

Portrait of an Inclusive Lecturer: Professional and Personal Attributes

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Abstract

This paper explores how 119 Spanish lecturers nominated by their students with disabilities as being inclusive define themselves in terms of their professional and personal attributes. It also analyses how these attributes influence student learning and explores the profile of an ideal inclusive lecturer. We conduct individual interviews. Three major findings emerged from the data: 1) lecturers facilitate the learning of all students; 2) the professional and personal attributes of lecturers influence students' success at university; and 3) the way lecturers define themselves and their beliefs regarding what an inclusive lecturer should be like are practically identical. This paper concludes that the narratives of these lecturers may perhaps serve to encourage other professionals to understand the importance of these personal and professional characteristics and readjust their practice in collaboration with colleagues. They may also help lecturers realise that inclusive teaching is something which can be learned.

Keywords: Inclusive education; higher education; lecturer; professional attributes; personal attributes

Introduction

Universities have made progress in terms of the rights and responses to the needs of students with disabilities, however, in some cases, university environments do not facilitate these inclusion processes (Jarus et al. 2022). Throughout their university careers, people with disabilities face a series of architectural, attitudinal and curriculum access barriers (Luthuli and Wood 2020; Mamboleo, Dong, and Fais 2020; Martins, Morges, and Gonçalves 2018). These difficulties, vulnerability and risk of exclusion are further accentuated by the new educational realities arising from COVID-19 (UNESCO 2020). Although the concept of inclusion is theoretically present in universities, people with disabilities continue to encounter barriers to their learning and participation (Author et al. 2015; Svendby 2021). Therefore, there is a need to move toward universities that carry out inclusive practices, as these have proved to be effective enabling students with disabilities to progress and successfully complete their studies (Louise and Swartz 2022).

Moreover, enrolling in higher education (HE) is an opportunity to improve both personal and professional competences, enjoy the benefit of social relationships and increase one's chances of finding a job and becoming financially independent (Kreider, Bendixen, and Lutz 2015; Rodríguez, Izuzquiza, and Cabrera 2021). This is important for everyone, but it is even more vital for those who have traditionally been unable to HE, such as people with disabilities. However, merely accessing this sphere, or 'being there', does not necessarily guarantee that individuals can benefit from all the possibilities on offer. Moreover, access without the necessary support is not an opportunity (Author et al. 2021). Indeed, when universities are not inclusive, the dropout rate among students with disabilities is higher than among the rest of the student body (García-González et al. 2021).

This is simply a human rights issue, given that Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006) enshrines that Member States have the obligation to ensure the right to inclusive and quality education for persons with disabilities in initial training, HE and lifelong learning.

More recently, among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, Goal 4 ("To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all") is promoting a global agenda for the effective recognition of the rights of all persons, including those with disabilities, and the building of a cohesive society that respects the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination (United Nations 2015).

This is why it is imperative for universities to be inclusive (Veitch, Strehlow, and Boyd 2018); because inclusion aims to transform university cultures in order to ensure quality learning and the participation of all students. Precisely, those universities which identify with the principles of inclusion value diversity and acknowledge that there are different ways of learning and that all students bring things of value to the learning environment. Moreover, the barriers linked to exclusion are eliminated and an effort is made to act proactively to respond to the needs of all students (Gale and Mills 2013). Welcoming and teaching all learners means aligning with inclusive pedagogy, a pedagogical approach that responds to the diversity of learners in order to avoid the exclusion of particular students in the learning environment (Florian 2014). This approach considers all learners, without exception, focusing on beliefs (lecturers' conceptions, principles and maxims that lead them to design and develop teaching projects to include all learners), knowledge (theoretical, policy and legislative approaches that encourage faculty members to carry out carry inclusive pedagogy), designs (decision making and planning to make a teaching project accessible, i.e.,

designed from the outset with the aim to meet the educational needs of the largest number of learners, minimising adjustments) and actions (affective, emotional and teaching-learning strategies implemented for the development of inclusive pedagogy). Inclusive practices may enrich the curriculum and the success of all students. Learning-centred approaches and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) have been shown to be effective in inclusive environments (Larkin, Nihill, and Devlin 2014).

While ensuring a quality learning experience for all students is one of the maxims of inclusive universities, ensuring participation and developing a sense of belonging is also a priority (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano, and Newman 2015), since it also facilitates academic success. Therefore, inclusive education not only refers to syllabi and assessments designed to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all (Author 2019; Hitch, Macfarlane, and Nihill 2015; Nieminen, 2022), it also involves striving to ensure that students feel like valuable members of the university, members who truly belong and whose contributions are important (Lourens and Swartz 2016). Therefore, universities are obliged to commit to inclusion and guarantee the right of students with disabilities to learn and participate.

Research in this field analysing HE frequently highlights the link between inclusive education and lecturers (in this paper, the term lecturer is used without reference to any specific professional category, and simply means any faculty working in HE). Most studies conducted to date have concluded that lecturers are a key element in the success and sustainability of the inclusive approach (Aguirre, Carballo, and López-Gavira, 2021; Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2021; Lipka, Khouri, and Shecter-Lerner 2020).

Nevertheless, all too often, lecturers have been identified as an obstacle to inclusion (Biggeri, Di Masi, and Bellacicco 2020; Louise and Swartz 2022; Martins,

Morges, and Gonçalves 2018; Palan 2021). Studies on the university careers of students with disabilities have described lecturers who do not have the skills and effective strategies required to respond to the special needs of this student body. These lecturers are characterised by their inflexibility in terms of teaching and assessment methods, their lack of training in inclusive education and disability, their use of traditional methods and their negative attitude (García-González et al. 2021; Rooney 2019; Zhang et al. 2018). Moreover, in other studies in which lecturers themselves participated, they acknowledged that they did not feel qualified to respond to the needs of students with disabilities (Griful-Freixenet et al. 2017; Ortiz, Agreda, and Colmenero 2018).

Nevertheless, lecturers do not always act as barriers, and on some occasions have proven vital to students remaining at university and completing their degrees. Factors linked to student success include, among others, a close student-lecturer relationship, a positive attitude and knowing how to make reasonable accommodations (Bain 2004; Dyer 2018).

These findings suggest that without training and guidance for lecturers (particularly regarding how to respond to the needs of students with disabilities or how to plan inclusive practices based on UDL), it will be difficult to progress from rhetoric to real action. Consequently, a recurring theme in many works published over recent years is the need for staff training. Indeed, only through training and awareness-raising is it possible to initiate processes of change and transformation which foster truly inclusive university contexts (Grimes et al. 2021; Sandoval, Morgado, and Doménech 2021; Vergunst and Swartz 2020).

Moreover, this training is important since some studies have concluded that lecturers with prior training have more positive attitudes and provide more support to students with disabilities. This suggests the existence of a virtuous circle, in which more

training leads to more inclusive practices and outlooks (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2021; Kutscher and Tuckwiller 2019).

However, in order for universities to be able to design effective training plans for inclusive education, they need to understand what inclusive lecturers are actually like. Few studies have sought to offer a portrait of this kind. Those we are aware of include some which have focused on giving voice to students with disabilities regarding what lecturers who contribute to inclusion are like (Author et al. 2015; Griffiths 2015). The lecturers most appreciated by students with disabilities are those who are not excessively theoretical, but rather explain using examples and are innovative in their teaching methods. They are also those who have a thorough understanding of their subject and are capable of effectively transmitting that knowledge. In these studies, lecturers are described as people with a positive attitude towards disability, with other attributes including being flexible, approachable, understanding and always ready to help.

Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) concluded that students learn more when lecturers use active, cooperative learning techniques, interact with their students and make an effort to engage them in the learning process. Nevertheless, these practices are not enough to ensure inclusion, since lecturers should also strive to establish good relationships with students, show an interest in them, get to know them and treat them as people (Griffiths 2010).

Moreover, it is important for students to develop a sense of belonging to the university. To ensure this, lecturers should be enthusiastic about and enjoy their profession (Ruiz-Alfonso and León 2016). In a study by Stein (2014), students positively valued the fact that lecturers responded to their e-mails, were available during tutorials and made reasonable accommodations. Lipka, Khouri, and Shecter-Lerner

(2020) reported similar results, emphasising the fact that students with disabilities valued empathy, caring and approachability.

When students believe that their lecturers listen and show immediacy through behaviours aimed at generating a feeling of closeness, their learning experience is more positive and they feel emotionally supported and can express their own emotions more authentically (Titsworth, Quinlan, and Mazer 2010). These same authors also highlight the role played by the relationship lecturers have with the subjects they teach (interest, passion), as well as roles connected to student care (respect, empathy).

In a similar study to those outlined above, but focusing specifically on students' perceptions of the traits that make a lecturer excellent, the following profile emerged (Lubicz-Nawrocka and Bunting 2019): someone who takes the time to directly engage with students; designs clear, well-structured lectures which help students learn; communicates clearly; is committed to engaging students by using student-centred teaching approaches; is passionate and enthusiastic; explains using real examples and is practical; uses humour to teach; provides support to students for overcoming possible barriers which may hamper the progress of their studies; and interacts frequently with students to ensure a safe learning environment.

There are other attributes that make a faculty member inclusive, since teaching at university today involves assuming that diversity is common, that students learn in different ways and that their intelligences are multiple (Barrington 2004). It also means mastering not only the content of a subject, but also knowing how to teach, adjusting to students' needs and making use of different teaching resources, including technological ones (Seale et al. 2020). In fact, many studies confirm that assistive technologies facilitate inclusion (Hadjikakou and Hartas 2008). Therefore, the profile of an inclusive faculty should be characterised by an attitude of continuous professional development in

accessibility and the use of UDL. In particular, this faculty members should use a variety of technologies, both conventional (hardware and devices such as smartphones applications and software such as smartphone apps, Google apps and PDF readers) and specialised (screen reading software, speech recognition software, mind maps, Braille readers, scanners, voice recorders and DAISY players). The use of these technological resources not only benefits the student with disabilities, but also challenges faculty members to improve their training, enhances peer support, motivation and engagement of all students in the classroom (Clouder et al. 2019).

In sum, these studies conclude that inclusive lecturers possess a series of professional and personal characteristics that contribute to ensuring that students stay at university and finish their degree. Understanding these characteristics and fostering them other members of staff is a vital element in the construction of an inclusive culture, particularly given that research has shown that lecturers' skills and attitudes impact student learning (Dangoisse et al. 2020; Hansen and Dawson 2020; Zhang et al. 2018). Moreover, the research indicates that lecturers who practice inclusively benefit all students (Bunbury 2020; Carballo et al. 2022).

In our review of the scientific literature, we found no studies on how inclusive lecturers define themselves or what they think an ideal inclusive lecturer should be like. The research that does exist is scarce and focused on giving voice to students. In these studies, students either describe those lecturers they believed contributed to their inclusion at their university (Griffiths 2010; Lipka, Khouri, and Shecter-Lerner 2020; Ruíz-Alfonso and León 2016) or state what they think an ideal lecturer who fosters learning and participation at university should be like (Author et al. 2015). The present study therefore aims to fill a gap detected in the literature and to analyse what lecturers who have been nominated as inclusive by their own students believe should be the

professional and personal attributes of faculty committed to inclusion. We specifically aim to answer three research questions:

- 1) How do lecturers who have been nominated by their students for being inclusive define themselves?
- 2) How do their characteristics and attitudes in the classroom impact the learning of all students?
- 3) In their opinion, what are the fundamental characteristics and attitudes that lecturers practicing inclusive education should have?

Method

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 aims to explore the beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions of lecturers from all areas of knowledge who practice inclusive teaching. This paper focuses solely how lecturers define themselves in terms of their professional and personal characteristics, how these characteristics impact student learning, and what attributes they believe inclusive lecturers should have.

This qualitative study was funded by the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness, and all ethical issues were approved by this body. Moreover, in relation to ethical concerns, the research procedure takes into account the criteria established by the American Psychological Association Ethics Code (APA 2017) in relation to confidentiality, respect for participants and informed consent.

Participants

The lecturers participating in this study were selected exclusively by students with disabilities. Through the disability support services, Spanish university students were asked to nominate lecturers who had contributed to their inclusion at university.

Given that not everyone is familiar with the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education', the research team provided an explanation of what an inclusive lecturer is like. The explanation was as follows: inclusive lecturers believe that all students have potential; they facilitate learning processes; engage in active teaching; use different methodological strategies; take an active interest in their students' learning; are flexible and willing to help; make an effort to motivate students; are approachable and foster interactions between students; and try to make students feel like important members of the class.

Once students had agreed to collaborate in the recruitment process, we contacted them by email to explain the project and invite them to nominate inclusive lecturers. In total, 119 lecturers from 10 Spanish universities participated in the research project. Of these 24 (20.2%) were from the field of Arts and Humanities (Participants P1 to P24), 14 (12%) were from Science and Engineering (P25 to P38), 16 (13.4%) were from the Health Sciences (P39 to P54), 25 (21.01%) from the Social and Legal Sciences (P55 to P79) and 40 (33.6%) from the field of Education (P80-P119). In terms of gender, 58% were men and 42% were women. The majority were aged between 36 and 60 years, with seven (7.8%) being under 35 and four (4.4%) being over 60 years of age. Most (68.4%) had over 10 years' teaching experience, although six (6.2%) had less than 5 years' experience and 24 (25.4%) had between 5 and 10.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Once the nominated lecturers had agreed to participate in the research project, a telephone conversation was arranged to explain in more detail what the project consisted of and why their participation was important. Arrangements for an initial interview were also made during this first conversation.

Individual semi-structured interviews were held with lecturers. First, the research team designed three semi-structured scripts for lecturers. These scripts were then discussed and piloted with faculty not participating in the study. All the necessary modifications were carried out in accordance with the recommendations made. The mean duration of each interview was one hour, thirty minutes.

The majority of interviews with lecturers were held face-to-face (n=89). However, 18 lecturers conducted their interviews via Skype and 12 did so over the telephone, since they were unable to attend in person. All student interviews were carried out face-to-face. Interviews were audio and video recorded.

Data Analysis

The information was transcribed and analysed using a progressive qualitative data analysis method which generated a system of inductive codes and categories that enabled meaning to be attached to the information gathered (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2004). Information processing was carried out using the MaxQDA 14 software program. First, we developed a broad and generic system of categories and codes. Then, during the next phase, we created new sub-codes for the different topics explored (Figure 1). Each of these codes was analysed to determine whether it could be broken down further or merged with other codes. This enabled us to organise and interpret the data gathered through the category system. All the information was simultaneously analysed by two people. Fragments of information which were difficult to interpret were analysed by the entire research team during face-to-face meetings.

Please, insert figure 1 here

Results

What are Lecturers who Practice Inclusive Education Like? Professional and Personal Characteristics

The majority of lecturers who practice inclusive education define themselves in accordance with the information their students have conveyed to them throughout their teaching career. The characteristics they attributed to themselves suggest that in order to become an inclusive lecturer, it is not enough just to have certain professional qualities, such as responsibility and a thorough knowledge of the subject being taught. Rather, a set of personal characteristics are also required, with special attention being paid to emotions.

Firstly, in relation to professional characteristics, the main attributes were perseverance, effort and a firm commitment to doing a good job and giving students the best of themselves. All lecturers took their jobs very seriously, were responsible, demanding and determined to provide students with quality learning. They pointed out their strong teaching vocation and emphasised the passion they conveyed when learning alongside students.

I'm passionate about education and always try to give the best of myself in class.

The characteristic which best defines me is, without doubt, responsibility.

(Participant 85, Education)

Another trait that almost all lecturers mentioned when describing themselves was their tendency to meticulously organise every last detail of their lectures. Nevertheless, they also defined themselves as flexible, since they tried to customise their syllabuses, use different methodological strategies, explain contents in different ways, adapt to the needs and pace of the students in their class and continuously include innovations in their subject.

I'm an extremely organised and methodical person. I like to have everything organised well in advance, so that students can have access to the information at any time. (Participant 15, Arts and Humanities)

Many lecturers also emphasised their practical, active and dynamic approach. They said they saw themselves as professionals who teach theoretical content, but believed it was vital to create spaces for dialog in the teaching-learning process, combine explanations with practical examples and link content to familiar experiences from students' social environment.

I always try to encourage students to find real-life examples. This really helps them understand the contents of course, and learn how to apply them.

(Participant 60, Social and Legal Sciences)

Finally, in relation to professional characteristics, only a small minority of lecturers mentioned a willingness to keep up to date, and improve and innovate in their praxis. Most participants defined themselves as demanding, but only a few saw themselves as transformational lecturers who reflected deeply about how they behaved and acted in the classroom. For example, one participant said that thanks to his students he was able to learn and to become a better professional as a result of the training course they had demanded he go on in the use of ICT.

Every day my students force me to better myself. For example, I'm now a New Technology enthusiast. They helped me see that I have to move with the times.

(Participant 40, Health Sciences)

Secondly, in relation to personal characteristics, almost all lecturers defined themselves as approachable, kind, not arrogant, affectionate and interested in establishing good relationships with their students. However, many pointed out that while they made an effort to be available and approachable, this did not mean they formed friendships with students. Thus, lecturers described themselves as being close to their students, a circumstance which, in their opinion, provided students with the security and confidence they needed to express any doubts about the subject, eliminated

certain barriers, built spaces of trust and enabled them to get to know their students better.

I don't think I come across as arrogant at all; I'm approachable. And this encourages students to confide in me. So I learn about all their fears and can do something about them. (Participant 96, Education)

Another personal characteristic mentioned by almost all participants was empathy. Lecturers defined themselves as being sensitive to their students' needs, able to connect easily with them and put themselves in their shoes. This same characteristic also encompassed taking an interest in students, patience and a willingness to provide immediate help and support both in face-to-face tutorials and by e-mail.

I take a lot of interest in them. For example, if they have doubts, they can send me an e-mail and I respond at once. (Participant 49, Health Sciences)

Finally, the vast majority of lecturers defined themselves as enthusiastic, fun and motivating. In general, they said they enjoyed teaching and were happy in the classroom.

I'm very enthusiastic and I try to ensure a relaxed working atmosphere in the classroom, with many different methods of communication. (Participant 89, Education)

How do Lecturers' Characteristics and Attitudes in the Classroom Impact the Learning of all Students?

The participants in this study said that their characteristics and attitudes in the classroom impacted the learning of all students in different ways. Firstly, a minority mentioned that these attitudes depended on the student (type of need and level of commitment), the lecturer and/or the subject. Nevertheless, the vast majority said they believed their characteristics and attitudes helped establish an optimal climate for

learning, and many mentioned the fact that they helped generate interest and encouraged students to trust them, as well fostering a closer connection between what students learned in the classroom, their social reality and their future professional careers.

Almost all lecturers highlighted the fact that energy and passion, as well as enthusiasm for teaching, were contagious. They also said that, at both an emotional and practical level, they gave rise to a friendlier classroom climate that was also more respectful, more comfortable and more fun, and which enabled students not only to participate actively, but also to learn more and better.

If you manage to create a warm, welcoming and emotionally-secure classroom environment, this will help pique students' interest, even when they are initially not so keen on a particular subject. (Participant 44, Health Sciences)

Many lecturers said that forging close bonds with students and being approachable, available and not in any way arrogant enabled a better lecturer-student connection, allowing them to get to know each other better. This in turn made students feel secure, since they knew they could count on their lecturer's ongoing support and saw them as someone who would listen to them and make an effort to respond to their needs. They also saw them as someone who trusted and believed in them and would help them on the road to success. Consequently, during tutoring sessions, students were not afraid of being themselves, and could learn from their mistakes, express any doubts and feel secure voicing their opinions in class.

I think that being open and available to students makes them more interested in the subject. (Participant 37, Science and Engineering)

At least half of the participants in this study mentioned that their practical outlook may influence students' attitudes, since they recognised that the classes were worth attending and would prove useful later on in their professional career. The fact that

lecturers used their own experiences or real case studies in class enabled their students to connect what they learned to their social environment and future professional career, while at the same time helping build their knowledge and encouraging them to adopt a more critical outlook.

I think that students also really appreciate anecdotes and real-life experiences, because it opens their eyes to a reality that is not reflected in books but is the one they will experience once they graduate. (Participant 65, Social and Legal Sciences)

Finally, a few lecturers said that the way they organised their work helped students to pass their subject. Being very meticulous with timekeeping, handing-in deadlines for assignments and explanations helped all students follow their classes better, since they knew what they were going to be doing or studying at any given moment and how to solve any problems that may arise.

What is the Profile of an Ideal Lecturer who Includes all Students? Professional and Personal Characteristics

The last question we analysed in this study was that of the (professional and personal) characteristics that an inclusive lecturer should have. Firstly, the professional characteristics most frequently mentioned by participants were dedication and responsibility. An inclusive lecturer is someone committed to their job, who has a thorough knowledge of their subject and dedicates as much time as necessary to their students, both inside and outside class hours. For this to be possible, they also have to have a strong vocation and enjoy their profession.

I think what students appreciate most is the fact that you are engaged and passionate when teaching something. (Participant 115, Education)

Secondly, the vast majority of participants said that an inclusive lecturer should be someone who reflects on their own professional practice, is open to making changes to their subject and is interested in keeping abreast of and training themselves in inclusive education and disability strategies on an ongoing basis. This training would help them acquire the knowledge and tools they need to understand their students and encourage their interest in the subject matter at hand, adapting their syllabus accordingly and developing more accessible resources in the classroom.

Training, of course. Because it gives you tools that can really help in the unfamiliar situations you have to deal with. (Participant 45, Health Sciences)

The third most frequently-mentioned professional characteristic was linked to meticulous planning. Many participants said they believed that an inclusive lecturer should be interested in exploring the contents of their subject in depth and updating them prior to presenting them in class. They also said they thought they should analyse any teaching barriers or limitations that may exist before entering the classroom, in order to make any adjustments or accommodations required. An ideal inclusive lecturer would be a professional who was generous with their teaching materials and had a clear set of teaching objectives while still being flexible in relation to all elements of the curriculum (resources, methodology and assessment), in order to ensure that all students acquired the relevant competences in an optimal environment.

Every year you get students with very different profiles, and the contexts are different too. So, an ideal lecturer should carry out a general analysis of their class at the beginning, and adapt accordingly. (Participant 10, Arts and Humanities)

In the case of students with disabilities, participants emphasised the need to show an interest in them, make an effort with them and continually adjust to any needs that may arise by providing closer supervision.

You have to show an interest, because if you have to spend more time with them or do some different activities, well, you just do. If you have to stay behind with them after class, you do. You stay and talk and listen to them. (Participant 80, Education)

One final set of professional characteristics that some participants mentioned were creative, teaching and communication skills. According to these participants, an inclusive lecturer should engage in divergent thinking in order to adapt the teaching-learning process to different student needs; they should be able to teach and convey knowledge to students using a variety of different methods.

A lecturer who is committed to inclusion in the classroom should have the creativity required to adapt to all kinds of student needs. (Participant 44, Health Sciences)

The personal characteristics that the majority of participants said they thought an inclusive lecturer should have were empathy and sensitivity. In their opinion, an ideal professional should be tactful and willing to help at all times; they should strive to understand their students' needs and show an interest in them and ensure they are following the sessions; they should be able to put themselves in their students' shoes and change their plans and adjust their demands accordingly.

Regardless of the environment in which they work, if a lecturer is not able to put themselves in their students' shoes (whether said students have a disability or not), they will be more limited in their ability to ensure effective learning. (Participant 94, Education)

Most participants also highlighted the importance of forming emotional and affective bonds with students. Specifically, they claimed that in order to ensure customised attention and humanise teaching, an ideal inclusive lecturer should be patient, always available, know how to listen and be affectionate, approachable, emotionally open and close to their students.

I believe closeness is important; we have to humanise our work, which has always been a bit mechanical. I think this is a mistake, particularly in our line of work, which at the end of the day aims to educate and teach. (Participant 60, Social and Legal Sciences)

Around half of the participants expressed motivation as a fundamental ingredient in the profile of an inclusive lecturer, along with the ability to cope with frustration. They explained that lecturers should be the first to be resilient and motivated in class, since otherwise they will not be able to arouse students' interest. Moreover, being able to motivate also required a belief in the capabilities of all students, coupled with a willingness to create dynamic, shared spaces of interaction.

I believe you have to be enthusiastic in class. If you believe in what you are doing, then you will motivate and convey this to students. You have to teach them, but you also have to make things easier for them. For example, you can tell them a joke, take a short break or tell them an amusing or interesting story. (Participant 29, Science and Engineering)

Many participants mentioned honesty and the importance of not being arrogant, with basic human decency also being one of the key characteristics attributed to an ideal inclusive lecturer, along with a passion for teaching. This means recognising the key role played by students and putting them at the centre of the learning process. It also means being a good person, having a firm ethical and social commitment to the

generations you are educating and understanding how your students will eventually influence others. In sum, an inclusive lecturer should be an agent for change who contributes to making society fairer and more equal.

They have to be interested in and enthusiastic about collaborating in the shift towards inclusion. I think they should see themselves as agents for change in the classroom. (Participant 17, Arts and Humanities)

Finally, a few participants underscored the fact that inclusive lecturers should have inclusive beliefs, and should be open-minded and free from prejudices about students' capabilities. High expectations help lecturers appreciate the idiosyncrasies of each group, find alternatives, adapt and treat all members equally. They also help them feel secure in their job and overcome any obstacles they may come across during the educational process.

Firstly, I believe they should have a mind as free as possible from prejudice. Secondly, they shouldn't see students with disabilities as different from other students. (Participant 2, Arts and Humanities)

In sum, an ideal inclusive lecturer should have a set of personal and professional characteristics. They should be interested in monitoring their students' teaching-learning processes. This closeness and personal relationship, combined with emotional openness, gives them the opportunity to get to know students better (needs, concerns, interests and prior ideas), support them and contribute to the continuation and success of their university studies.

Discussion

This study provides evidence and guidance regarding some professional and personal attributes that should be taken into consideration in lecturers' professional development. While it is true that the inclusive education approach does not just

concern lecturers, there is no doubt that they are the most immediate and closest point of reference for students (Author 2019).

These lecturers' voices teach us four basic lessons. Firstly, while the majority of studies have identified lecturers as a barrier to the learning and participation of students with disabilities (Biggeri, Di Masi, and Bellacicco 2020; Martins, Morges, and Gonçalves 2018), in the present study, they contribute to inclusion. This finding corroborates those of previous studies which argue that lecturers are a key element in inclusion, and that given the right conditions, any student can learn, participate and be successful (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2019; Lipka, Khouri, and Shecter-Lerner 2020). Moreover, the results identify the professional (dedication, vocation, meticulous organisation, flexibility, reflection on practice, creativity, practical and active outlook) and personal characteristics (human decency, approachability, empathy, emotional openness and enthusiasm) that lecturers should strive to attain and develop.

These findings are encouraging, not only because they may help guide universities during personnel selection processes and the planning of staff training programmes, but also because they highlight the fact that inclusion is possible. Inclusion, which has been questioned on so many occasions and which, in the majority of papers published to date, is referred to mainly in terms of a general recommendation for universities to become 'more inclusive' (Lourens and Swartz 2016), here moves from rhetoric to practice, showing that inclusive lecturers do indeed exist and offering a portrait of their characteristics.

The second lesson the narratives teach us is that the profile of an inclusive lecturer coincides with that described in previous studies which sought to give voice to students with disabilities (Griffiths 2010; Stein 2014). Like the lecturers here, the students participating in those studies described the profile of faculty who contributed to

their inclusion, alluding to both professional and personal qualities. In our study, we were not able to analyse whether there are differences in the profiles of inclusive faculty depending on the type of disability of the students. Undoubtedly, this is a new question that can be answered in a forthcoming study that would explore whether there are common characteristics between them and what differences need to be taken into account in each case.

The third lesson we can learn from the findings reported here is that lecturers' professional and personal attributes are not neutral and have an impact, for better or for worse, on whether students complete their university studies or drop out before earning their degree (Dangoisse et al. 2020; Hansen and Dawson 2019; Zhang et al. 2018). In this case, participants' characteristics and attitudes helped foster an optimal learning climate. Students felt secure knowing they could count on their lecturer's support; motivated due to the practical outlook adopted during classes, which enabled them to connect what they were learning to real life and prepare for their future professional career; and were successful in the subject as a result of their lecturer's meticulous and systematic planning, which enabled them to know what they were going to be doing at any given time.

These ideas prompt us to think about what it means to 'be' a lecturer. In our view, just as described in this study, being an inclusive lecturer is not just about having a thorough knowledge of one's subject or having the ability to convey it to students. Social skills such as communication and empathy are also necessary, as is a willingness to pay attention to emotions and to one's interactions with students, trying to listen, respect and appreciate each individual learner (Lipka, Khouri, and Shecter-Lerner 2019; Titsworth, Quinlan, and Mazer 2010). This raises new questions: How could training policies contribute to lecturer professional development in order to promote inclusion?

What kind of training could be planned? What would this training look like and how would it be organised?

The fourth and final lesson learned is that it is not easy to distinguish between the profile of the lecturers participating in this study and their beliefs about what an inclusive lecturer should be like. This is because these lecturers are indeed inclusive and many of the attributes they recognise in their ideal inclusive lecturer are attributes they themselves have already developed. Of those traits that were not mentioned in the self-definitions, we should highlight, in relation to professional qualities, reflection on one's own practice, educational training, communication skills and creativity; and in relation to personal characteristics, inclusive beliefs. This suggests that training and the development of one's teaching identity is a gradual, ongoing process that enables lecturers to reflect upon the way they think, feel and act in the classroom and to explore their own practice in order to improve it (Kutscher and Tuckwiller 2019). Moreover, we did not delve into the training of these faculty members in the present study. This opens up the possibility of initiating new research to analyse how and why faculty members are trained and what they are taught.

Ultimately, the narratives of these lecturers may perhaps serve to encourage other professionals to understand the importance of these personal and professional characteristics and readjust their practice in collaboration with colleagues. They may also help lecturers realise that inclusive teaching is something which can be learned.

Limitations and Future Research

This study, which is novel and makes a relevant contribution to research into inclusive education and HE, has certain limitations. For example, the sample could have been larger and separate analyses could have been carried out for each knowledge area. Other data collection instruments could also be included, such as observations

combined with the voice of students with disabilities. Another limitation of this study is that it does not differentiate between types of disability. Future studies could take this perspective into account and analyse inclusive faculty in terms of which students with disabilities they teach and how they teach them.

Nevertheless, we believe that the results are valuable and may help us gain greater insight into the profile of lecturers who engage in inclusive practice. Future research may wish to explore the profile of lecturers in other international contexts in order to corroborate, expand on or refute the results reported here. Researchers may also wish to plan projects to design, develop and evaluate awareness-raising and training programmes for fostering some of these attributes among lecturers.

Conclusions

We know that students with disabilities and non-traditional students still continue to come up against barriers to their full inclusion (Louise and Swartz 2022; Rooney 2019; Zhang et al. 2018). The moment has therefore come to act and to eliminate these barriers. Moreover, thanks to the existence of studies which point the way, these actions will not be carried out blindly. One example is the information presented in this paper, which provides insight into what inclusive lecturers are like. These findings offer lecturers a mirror in which to examine ourselves and plan our professional development and our construction of our own teaching ‘selves’. We recognise that it will not be easy, beset as we are with increasing amounts of uncertainty, tension and pressure in a university environment which is becoming more and more bureaucratic and demanding in terms of research activity. However, we are also aware of our responsibility and commitment as lecturers in a society which expects a great deal from its universities, and in relation to students who are seeking an opportunity for personal, educational, social and professional advancement.

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