaces in the faculty building, such as bathrooms, corridors and offices, were not accessible, since they had been designed without taking diversity into account, just as so often happens in society in general. Thus, they highlighted how difficult it was for these students to learn in an institution in which they found it hard to handle doors, use toilets and, above all, access classrooms. They remarked that they did not think students with disabilities felt represented in the classroom because they sometimes did not even have a place to sit as their peers did, since the tables and chairs were bolted to the floor, preventing movement and participation.

I remember that in the case of one student with a physical disability, he had to sit at a separate table, in a corner. That's not integration. (Participant 58, Social and Legal Sciences)

Many participants said they believed that academic staff might also represent an obstacle for students with disabilities. They remarked that faculty could be either an obstacle or a source of support, depending on each student's specific experience. When talking about faculty as a barrier, they highlighted how they sometimes demonstrated a lack of awareness, understanding and training. They also underscored their resistance to change, their reluctance to deal with new situations and their unwillingness to seek out or use new methodologies that would truly enable them to adapt to different needs.

They said they believed that having students with disabilities in the classroom forced faculty to rethink their teaching practice and therefore constituted an additional workload. This was often not welcomed by them, and was perceived as a problem or a threat to the status quo of existing class dynamics.

A priori, some faculty members see these students as constituting extra work, and reject them outright. So, students feel uncomfortable in the classroom, uncomfortable during evaluations, and uncomfortable doing work in a pre-established, automatic manner. (Participant 107, Education)

In relation to faculty members themselves, participants also clearly highlighted how their prejudices and mental images regarding disability were the most difficult walls to tear down. They pointed out that not believing or trusting in students' abilities may result in their unfair and inhuman treatment, thereby limiting their dignity and their right to decide and to receive a quality education.

Faculty members themselves can sometimes be barriers, because they may have said something unpleasant to a student, such as 'don't waste your time here because you'll never become a physiotherapist'. (Participant 44, Health Sciences)

The rigid design of subjects and curricula was identified as another obstacle. Participants said that, at university and for both students with and without disabilities, planning was rigid, students' individual pace of learning was not respected, their interests were not valued and their different ways of thinking, feeling and acting were not taken into account.

The curriculum isn't adapted to the needs of the students. In fact, I don't think it's adapted to even those who don't have a disability. (Participant 2, Arts and Humanities)

Therefore, as some participants argued in relation to this idea, it is not the student who has a disability, but rather the system. Thus, the university itself as an organisation was identified as yet another barrier for students with disabilities, since the way in which it was structured did not allow faculty to work as they would perhaps like, and nor did it enable students to participate on an equal footing.

The subjects are extremely dense. If students without disabilities and faculty are overwhelmed by that lack of time and that situation, then how do you think a person who needs more time feels? I believe that the education system itself is 'disabling'. (Participant 48, Health Sciences)

A few participants went beyond the institution itself to claim that the most important obstacle for this student body was society's 'medical' view of disability. They stated that disability was not a biological phenomenon, but rather (fundamentally) a mental and social-cultural one. In other words, they argued that disability was the outcome of the relationships established by students with all the people in their environment (family, peers and faculty).

Likewise, in relation to the university as an institution, several participants added that bureaucracy was one more impediment encountered by students with disabilities when requesting help of any kind. They remarked on the tiresome procedures that students were forced to follow in order to obtain certain resources, and commented that access to these resources should not be delayed, but rather, they should be available to all right from the beginning of the course.

Another barrier identified by participants was classmates. Real cooperation and the full inclusion of students with disabilities have not yet been achieved in university classrooms. Interviewees highlighted the lack of empathy shown by peers and their rejection of students with disabilities, particularly during group work. This, they

explained, resulted in students with disabilities developing a negative self-concept and being reluctant to draw attention to their disability and ask for the help they need in order to succeed in their studies.

Their classmates doubt that what you are doing for them is simply adapting the course so everyone starts from the same level. They think you are giving them a free pass. So, of course, this can become a barrier for students with disabilities, who sometimes don't ask for what they need in order to start from the same baseline because they don't want their classmates to think they're taking shortcuts. (Participant 44, Health Sciences)

Some participants also identified lack of resources as a barrier. Although material resources were hardly mentioned at all, interviewees did highlight the lack of human resources in the classroom. Some described different cases in which it was necessary to have human support in the classroom because one person alone could not adequately meet all students' specific needs.

Another thing, there are those who say: 'I need to go to the toilet and I need someone to help me'. Now, this is a barrier because the faculty member may not have planned for this eventuality. (Participant 66, Social and Legal Sciences)

A few participants said that the greatest difficulty experienced by students with disabilities at university was a lack of information and advice (both for themselves and for faculty) about the procedures for requesting help.

There is a lack of knowledge among students regarding what rights they have and what possibilities are available to them. And, above all, there is a lack of knowledge among university staff, not only about the needs of students with disabilities, but also about their very existence. (Participant 37, Sciences and Engineering)

Indeed, one participant in the study even confessed that he could not answer the question about what barriers a student with a disability might encounter in the university context with any degree of certainty. Finally, there were also exceptional cases such as some interviewees who failed to see any barriers at university for students with disabilities. According to these participants, the university environment was fully accessible and open to providing all necessary actions and support.

Aids to Learning and Participation

Participants not only described barriers, they also identified aids that contributed to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Although the facilitators which enabled students with disabilities to stay at university were varied, all participants highlighted the disability service. In general, this service was viewed as essential because it accompanied students throughout their university career and offered them specific information according to their individual needs. Participants explained how the service contacted faculty to provide them with guidelines for action in each case, thereby enabling them to explore and receive training in strategies designed to respond to diversity, provide the required resources and make reasonable adjustments in their subject.

I am constantly being offered advice by the disability service. I think one year I had a question and I was treated very well. The advice I received was quite good. (Participant 46, Health Sciences)

The second aid identified for students with disabilities was their classmates. This was mentioned by most of the faculty participating in the study, who emphasised, for example, their sensitivity, empathy and solidarity, evident in the fact that they lent students with disabilities their class notes, helped them move around and stayed close to them. Participants specifically pointed out that sometimes, students with disabilities felt

more comfortable and accepted in small groups, although they also acknowledged how the strength of the whole class and an unprejudiced attitude by peers in the classroom made this student body more resilient, while at the same time fostering their progress.

Her peers see her as just another student, just another person. They don't discriminate against her because of her mental condition. (Participant 35, Sciences and Engineering)

The third aid identified by the majority of participants was resources, especially human resources. The most commonly-mentioned ones were those managed at an institutional level, such as the availability of sign language interpreters or student collaborators working on behalf of the disability service. All these supports were seen by participants as essential elements in their daily practice, because they made their job easier, helping them feel satisfied with their work and enabling them to adapt and respond to the needs of their students. Likewise, several faculty members also mentioned material resources as a means of fostering the learning process of students with disabilities. Specifically, they mentioned radio equipment, self-copying notebooks or certain applications that allowed subtitles and audio descriptions to be entered from a computer, thereby rendering classroom sessions truly accessible.

Also in relation to resources, some participants highlighted those external to the university, such as organisations, associations and volunteers. Communication and coordination between these resources and the university were seen as essential to ensuring that help would be immediate and actually used by the students.

This girl came in and she had difficulties. She needed a magnifying glass. Although the magnifying glass itself was provided by the ONCE (Spanish National Blind People's Organisation), the process was managed very quickly and efficiently from here. (Participant 79, Legal and Social Science)

The fourth aid or support mentioned by many participants was faculty. Interviewees explained that faculty members who most helped students with disabilities to achieve their academic goals were characterised by having a strong social will and commitment, as well as a high degree of sensitivity towards and awareness of disability and the purpose of education. Moreover, they were innately human people, since they tutored and established good relationships with both students and the institution. They provided all students with lecture notes in advance, used different material formats, made sure their slideshows and presentations were accessible, used a variety of technological resources and applications to eliminate didactic barriers and, above all, made methodologies more flexible and adapted exams.

If students have been able to stay on at university, I think it was often because they were lucky enough to have a faculty member who helped them, who encouraged them to overcome difficulties. (Participant 40, Health Science)

At an institutional level, participants said they thought that universities were becoming increasingly sensitive to disabilities and the importance of treating everyone who wants to study equally. They also considered the work carried out by administrative staff to be helpful, particularly when they treated students with disabilities with friendliness and understanding during bureaucratic procedures.

Some participants also identified the scholarships for which students could apply as another possible source of help and support, referring not so much to economic scholarships as to those that directly offered additional human resources. Interviewees described these as essential to fulfilling students' needs while at the same time enabling them to enjoy the same opportunities and the same rights as their classmates during their time at university.

Conclusions and Discussion

One conclusion we can draw from this study is that each faculty member's unique experience determines their view of the barriers and aids encountered by students with disabilities at university. Indeed, throughout the paper, it becomes clear that what are perceived by some as barriers are regarded by others as supports. This allows us to delve deeper into the key elements that need to be addressed in the university sphere to ensure the full participation of all students.

In relation to barriers, participants highlighted the fact that they depend on the type of impairment in question (Mullins and Preyde 2013), although physical and architectural barriers were mentioned as being the most visible and common ones. In the participants' view, the physical organisation of the university is not designed for all students, but only for a minority. This contradicts the findings of most studies carried out with students with disabilities (Moriña & Perera, 2018; Lourens and Swartz 2019; Vlachou and Papananou 2018), which highlight academic staff as the main obstacle, with architectural barriers, while being recognised, being scarcely mentioned at all. However, while it is also true that Ambati and Ambati (2013), Babic and Dowling, (2015), and Sakiz and Saricali (2018) question university facilities for people with disabilities, our study adds a new perspective and reveals that the design of these spaces not only limits the opportunities and rights of people with disabilities, but also prevents any student in the classroom from receiving a quality education.

Faculty was the second most commonly-mentioned barrier, with students with disabilities having to overcome multiple obstacles due to university staff's lack of awareness and training. Faculty members with prejudices about disability tend to establish exclusionary itineraries. Similarly, if they plan their syllabus without listening to the needs of their class and teach their subject using rigid methodologies, it will be difficult for students with disabilities to feel like just another member of the group and

be successful in their academic endeavours. The contributions made by Bunbury (2018), Hong (2015), Kendall (2016), Martins et al. (2018) and Vlachou and Papananou (2018) support this idea. The participants in our study also emphasised the harmful effects of negative attitudes toward disability, i.e., viewing the student as someone who is going to hinder sessions, and imposing limits without taking the time to discover each person's talents.

Universities themselves can also be barriers, since, in general, faculty policies and cultures do not tend to rethink universal accessibility. Participants particularly emphasised bureaucracy, owing to the fact that the obstacles students with disabilities must overcome in order to receive the resources or support for which they are eligible, or which they need, are often excessive. The procedures are slow, the services are not competent or efficient and neither the student nor the rest of the university community are informed or receive information about their rights. These results are consistent with the conclusions drawn by Hong (2015), Lane (2017) and Strnadová, et al. (2015).

In relation to universities, another barrier worth highlighting is the rigidity of certain syllabuses and curricula; for example, the requirements of some study programmes which all students must complete successfully in order to graduate (such as programmes which require students to study or complete an internship abroad). These obligatory requirements may constitute a barrier for some students with disabilities (particularly when the foreign placements or universities are not accessible and are not prepared for inclusion). Consequently, each university and faculty should take steps to guarantee that every student, regardless of whether or not they have a disability, is able to fulfil these basic, non-negotiable requirements under adequate conditions that ensure their learning and participation.

Another conclusion worth underscoring is that disability is often interpreted in accordance with the medical model. This prompts us to think about how, at university, unlike in other previous educational stages, students have to personally disclose their condition by presenting an official proof-of-disability document in order to access the reasonable adjustments they require. This process is a painful one for students, as we indeed concluded in a previous study (Moriña & Perera, 2018). Consequently, the students often prefer to do without the aids to which they are legally entitled in order to enjoy a more 'normal' university experience and avoid the stigma attached to disability. This is particularly common among those with invisible conditions, such as, for example, learning difficulties and mental disabilities (Grimes et al. 2019). In the specific case of learning difficulties, in Spain as in other countries, they represent a challenge for universities and there is currently much debate about the suitability and ability of students with dyslexia at both university and once they graduate into professional practice.

This mostly occurs in those university contexts in which the predominant model of disability is the medical one and where attitudes towards disability are negative. Universities should therefore design awareness-raising campaigns within the university community to combat these prejudices and act proactively rather than reactively. In addition, if universities were to adopt Universal Design for Learning, then students would no longer be forced to make their disability visible and the need for disclosure might disappear (Burgstahler 2013). Curricula would be adapted in advance to all students' needs and would offer multiple forms of expression (presentation of information in an accessible way by combining, for example, lectures, subtitled videos, concept maps, written materials or groups learning together), representation (different options for expressing knowledge, such as presentations, role playing, solving problems

or cases, or projects) and involvement (motivation of students in different ways, such as basing themselves on their previous knowledge, giving feedback, or different self-assessment strategies) (CAST 2018).

Likewise, it is possible that society may be responsible for the conception that people in general have developed about disability, which is mainly linked to the deficit model (Oliver 1988). O'Byrne et al. (2019) and Gallagher et al. (2014) explain how disability originates from the relationships people have with the environment around them. In our study, this idea is evident on many occasions, which suggests that all universities should train all their students in disability and inclusive education right from the beginning of the degree course. However, students should not be the only ones to receive such training; rather, it should be targeted at the entire university community.

Classmates' unwillingness to carry out group work with students with disabilities, their lack of empathy and their perception of disability creates an environment that, rather than being welcoming, generates feelings of marginalisation and suffering. Studies that give voice to students with disabilities have reached the same conclusion, highlighting peer rejection as the most painful university experience (Ben-Nain, et al. 2017; Lane 2017; Vlachou and Papananou 2018). In this sense, faculty should play a decisive role, striving to create groups that are more cohesive, sensitive and tolerant of differences.

Lack of resources has often been used as an excuse to justify educational exclusion. However, in this study, participants highlighted how the absence of human resources in the classroom can hamper the learning and participation of students with disabilities. Authors such as Hong (2015) and Sakiz and Saricali (2018) have previously alluded to the scarcity of resources, but in our case the focus is on human aid (translators, sign language interpreters, or collaborating students). Although this type of

support is primarily intended for students with disabilities, the faculty participating in our study revealed how these elements are also essential to their own work, enabling them to feel satisfied with their performance as professionals.

In terms of aids and support, faculty are aware of the existence of support services and acknowledge also that scholarships help prevent students with disabilities from dropping out of university. These findings are consistent with those reported by Babic and Dowling (2015) and Strnadová et al. (2015), although they contradict that observed by Hong (2015) and Lane (2017), who argue that such aids are null and that the functioning of the support services is inadequate. The participants in our study acknowledged the work carried out by these services, stating that they offer advice and action guidelines regarding how to respond to diversity.

Peers constitute another aid that enables the presence, participation, well-being, success and emancipation of students with disabilities at university (Babic and Dowling 2015; Lombardi, et al. 2016; Strnadová et al. 2015; Vlachou and Papananou 2018). All the injustices this student body may experience because of their impairment can be mitigated by the academic, physical and emotional support of their classmates. Again, both faculty and the institution as a whole must take action to raise awareness and fight for the rights of people with disabilities.

Human resources in the classroom are another source of support. Moreover, there are also other aids external to the Spanish university, such as associations and volunteers, which have not hitherto been mentioned in any studies in connection with students with disabilities. Although the proposals made by Babic and Dowling (2015) and Strnadová et al. (2015) included coordination between agencies and universities, in our case this is reflected through the human support which has to be present in the classroom in order to ensure that sessions are truly accessible.

Finally, participants stated that faculty who are involved in tutoring, establish relationships with their students, are aware of the adjustments required in evaluations, and use effective and diverse resources and methodologies, constitute another source of help for students with disabilities. This has been amply demonstrated in many studies seeking to give voice to the student body (Bunbury 2018; Garrison-Wade 2012; Stein 2014; Vlachou and Papananou 2018). In our study, participants highlighted the fact that these faculty members' attitude and willingness to help, their efforts to be friendly and accessible and their tireless struggle against both social inequalities and those generated by the education system.

In sum, by giving voice to faculty members, this study identifies some barriers which make it harder for students with disabilities to learn, participate and successfully complete their university studies. This suggests that there is still a long way to go before universities can be said to be designed for everyone (Lourens and Swartz 2019; Sakiz and Saricali 2018). These same obstacles can disappear, or even become aids, providing a concerted effort is made to provide training designed to increase the teaching competence of faculty members. Such training should be both general (on Universal Design for Learning and teaching and affective strategies designed to ensure the inclusion of all students) and specific (on types of disability and the main needs stemming from them). The training should be also be officially recognised by universities, so that faculty see it as something which will help their professional career, thereby stimulating participation. A good moment for providing this training would be during the first few years, when faculty members are still new to their jobs. During this stage, we believe that courses should be obligatory, since otherwise only those faculty members most sensitive to the issue will choose to attend, rather than those who most need it, which is what is happening currently (Moriña 2019b). In addition to training, it

is also important to raise the collective awareness of what exactly we mean by disability (Getzel 2008): Who or what is disabled, the student or the system? What kind of interaction and opportunities exist between students and the people around them? And what resources are made available to students?

The voices of the participants in our study coincide with the main research findings supporting the application of UDL in Higher Education (Davies et al. 2013; Redpath et al. 2013; Waitoller and Thorius 2016). The application of UDL, which aims to adapt the curriculum to all students, would help eliminate the barriers constituted by inflexible curricula, which make it harder for students to acquire meaningful learning. Everyone, with and without disabilities, has the right to receive an education appropriate to their needs. It is not a question of doing favours for minority groups, but rather one of justice and respect for the different forms of expression, representation and involvement of each individual who decides to study a degree.

It is time to rethink universities and give them back their human, democratic and social sensibilities. The aids we identify in this study may help transform classrooms and universities, but as long as barriers continue to exist for coexistence, learning and participation, they will never truly be inclusive. The first step towards achieving this goal is to change the system, i.e., to break down the physical barriers that continue to constitute an impediment to everyone feeling represented and able to participate in the space in which they receive their education. This requires not only a change in mindset (moving from the medical to the social model of disability), but also a transformation of teaching practices. And here, the lifelong learning of both faculty members and all those who make up the university community is essential. In this context, sensitizing, informing and training faculty members to incorporate UDL and assistive technologies into their course syllabi can be effective strategies so that they can contribute to

removing barriers to learning and participation for students with disabilities. These actions may not only benefit these students, but the entire student body.

Limitations and Further Research

Much time and dedication were required to recruit participants. The decision to contact faculty members who practice inclusive pedagogy in different parts of Spain meant accepting that the process would be slow and that we would have to adapt to the dates that were most convenient to potential participants. However, we believe the approach adopted was appropriate, since this broader view enables the voices of different areas of knowledge to be heard, thereby making a richer contribution to existing scientific literature. Another limitation is that we did not analyse the data separately for each university. However, this was not the purpose of the study, and nor were any significant data found to justify such an analysis.

Future research may wish to contact faculty who practice inclusive pedagogy at an international level, or to include other socialising agents in the analysis. For example, researchers could start by selecting two or three of the most significant participants from each area of knowledge and then organising discussion groups with the aim of gaining greater insight into the barriers and aids that have been identified here, as well as others that have yet to emerge. These meetings could also include students with disabilities, their families and peers, disability services and even administrative staff.

However, despite the limitations described and the need for further research, we believe that our study is novel and fills a gap in the line of research on higher education and disability. Listening to the voices of faculty members about the barriers and aids encountered by university students with disabilities can help mobilize universities to become increasingly inclusive and proactive rather than reactive.

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