How to become an inclusive teacher? Advice from Spanish educators involved in Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Higher Education

Abstract

Through the voices of 100 Spanish teachers from Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Higher Education who carry out inclusive practices, this study explores the recommendations of these professionals for other colleagues to be inclusive. We conducted a qualitative multicase study using semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed through an inductive category and coding system. The findings are presented based on four topics: teacher planning, methodologies, ethical and emotional competences, and training. The results show similarities and differences between the guidelines given at different educational levels. This research provides practical lessons and it highlights that it is possible to be inclusive at any educational stage.

Keywords: Inclusive education; advice; teachers; qualitative research; Spain.

Introduction

Inclusive quality education for everyone and lifelong learning are universal human rights (UNESCO 2015). Well-known authors in this field have also revealed that inclusion is a moral responsibility that involves a never-ending process of responding to diversity by recognising and removing barriers to learning and participation (Ainscow 2016; Arnaiz, De Haro, and Maldonado 2019). In fact, in many cases, these barriers are linked to teacher attitude, information and quality of training (Forlin 2012; Opoku et al. 2021).

In this sense, the European Agency for Special Needs Education (2012) already proposed encouraging guidelines on real inclusive profiling around a framework of values and competences: positive valuing of student diversity (conception of inclusive education and learner differences), supporting all students (promoting academic, practical, social and emotional learning; effective teaching approaches in heterogeneous classes), teamwork (families and a wide range of education stakeholders) and professional and personal development (reflection of practice, pre-service training to underpin ongoing training). This last value of own lifelong learning underpins our study, even if a teacher is already inclusive in his or her profession, he or she will never be convinced and will always strive to find ways to do it better.

The literature also contains studies that have already attempted to explore the profiles of teachers' concerns about inclusive education, as well as their competences and attitudes (Oonk et al. 2020; Özgür and Çatal 2022). Many studies in this vein can be found, either with student teachers as participants (Arnaiz, De Haro, and Maldonado 2019; Arvelo-Rosales and De la Rosa, 2021; Bannister-Tyrrell et al. 2018), with a focus on students with special needs (Gavish 2017; Majoko 2019; Paju et al. 2022) or mostly quantitative studies (Schwab, Resch and Alnahdi 2021).

Regarding previous studies, Gavish (2017) carried out an investigation at the Primary and Secondary Education, finding that the most inclusive profile was one that perceived inclusion as a core value in the life of the school and collaborated with other teachers in the search for differentiated instructional methods. Similar ideas are reported in the study by Paju et al. (2022), who showed that coordination, cooperation and reflective communication are modes of collaborative action for better teaching. This idea was highlighted in primary education by Sirem and Catal (2022), who pointed out the importance of establishing support with all stakeholders, and Oonk (2019), who argued, at the university stage, the competence of stimulating a school-university collaborative learning attitude as a key to inclusive education.

Meanwhile, Arvelo-Rosales and De la Rosa (2021) emphasised the competence of on-going professional development, while Sirem and Catal (2022) stressed teachers' positive self-awareness and fostering students' social-emotional skills.

Even over the years, inclusion of all learners in mainstream classrooms remains one of the most relevant challenges for novice teachers as well as for more experienced teachers (Bannister-Tyrrell et al. 2018). Teacher competence in inclusive education is still a controversial topic filled with external excuses and associated with specific groups (Kakhuta 2020). Therefore, there is an urgent need to reach an agreement on meanings about inclusion and encourage teachers to be change agents willing to improve from within, rather than to blame the surrounding environment for excluding situations (Van der Heijden et al. 2015).

Three concepts should be distinguished when talking about teachers who carry out inclusive practices: inclusive education, inclusive practices and inclusive pedagogy (Author, 2020). Inclusive education is a broad concept that refers to efforts to reduce exclusion in policies, cultures and practices. Inclusive practice refers to teaching

practices that promote the learning and participation of all students. However, inclusive pedagogy (i.e., the focus of this article) considers that all decisions made are determined not only by practices, but also by knowledge, values and beliefs in relation to learners and the nature of teaching and learning.

In this line, Florian (2014) clarified that a teacher who carries out an inclusive pedagogy will look for ways to create learning environments that are sufficiently rich and diverse in opportunities to allow all learners to participate meaningfully. Shulman (2004) spoke about this a long time before, making it clear that educators must attain three apprenticeships: 1) knowledge and a theoretical basis of the profession, 2) technical and practical skills, and 3) ethical and moral dimensions.

From this approach to inclusive pedagogy, studies conducted in Higher education (HE), such as Bain (2004), Lubicz-Nawrocka and Buntin (2019) and Author et al. (2022), offer some clues about the ideal teacher profile from a broad perspective, pointing to the need for both personal and professional skills: responsibility, reflection on practice, supportive relationship, respect and affection for students, use of student-centred teaching approaches, teaching with real and practical examples, careful planning, and passion and enthusiasm for the profession. These are further corroborated by the study of Van der Heijden et al. (2015), who indicated that the defining characteristics of teachers as change agents are: lifelong learning (being eager to learn and reflective), mastery (giving guidance, being approachable, positive, committed, confident and self-assured), entrepreneurship (being innovative and feeling responsible) and collaboration (being collegial).

Majoko (2019), while referring to Special Needs Education Teachers, incorporates the framework of inclusive pedagogy in his study, uncovering that the main competence areas are related to Differentiated Instruction (DI), needs screening,

classroom management and collaboration. Kayini et al. (2016), while carrying out a quantitative study, found that the competences considered most important for inclusion by teachers were adapting materials and training, while family support and collaboration were the least valued. We reinforce that DI is considered elemental to teaching effectively in classrooms with increasingly diverse and complex student populations (Santangelo and Tomlinson 2012). Therefore, other critical competencies for being inclusive are associated with designing lessons proactively, thereby allowing the different forms of expression, representation and involvement of all learners to be visible, so as to ensure that they feel important and recognised in the group (CAST 2018).

Briefly, we have not found studies in the literature that provide recommendations by teachers who carry out inclusive practices (in the broad sense) at all educational levels with a qualitative approach. This gap in the literature leads us to listen to teachers' voices, understand their narratives and give tips to encourage others to follow their lessons. These insights will be useful for pre-service training to develop coherent training, but also for teacher training centres to promote changes in their training.

For this purpose, we wonder: What recommendations do teachers give to ensure that the planning of their subjects is inclusive? Which teaching methodologies promote inclusive education? What ethical and emotional competences should a teacher who carries out inclusive practices have? What should teacher training be like in order to move toward inclusive education?

Method

This study is part of a wider research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain. Specifically, it belongs to the first phase of a doctoral thesis that explores, analyses and aims to understand the beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions of Spanish Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and HE teachers (faculty members who train student teachers) who carry out an inclusive pedagogy.

Through a qualitative multi-case study (Stake 2006), we aimed to explore and describe what recommendations are given by the teachers to other colleagues in order to promote the inclusion of all students.

Spanish educational context

The Spanish education system is structured in five levels: Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, HE and Non-University Level technical/vocational training (languages, sports, artistic, religious and military). Table 1 shows a summary of the Spanish Education System according to stage, type of education, age and educational setting.

Table 1. Spanish Education System

Stage	Type	Age	Setting
Early Childhood Education	Non-compulsory	0 to 3 years 3 to 6 years	Nursery schools Kindergartens
Primary Education	Compulsory	6 to 12 years	Primary schools
Secondary Education	Compulsory	12 to 16 years	
	Optional	16 to 18 years (Baccalaureate, students who want to pursue a university degree)	Secondary schools
Higher Education	Optional	18 years of age and older (vocational training, professional plastic arts and design education, sports education, higher artistic education and university).	Sixth Form College and vocational training centres
	Optional	Spanish universities are divided into three levels: Undergraduate studies (4 years), Master's degree (1 or 2 years) and Doctorate (3-5 years).	Universities

Regarding inclusive education and educational Spanish national policies, Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which amends Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education, states that the education system must be challenging, guarantee equal opportunities and ensure the possibility for each student to develop their full potential throughout their lives. Organic Law 4/2007, on universities, also establishes that the principles of equal opportunities must be guaranteed and that university infrastructures and facilities must be accessible to all.

Recruitment and participants

The sample of participants consisted of a total of 100 teachers from four educational levels: 25 preschool teachers, 25 primary school teachers, 25 secondary school teachers, and 25 faculty members. The latter taught at the Faculty of Education to student teachers.

The participants were recruited by convenience, intentional and accessibility sampling. Seven criteria were used to select the participants: 1) teachers who carry out an inclusive practice, 2) teachers from the province of Seville, 3) age diversity, 4) gender diversity, 5) diversity of years of teaching experience, 6) availability in participation and time, and 7) willingness and desire to talk about their personal and professional trajectory.

For the Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education stages, face-to-face meetings and virtual exchanges were held with training consultants of three Spanish teacher training centres, who recommended first-hand contacts of teachers who carry out inclusive practices. Then, the potential participants were contacted via phone call and/or e-mail to present the study to them and agree on dates for the interviews. In addition, the non-probability "snowball" sampling technique (Cohen, Manion and

Morrison 2000) was used to identify colleagues recommended by the first participants in the three stages previously mentioned.

Faculty members were selected based on face-to-face meetings and e-mails with university students. These students were studying the last year of the Degree in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education of the Inclusive Education Speciality. They nominated teachers they knew and considered inclusive for having been relevant throughout their university career. Recent students graduated from these degrees also nominated faculty members who had contributed to the learning, participation, and success of all students. We sent a letter of introduction to all participating lecturers via email in order to make contact and set up interview dates.

To ensure that the participants were truly inclusive at all four levels, training consultants from the teaching training centres, teachers initially interviewed and university students had access to a list with several characteristics required to be matched by the recommended professionals. To ensure the quality of the recruitment and try to reduce selector bias, the researchers clarified to them the broad concept of diversity and the profile of a teacher who carries out inclusive practices. For the pre-university stages, this meant that support teachers were continually rejected from the sample. In the case of the university stage, a list was created, which ordered the most frequently nominated faculty members with justification for their choice.

This profile was drawn up on the basis of the inclusive teacher profile (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012), "what the best faculty members do" (Bain 2004) and the characteristics of an ideal inclusive faculty member proposed by Moriña, Cortés-Vega and Molina (2015). The characteristics that appear in the three studies helped to synthesise all of them. All the characteristics that appeared in the three studies were read, starting by highlighting those that were common. Whenever

new content appeared, it was added to the list. Finally, all the criteria obtained were taken into account to select the participants: Gets everyone to participate in class, trusts everyone's abilities and success, he/she is sensitive and close to all students, the methodologies he/she uses are active, cares about the well-being of his/her students, values and takes into account different opinions and different interests, makes the necessary adjustments in his/her planning, motivates to ensure that students enjoy and get involved, listens to all student voices, creates a good climate and promotes social interactions in the classroom, makes it possible for everyone to feel comfortable and important, is open to any type of proposal and improvement and establishes supportive and collaborative links with the educational/university community.

Most of the interviews were face-to-face, but due to personal situations of the participants and the supervening situation of the pandemic, some of them had to be adjusted to the telephone and virtual modality (n= 21). The interviews with the participants had an average duration of 2 hours, although there were others that extended up to 6 or even 11 total hours in some cases.

The Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education teachers worked in regular classrooms with a wide diversity of students, and they were from different areas of knowledge. Some of the institutions were Learning Communities and tended to welcome support from the wider environment. A majority of these teachers were also principals and leaders of their own institutions. They tended to be characterised by a strong belief in the value of diversity, with a proactive attitude to learning and convincing others of the impact of their inclusive practices. Pre-university teachers were defined as vocational and worked in public schools. Only one secondary school teacher worked in a private school. The vast majority of their schools were located in deprived areas and the other schools were in middle-class social areas. The faculty members in

our sample also taught in a broadly diverse range in one faculty located in an upper-middle class area of a public university.

Table 2 shows the profile of the participants at each educational level analysed.

Table 2

Participants' profile

Stage	Acess to participants	Centres	Gender Female	Male	Average age	Average teaching experience
Early Childhood Education	3 teaching training centres	16 public preschool and primary schools 2 nursery schools	22	3	42	16
Primary Education	2 teaching training centres	11 public primary schools	18	7	44	19
Secondary Education Baccalaureate/ Vocational training	2 teaching training centres	15 Secondary schools (14 public and 1 private)	18	7	48	19
Higher Education	207 university students	1 public university	19	11	47	19

Data collection instruments

A semi-structured interview script was created. This script was suited to each level studied. Theoretical approaches from Florian (2014), Gale and Mills (2013) and Rouse (2009) research were taken into account in its drafting.

This script aimed to study four dimensions of inclusive pedagogy: beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions (Florian 2014; Gale and Mills 2013; Moriña 2020). Specifically, this article is focused on the dimension of actions and the

recommendations given by the participants to provide other professionals with practical guidance on how to become an inclusive teacher.

Ethical issues

We complied with the current Organic Law on Data Protection and Guarantee of Digital Rights (LOPDGDD 2018), as each participant was given and signed an informed consent. This document showed the purposes and procedures of the research, the dissemination of the results and the rights of the participants before, during and after the study, and it also ensured their anonymity.

In order not to reveal the participants' identities, we used numbers and initials for each level studied: Early Childhood (E1-E25), Primary (P1-P25), Secondary (S1-25) and HE (H1-H25). Using a deal process, the transcripts were emailed back to each participant. This allowed all participants to make any changes in the text that they considered necessary. Then, the participants themselves got back in touch with the researchers, commented on the document and gave their final approval.

Data analysis

Once the transcripts were returned to the participants and considered as definitive, we analysed the data in a qualitative manner. To this end, an inductive system of categories and codes was created to allow us to make sense of the information collected (Miles and Huberman 1994). Initially, this system was broad and generic, focusing on the actions of teachers and, more specifically, on the recommendations that participants gave to other teachers to be inclusive. Subsequently, new sub-codes emerged related to key themes and ideas: teacher planning, teaching methodologies, ethical and emotional competencies, and training. Finally, each of these subcodes was analysed for possible combination or merging with other codes (Figure 1).

Figure 1

System of categories and codes
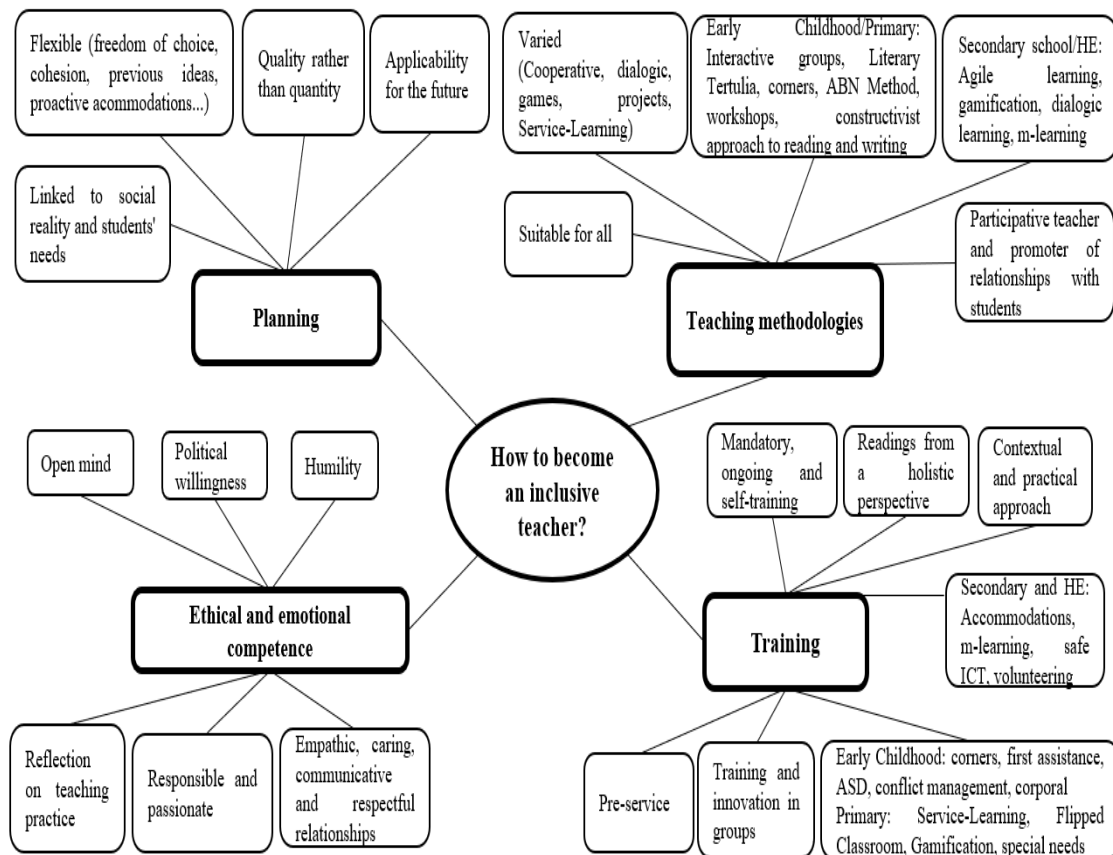
Those codes from the category system and general research codes that matched the themes already obtained were also reviewed again to describe them in more detail. Finally, to facilitate the handling of the large amount of data, the qualitative analysis was carried out with MAXQDA 2020 software.

Presenting and Discussing the Results

What recommendations do teachers give to ensure that the planning of their subjects is inclusive?

Teachers in Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and HE provided similar recommendations on how to deal with subject planning. At first, they all agreed on the importance of allowing flexibility in planning, incorporating a variety of formats for the

same instruction and activity, giving students freedom of choice and making reasonable adjustments from the beginning. These results coincide with the ideas already pointed out by DI (Santangelo and Tomlinson, 2012) and Universal Design for Learning (CAST 2018).

> *H13: When you are planning the subject, you have to recognise that when they submit an exercise or activity for you, it will always be different. For example, you give them the slides, you give them material in the form of a video or written material, with an explanation in class, or you ask them to do a reading on the same topic.*

Furthermore, teachers at all levels recommended that lesson planning should be linked to the social reality and be based on the needs and pace of each student. For them, it was clear that planning should be sufficiently broad to allow enough time for the teacher and the students to get to know each other and build group cohesion, to explore their previous ideas, and then to plan according to their interests and wishes. These considerations corroborate the findings of Van der Heijden et al. (2015), since these teachers show the importance of feeling responsible for the accessibility of their teaching.

> *P7: You must be aware of what your students' needs are, you must get to know them. You can't plan a fortnight before the students come to class. You must plan a lot of things as you go along.*

Finally, teachers at all stages indicated that, when designing the curriculum, it is not the quantity of the syllabus that should be taken into account, but the usefulness of what is taught for their lives. Beyond the competencies that may be reflected in the rules, the participants emphasised the cultural dimension, individual responsibility and teamwork, autonomous learning, self-knowledge, creativity and the improvement of

self-esteem. In the case of the university level, they also emphasised the applicability of content, activities and assessment to ensure that student teachers can transfer this to their future classrooms. However, these findings are in disagreement with those of Majoko (2018) and Kuyini et al. (2016), since these teachers do not consider specific accommodations for specific students to be useful, but rather a sufficiently varied and relevant classroom design that does not discriminate against any student.

> *S13: If what you learn is meaningful, the teaching process flows. Then, you will be able to get the student to find meaning and, something very important in education, you will achieve a high level of self-esteem.*

Which teaching methodologies promote inclusive education?

Teachers at all educational stages recommended that teaching methodologies should be active, practical, respectful, cooperative, experiential, useful, participatory, flexible, contextualised and playful. They underlined that one size does not fit all, and that a teacher concerned about what he or she does well should try new ways of doing things and incorporate variety. Furthermore, these participants made it clear that the teaching methodologies had to be suited to the whole group and not to a minority.

> *E6: The methodology has to be adapted to the whole class. If there is a child who requires a certain type of organisation, the organisation has to be for everyone.*

The key offered by these teachers at all levels was the development of a varied, student-centred methodology that encouraged human interactions and autonomous learning and had an impact on the community (Author et al. 2022; Bain 2004; Lubicz-Nawrocka and Buntin 2019).

Both Early Childhood and Primary Education teachers recommended the use of some successful educational actions of the Learning Communities (interactive groups

and discussion groups), learning corners and the Open Algorithm Based on Numbers (ABN) calculation method. They stated that these actions fostered interactions, strengthened human values and maximised learning for all students. Specifically, Early Childhood participants suggested that workshops should be used and reading and writing should be taught using a constructivist approach.

Moreover, participants from all educational stages emphasised cooperative learning, dialogical learning, project-based work, play and Service-Learning. From their point of view, all these factors increased critical thinking and engagement in interdisciplinary learning. They also mentioned that these methodologies involve more people, achieve greater civic and individual responsibility, prepare students for life and reduce school failure.

S14: Cooperative learning caters for diversity and also prepares students for the future and personal life. Next, the issue of project-based learning, as it motivates them a lot, they work together with other people.

In the case of Secondary and HE, some participants also talked about agile methodologies, gamification, mobile learning and Flipped Classroom as a specific strategy for reviewing content. In the university stage, in a more specific way, the participants recommended that the methodologies had to be close to the future professional and far removed from theory. They also explained that it was essential to create a dialogical, safe and reflective learning environment.

In short, at all stages, they recommended that the teacher should have a participatory role and try to create strong links, to ensure that their students could get to know each other and look for solutions together.

What ethical and emotional competences should an inclusive who carry out inclusive practices have?

To back up the inclusive practices and teaching methodologies described above, teachers from all educational stages underlined that they needed to have a basic outlook of justice toward the person (an open mind) and be eager to transform their beliefs and practices. For them, it was fundamental to have a political willingness, high expectations, predisposition, and attitude to give a response to the needs of all their learners.

> *E21: You must have an open mind. Nothing stops children more than an adult telling them that they are not capable. If you don't believe it, you will never fight for it.*

Firstly, all participants recommended that teachers should be responsible, passionate, and vocational in their work. They also pointed out that it was essential for teachers to feel good in their profession and to be able to motivate their students in their subjects.

> *S4: If you are not passionate about your job, you should look for what you are passionate about in your life. I feel that it is a very nice profession, but it also involves a lot of responsibility, as it has a great impact on the people you work with.*

Secondly, all the teachers highlighted the relevance of reflecting on their practice to improve it. This analysis should be both individual and collective to question their way of acting in the classroom and to understand that there is a reason underlying each behaviour.

> *S16: One of the things I would recommend is not to make quick judgements based on behaviour. There is always a story behind a behaviour.*

Thirdly, all participants suggested that teachers should be humble and be an example to follow. They said that they should master the content of the subject they teach, and that teachers should not pretend to be perfect, researching with their students whenever they encounter something they do not know. They proposed to consider mistakes as a resource for the improvement of the profession.

> *H8: There is one thing that they value a lot about you, and it is that you show that you are imperfect. I mean, that you recognise that if there is something you don't know or you have a specific domain, you can investigate together. Showing a certain sense of humility helps them to be humble as well.*

Meanwhile, the participants also valued the affective level. Unlike the study of Majoko (2019), who insisted on the detection of needs and classroom management as a competence for inclusive teaching, they pointed out that being professional requires being human. They recommended that, if teachers taught with affection, learning would be more meaningful. In this sense, teachers from all stages were clear about the idea that, to be inclusive, teachers should have good communication with their students, listen to them and get to know them, promote their happiness, and be caring, close, respectful, empathetic, sensitive and patient. In the case of early childhood and primary education, they insisted on accompanying the processes, rather than controlling and identifying special needs. In the case of Secondary Education, they recommended that teachers should be trained in self-concept and emotional management for dealing with stress, learning to switch off from their work, developing patience and ensuring the well-being of their students. At the university level, they advise to try to go into class with a smile on their face, knowing all their students' names and doing the best they can.

> *P14: Having the highest care for the students, and that they think that we are mainly educating people, that we are not just teaching Maths or Social Sciences.*

This is an excuse for your students to be happy and learn, because, if they are happy, they will learn more.

Multiple previous studies have reached similar conclusions, especially in terms of caring for the teacher-student relationship, belief in the value of diversity, passion for teaching and concern not only for the students' learning, but also for their well-being (Lubicz-Nawrocka and Buntin 2019; Sirem and Catal 2022).

What teacher training should be like to move toward inclusive education?

The participants highlighted the value of training as a cornerstone for inclusive education (Forlin 2012). All teachers recommended mandatory, ongoing, varied and self-training as a basic principle. Regardless of the stage, they made it clear that this was an undoubted, ethical, and life-related responsibility in society.

P21: I insist that a teacher's training should never be finished.

In most cases, the participants expressed that, for training to be useful and taken on by teachers, it had to be related to the reality of their centres and classrooms, starting from and expressing their training needs. They also mentioned that training should be given by someone specialised in the subject and with a theoretical-practical approach.

H10: Any kind of training initiative must be coupled with the analysis of a classroom experience; if it is not linked to the reality of the topic, I think it is less useful.

In general, teachers of all stages hinted at reading about education from a humanistic, legislative, philosophical, and psychological viewpoint. All agreed on training on how people learn, the concept of diversity broadly defined and how to respond to specific educational needs, active methodologies that encourage and involve their students (projects, mindfulness, cooperative learning, couple with the use of

information and communication technology (ICT)), Neuroscience, emotional education, assessment, and Learning Communities.

In particular, Early Childhood Education teachers added the following to the previous topics: working in groups, First Aid, ASD, conflict management, constructivist reading and writing, body expression and having experience in challenging centres (vulnerable environment). Primary Education teachers included training in other teaching methodologies such as Service-Learning, Flipped Classroom and Gamification. They also mentioned positive communication and more emphasis on training on the variety of specific needs. Both secondary school teachers and faculty members revealed that teachers should be aware of their possible lack of training in pedagogy and be proactive. Secondary school teachers recommended training on m-learning, mobile apps and how to use ICT safely, entrepreneurship, how to organise spaces and carry out meaningful curricular accommodations, Future Classroom Lab, interactive games, how to coordinate with the family, Roma Project and Cooperation for Development. Additionally, faculty members highlighted training in educational innovation and 'The Pedagogy of Listening', accessibility and sustainability of information, the ECO (explore, create, and offer) method, volunteering and participating in research on teaching improvement.

Moreover, beyond the significance of being self-taught, attending educational events (conferences, seminars, workshops...), in all stages, the participants agreed on the urgency of reflecting with other colleagues with the same educational mindset and having a support group among teachers. They also referred to the study groups that meet regularly to train, discuss, and share their classroom experiences and search for collaborative answers. In some cases, these groups are constituted in the centres themselves and, in other cases, these groups are formed externally and informally by the

autonomous search of teachers. Both groups are considered helpful, although the most important ones are those that are done on a voluntary basis in small, committed groups where teachers do not feel that they are being "evaluated".

> *E15: The best way is to create real work groups where everyone joins in willingly and without a chairperson who checks attendance and that's it.*

They also mentioned, as beneficial for training, the relationships and those sessions given by the guidance team and associations. In the case of Early Childhood and Primary Education, the participants positively valued the support groups among teachers through dialogic discussions. In Secondary Education, they underlined the value of training and keeping a close relationship with teaching assistants, as well as participating through social networks, forums, and educational meetings such as EABE (an annual educational meeting that includes any topic related to education, although priority is given to educational improvement and innovation). In HE, faculty members recommended the courses for novice teachers and innovation conferences led by the faculty themselves, as well as the communication and design of projects with entities, other universities and teachers working at lower educational stages.

Finally, participants from all educational stages recommended that the key to being inclusive was in the pre-service training. All participants strongly advocated greater coordination between schools and universities. To this end, they outlined several paths. The first step was related to the profile of faculty members, who should gain experience and be trained in the field they teach. The second step had to do with an overwhelmingly practical approach and with useful strategies to know how to act in the classroom.

Specifically, the faculty members suggested that it was important to have specific training on specific needs, to know how to stimulate critical thinking in their

students from the first years, to promote visits and experiences in marginalised schools, to provide up-to-date papers and readings on diversity, and to be familiarised with awareness-raising campaigns.

> *H4: Starting from the first year, they should be used to awareness-raising campaigns, making diversity visible in the faculties. It is very difficult if you start with a fourth-year student. You must create a diversity and inclusion culture at the university.*

The same ideas advocated by the European Agency for Special Needs Education (2012) and Van der Heijden et al. (2015) about pre-service training as a basis, lifelong learning, reflecting on practice, feeling responsible for innovation and collaborating with others are corroborated in this study at all educational levels.

Conclusions

Teachers who develop inclusive practices from Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and HE provided four common recommendations for other teachers to become inclusive: 1) teacher planning; 2) methodologies; 3) ethical and emotional competencies; and 4) training. For this reason, this study shows that it is not only an urgent need to become an inclusive teacher, but it is also possible to make it a reality regardless of the educational stage.

In order to move toward inclusion, planning needs to be flexible, with varied activities, free-choice formats and reasonable adjustments from the beginning. It also needs to take into account the interests of the students and the usefulness of the content.

On the other hand, although what is effective in relation to inclusion at one educational stage may be useful at other stages, it is also possible to see distinguishing features depending on the age of the students. That is, we can find small hints (methodologies, ethics and emotional competence, as well as in training) in each of the

stages that can encourage us to continue rethinking the removal of barriers and the improvement of teaching (Ainscow, 2016; Arnaiz, De Haro, and Maldonado 2019). For example, in Early Childhood and Primary Education, it would be essential to allow freedom of movement in the spaces (workshops, learning corners, available materials...), as well as accompanying and creating strong links between students, thereby allowing them to help each other. In the case of Secondary Education, it would be advisable to use emerging technologies and learn how to make accommodations and handle emotions. In the university stage, it would be desirable to align methodologies with the practice of the profession, considering at all times that teaching at university involves innovation, accessibility and interacting with people.

In the case of training to carry out inclusive teaching, regardless of the stage at which it is taught, this should be compulsory, on-going, useful, contextualised and practical. Training should be an individual obligation and responsibility, but also a group responsibility together with other colleagues.

In short, the narratives from these participants can help colleagues from a variety of educational stages to portray their own teaching profile, reflect on it and act to improve it. Likewise, it can be useful for both university and school training centres to design training and projects aimed at strengthening each recommendation.

Implications for practice

This study shows that teachers who want to become inclusive (regardless of the stage of education) must work on their beliefs about diversity and stand up against exclusionary situations in their institutions, seriously stating their training needs and calling for a response to these changes. Leaders should listen to them and spend time on this issue. Policy-makers should ensure that teacher training centres do not only design

training along these lines, but also evaluate its impact in future practice in collaboration with the education inspectorate.

Likewise, the results of this study can be useful, as they allow for discussion in support groups among teachers (across all stages and knowledge areas), as well as with other community agents (families, volunteers, students, support teachers, disability offices...). In this way, a solid base would be established on what it means to plan for all students, exchange teaching resources and reflect on it together.

The findings presented here may be useful to professionals who are working in schools and universities to promote collaborative projects and reflect on and find ways to make their own centres more inclusive. For example, through the Lesson Study strategy, the process of teaching and learning to be a teacher would be bidirectional and become more meaningful, with a strong and continuously growing concept of diversity.

Limitations and future research

The first limitation of this study is that, due to external factors, we were not able to carry out classroom observations. It would have been desirable to mix interviews with observations. Due to the pandemic situation, this was not possible, and we had to readjust the research. Despite this, most of the interviews were face-to-face in the participants' own institutions, which helped to further corroborate their inclusive pedagogy (relationships with other professionals, classroom access, organisation of the school, student's attitude...).

Student voices would have been another key element in this research. However, although students have not participated in this phase of the research, they are taking part in the second phase through polyphonic life histories.

Furthermore, it would also be interesting to increase the number of participants with teachers from other Spanish schools and universities, even at an international level.

In this way, it would be useful to carry out a comparative study and further analyse the similarities and differences between educational stages, types of centres, provinces, and countries.

In short, we acknowledge that this study has some limitations, although we also consider that we are dealing with a considerable amount of data over a long period of time and with teachers identified as inclusive. The teachers were not selected at random, as in other studies, thereby shedding light and providing hope and guidelines to help rethink and transform the practices of other colleagues to make them more inclusive.

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