

Students with disabilities at university: benefits and challenges from the best faculty members' experiences

Abstract

This article presents the results of a study that gave a voice to 119 faculty members of 10 Spanish universities, who were recommended by their students with disabilities for carrying out an inclusive pedagogy. Following a qualitative methodology, two interviews were held to analyse different areas of inclusive pedagogy: beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions. The data were analysed through an inductive system of categories and codes. The results show the positive aspects and benefits highlighted by these faculty about their experiences regarding the presence of students with disabilities in their classrooms, as well as the main challenges they encounter when attempting to achieve the social and educational inclusion of these students.

Keywords: Inclusive pedagogy; faculty members; students with disabilities; Higher Education; qualitative methods.

Introduction

Universities all over the world have initiated a gradual transformation to respond to student diversity. In this process, universities have started analysing the needs of students with disabilities with the aim of improving the accessibility of all their services and resources (Moriña and Orozco 2020). One of the fundamental legal references of the rights of persons with disabilities is the United Nations Convention (United Nations 2006). In this convention, a set of fundamental principles were established, which were intended to serve as guidelines for the subsequent regulations of each member state on

this matter. Among such principles, it is worth highlighting the following: non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion, equal opportunities and access to public services for people with disabilities. Spain signed the protocol of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and ratified it in 2008. The Organic Law of Universities of 2001, with its later modification of 2007 (Spanish Government 2007), specifies the access, continuation and participation of students with disabilities in the university life.

Although 95% of Spanish universities have plans of attention to students with disabilities (Universia Foundation 2021), the reality is that students still encounter barriers that hinder their full development and, in some cases, the completion of their university studies (Babic and Dowling 2015). In this context, faculty members play a key role, since it is up to them to facilitate the learning of all students (Carballo, Morgado and Cortes-Vega 2021).

The situations of students with disabilities in universities all over the world have been extensively documented in the scientific literature (Elbeheri et al. 2018; Frank, McLinden and Douglas 2019). One of the most significant conclusions is that university students with disabilities encounter more barriers than facilitators throughout their university studies (Adefila et al. 2020).

Among the elements that facilitate their experience, these students highlight their classmates as one of the main facilitators, along with the disability support services and the faculty members who carry out inclusive practices and make reasonable adjustments (Rooney 2019). On the other hand, they identify numerous barriers such as complex bureaucratic processes, the lack of university support and the non-implementation of policies about disabilities (López-Gavira and Moriña, 2014). However, one of the most common difficulties in the discourse of all students at the

international level is the teaching staff (Martins, Borges and Gonçalves 2018). Students with disabilities highlight the lack of positive attitudes toward disability. Some faculty members are sceptical toward certain types of disabilities while others think that they should not make changes or adjustments, since that would pose a favourable consideration for the students with disabilities (Sandoval, Morgado and Doménech 2020).

Due to the lack of teaching and evaluation methods that allow for the participation of all students, together with the lack of accessible resources, students with disabilities do not have equal opportunities and, thus, they have to make greater efforts than their classmates. Moreover, these students also point out the lack of training among faculty members in inclusive education (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin 2014; Wray and Houghton 2019).

A small number of studies on this topic have given a voice to faculty members (Corrêa et al. 2021; Kendall 2018; Martins, Borges and Gonçalves 2018; Phillips et al. 2012). From their perspective, faculty members show high predisposition to work for the inclusion of students with disabilities (Becker and Palladino 2016; Carballo, Morgado and Cortes-Vega 2021). However, they also agree with students with disabilities on their lack of training (Gelbar et al. 2015; Martins, Borges and Gonçalves 2018). Therefore, in many cases they are guided by their own good will and interest, although with the insecurity of not knowing how to work with students with disabilities in the best possible manner. In terms of their beliefs, faculty members sometimes consider that students with disabilities have limitations that will hinder their academic and professional development (Martins et al. 2018). In addition to the lack of sensitivity towards disability reported by students themselves, there is a lack of experience. This inexperience, together with a lack of training, is also an obstacle for students (Black,

Weinberg and Brodwin 2014). In relation to faculty' knowledge, it has been shown that many faculty members do not have the necessary knowledge about the different types of disabilities and their educational needs (Carballo, Morgado and Cortes-Vega 2021). In the study by Lister et al. (2020), faculty members stated that they had a good knowledge of these issues. However, when asked specific questions to show their knowledge, most of them failed. Therefore, they are often unaware that there is a great deal of knowledge that they should know, but do not know. Finally, this lack of knowledge is compounded by the fact that many faculty members are also unaware of the universities' disability support services and therefore do not get help when they encounter difficulties (González and Colmenero 2021; Lister et al. 2020; Martins, Borges and Gonçalves 2018). In other cases, it has been shown that faculty members are aware of these services, but demand that universities make more resources available to staff and students to improve accessibility (Valle-Flórez et al. 2021).

Although faculty members tend to express very positive attitudes towards accessibility and inclusive teaching and learning (Lister et al. 2020), most studies have mainly investigated faculty' willingness to make reasonable accommodations in teaching and assessment resources, so a deeper understanding of the methodological part is needed from the analysis of inclusive pedagogy and all its components. The beliefs of the faculty about disability and their experiences with these students have been mostly analysed in stages of compulsory education (Florian 2014), and further knowledge about these aspects is needed in the context of HE (Gale 2017). Educational approaches such as inclusive pedagogy (Florian 2014) and Universal Design for Learning (CAST 2018) are increasingly popular in USA, Canada and UK.

This article provides evidence of faculty members who show positive attitudes and beliefs toward disability and carry out inclusive practices in the university. To this

end, we analysed the valuations of 119 faculty members about their experience with students with disabilities in their classrooms. Two research questions guided this analysis:

- 1) What benefits and positive aspects do faculty members identify regarding the presence of students with disabilities in university classrooms?
- 2) What challenges do faculty members face when there are students with disabilities in their classrooms?

Method

This article presents the partial results of a study entitled '*Inclusive pedagogy in the university: faculty members' narratives*' (EDU2016–76,587-R, IP. Anabel Moriña, 2016– 2021) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, whose aim was to analyse, through a qualitative methodology, the valuations of faculty members about their experiences with students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Participants

To ensure the adequacy of the sample, the faculty were selected by students with disabilities. Two methods were used to identify and select study participants. In the first way, the disability support services of the 10 participating universities were contacted. These services requested the collaboration of students with disabilities to nominate faculty members who carried out an inclusive pedagogy in the university. The students were given a list of characteristics and strategies of faculty members who carry out inclusive practices: they care about the learning of their students, are flexible and eager to help, and favour the relationships between the students and the faculty, among other aspects. The students e-mailed the research team, nominating faculty members who met these criteria. From the information provided by the students, we created a list of inclusive faculty members of the different universities and fields of knowledge.

The second method was conducted using the “snowball” technique (Dusek, Yurova and Ruppel 2015). In order to contact more students than those who were contacted by the support services, the research team shared the project information with other members of the university community (colleagues, students, university staff), in order to find students with disabilities who could propose more faculty members.

Once the sample selection process was finished, the research team contacted a total of 163 faculty members, either through e-mail or phone call. Of these, 5 faculty members refused to participate due to schedule, motivation or availability reasons, and another 39 faculty members did not reply to the invitation to participate. The final sample consisted of 119 faculty members of 10 different Spanish public universities (see figure 1). Most of the participants were between 36 and 60 years old (87.8%), while 7 were under 35 years (7.78%) and 4 were over 60 (4.42%). In relation to gender, 69 were male (58.3%) and 50 were female (41.6). Regarding their teaching experience, most of the participating faculty had over 10 years of experience (68.35%), with only 6 participants (6.25%) having less than 5 years of experience. Among the experiences with students with disabilities, sensory disabilities (visual and hearing impairments) were the most common (40.97%), followed by physical (23.68%), mental (18.79%), organic (10.52%) and learning difficulties (6.01%).

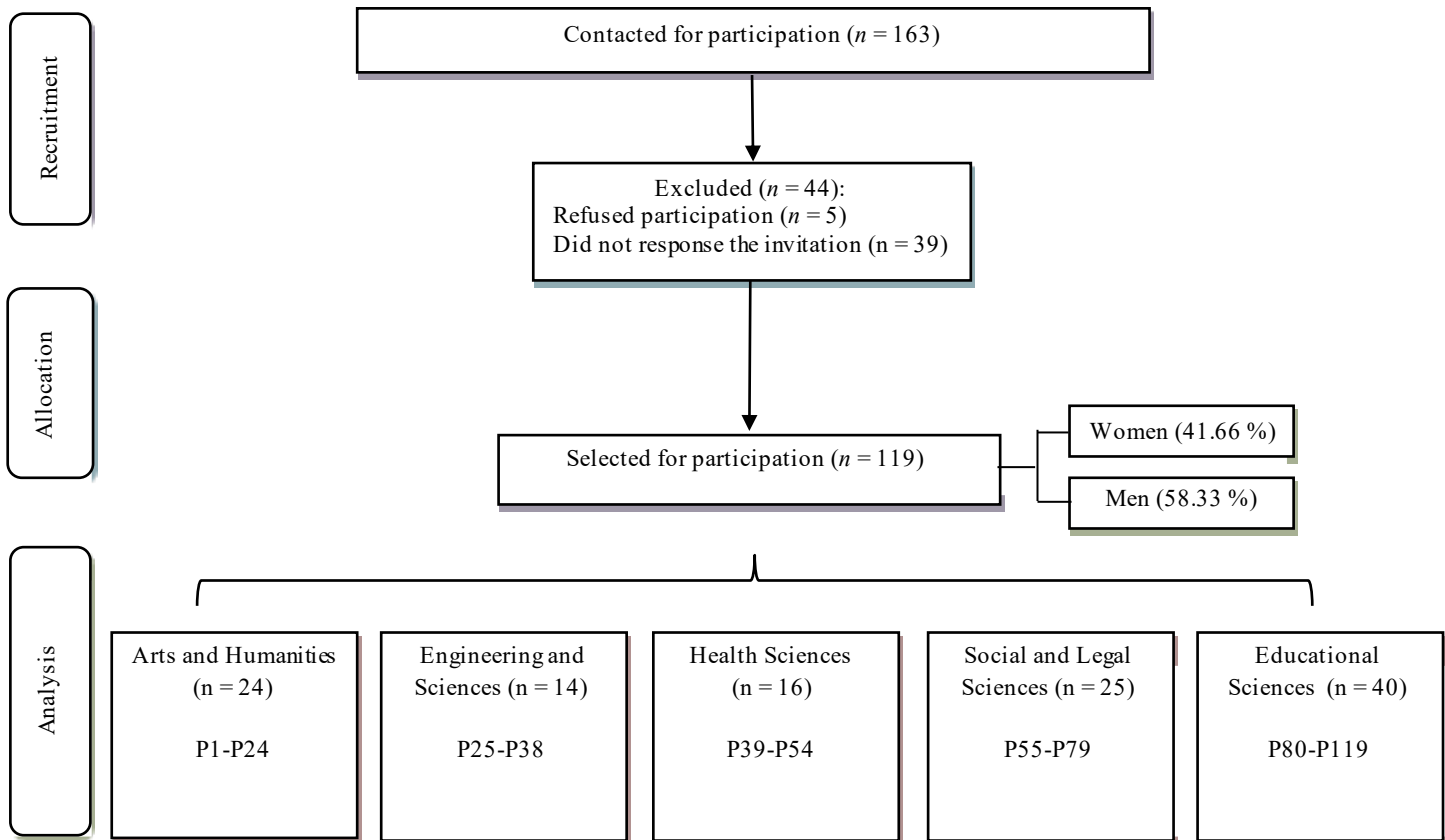


Figure 1. Study Flow Chart.

Procedure and instruments used for data gathering

The data were gathered through 2 semi-structured interviews which explored 4 analytical dimensions of inclusive pedagogy: beliefs, knowledge, designs and actions (Florian 2014; Gale and Mills 2013). The first interview was focused on the knowledge and beliefs about disability, whereas the second interview collected information about teaching designs and inclusive actions. This article presents and discusses the results obtained in the first interview. Specifically, some of the questions that guided this interview were the following: Could you make a brief description of your experience with students with disabilities? Could you make a general evaluation of your experience with them? What did you like the most about working with students with disabilities?

And what did you like the least? What difficulties did you encounter when working with these students?

Of the 119 interviews, 89 were conducted face-to-face, 18 through video-call and 12 via phone call, according to the particular circumstances of each participant. These interviews had a duration of 60-90 minutes, and they were recorded in audio and subsequently transcribed for the analysis of the information provided by the participants.

Data analysis

The transcribed information was analysed through an inductive system of categories and codes (Huber and Gürtler 2013). To organise, synthesise and correlate the gathered data, the MaxQDA12 software was used. All the information was analysed by pairs of researchers simultaneously. Then, the entire research team carried out a global analysis, where those ideas of doubtful categorization were shared and debated by the whole team. These ideas were discussed in the team until at least 80% of the researchers agreed to include it in a specific category. For the analysis of the information presented in this article, three categories were selected: experiences with disability, positive aspects and difficulties. The analysis of these categories generated new codes for a more thorough study of the information. This further analysis resulted in the system of categories and codes presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories and codes system.

Categories	Codes	Sub-codes
Experiences with disabilities	Types of disabilities	Visual Hearing Physical/ organic Psychic/ psycho-social
Positive aspects of the experiences	Learning	Empathy Understanding diversity Valuing effort and self-improvement
	Classmates	Learning from disability Diversity as an opportunity of social inclusion
	Professional challenge	Learning inclusive strategies Opportunity to improve as an educator
	Feedback from students with disabilities	Recognition of the faculty's work
Difficulties	Lack of training	Insecurity of the faculty Difficulties in inclusion Difficulties communicating with students
	Lack of support	Institutional support Lack of information Support from other faculty members
	Relationships among students	Rejection due to competitiveness Lack of inclusion in the group Excessive attention and interest of the classmates

Ethical considerations

Through an informed participation consent, the participants were informed about the objective, purpose and main elements of this study. This document also guaranteed the right to anonymity and the freedom to leave the study whenever they wished. The participants were also given the right to review all the reports of the results and the

chance to modify or remove any piece of information. The ethical authorisation for this study was granted by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

Results

The results are presented in three sections. Firstly, a brief introduction is given about the types of disabilities of the students who were present in the classrooms of the participants. Then, we analyse the most positive aspects that the participants highlighted from these experiences. Lastly, we present the main difficulties that the faculty identified in their pursuit of achieving the educational and social inclusion of these students.

Experience of the faculty with students with disabilities

All the faculty members who participated in the study had had at least one student with a disability in their classrooms. The participants had experiences with all types (visual, auditory, physical or organic and mental or psycho-social), which shows the great diversity of students present in the university in terms of disability. It is worth highlighting that the disabilities that generated the greatest difficulties for the faculty were visual and mental or psycho-social disabilities, with the latter being the ones which posed the hardest challenge.

The most difficult type is strong psychological problems; I have had quite a few of them and this is something I never know in advance, because nobody tells me about it (Faculty 25).

The challenge of these faculty members consisted in favouring their integration and participation, empathising with them and using resources designed to highlight the abilities of these students, thus fostering their confidence.

I think that it is most important to make these people feel self-confident. There may not be as many opportunities for them in the university context, and I believe that

knowing that there is some person of reference can greatly help their integration and improve their confidence (Faculty 19).

The benefits of the experience

The participants highlighted numerous positive aspects of having students with disabilities in the classroom. Next, we present those benefits that the faculty pointed out about the diversity of university students.

Having students with disabilities in the classroom for a vocational educator: a personal and positive learning

The most relevant and frequently mentioned positive experiences described by the faculty in their work with students with disabilities were related to the possibility of helping and participating in the inclusion of these students, as well as having the chance to be part of their improvement, which made them feel like not only better educators but also better people.

Every day I feel like a better person and educator, and I believe that the other students feel that way too. The thing is that the university must teach human values; knowledge is not enough. People must leave the university as prepared citizens, moving toward the inclusion of every person, and such inclusion begins in each of us (Faculty 22).

The participants highlighted that having a student with a disability in the classroom posed a learning opportunity. They stated that they do not only teach students, but learn from them.

Their different perspective is what contributes the most to my learning. As an educator, I have always believed that everybody learns from everybody, and that the educator also learns from the students as much as, or even more than, the students learn from the educator. With this type of students such learning is

greater. The contribution of their perspective is much greater than that of the regular student [...]. I am especially motivated to know how they see the world (Faculty 42).

Of all the positive characteristics that the participants identified in the students with disabilities, they specially highlighted the inspiration they found in the capacity of these students to work hard and improve themselves, as well as the fact that they did not use the barriers they encountered to victimise themselves or to achieve a special attention:

They are very brave and very eager to thrive and overcome barriers, and none of the students with disabilities I have had in my classroom have ever used those barriers to victimise themselves or to gain special consideration. So, as I said, all the merit goes to them (Faculty 67).

Diversity as an enriching element in the classroom

The faculty indicated that the better attitude of the students with disabilities toward learning was inspirational and positive not only for them but also for the other students.

What I liked the most is that they are people with great interest who always go the extra mile with respect to the rest of the students, and they clearly show that. If they have reached this point in their lives is because they have worked hard for it. So, that great interest they have and their willing to go the extra mile also inspire their classmates (Faculty 10).

The participants also commented that these students helped to create a climate of cooperation and dialogue, which had a very positive impact on the teaching-learning process and on the classroom environment.

What I liked the most was that they almost always imply cooperative work, since they make people around them get together to help these students. So, they create a

climate of conversation and cooperation, which helps everyone to get involved in a project within the subject (Faculty 5).

Furthermore, the presence of students with disabilities enriched the teaching-learning dynamics thanks to the diversity and new approaches they provided, and this was something that benefited the rest of the students:

What I liked the most was the richness they provided to the classroom dynamics, the fact that I had to consider aspects that I did not contemplate before, and the fact that the rest of the classmates learned from that diversity, which made the students with disabilities feel recognised and respected for their disability and valued for the extra effort they made, and I love that (Faculty 89).

Inclusion: a positive and gratifying professional challenge

The participants did not consider these experiences as a difficulty in their work, but as a challenge. Especially in their first experiences, the faculty members explained that they had to search for methods and resources that they had not used before, which helped them to improve as educators, since they had to make adjustments and diversify their teaching.

When I am given the opportunity to have students who need a special attention, I do not see that as a special attention, but as a different way of treating them in order to make them feel that they are included, since it is another way of transmitting those values. So, whereas to other faculty this may be a problem, to me this is an opportunity (Faculty 65).

It is worth highlighting the testimony of Faculty 22, who even improved as a professional thanks to a very complex adaptation for a blind student:

It was my first case, and we were in a subject about learning to read old documents. My colleagues believed it would be impossible for this student to pass,

but I disagreed with them. However, I did not know how to tackle this. One thing is to translate a document to Braille, but a document from the 15th century is a whole different thing, because you have to touch it and look at it. This was my first experience, and I faced it as a challenge. It raised my curiosity to see how a blind person could learn to read old documents, since they cannot read visual letters. I took his hand, for hours, and told him: “A is like this, B is like this...”. So, he memorised the gestures of his hands, which is very difficult. And now, thanks to him, I can read much better, because now I see writing in a different way (Faculty 22).

The participant emphasised that the benefit of this internship is not only for the student with a disability, as faculty members can also learn a lot from the students. He pointed out how, thanks to the student, he had to discover new ways of working, and learned to see actions and skills in his work from a different perspective. Overcoming these challenges and helping these students implied acknowledgement from the latter, which the faculty valued greatly. Such acknowledgement, and even affection, received by the participants was moving, gratifying and motivating, to such an extent that, in many cases, they highlighted it as one of the most positive aspects of the experience.

I think that the feedback we get from them is the most beautiful thing. Look, I get goosebumps when I talk about it. I think so, because they are usually very grateful and sensitive, and I believe it is fundamental for them to see that there is someone who tries to make them feel well in the classroom. The human component comes first (Faculty 9).

Challenges in the way

Although the participants valued the positive aspects of their experience to a greater extent, they also described some difficulties when they were asked about the aspects

they did not like so much. These were problems that resulted from their lack of training and information, communication between the faculty and the students or the lack of support from the institution and from the classmates.

Inclusion is not always simple, especially when there is little or no training

The lack of specific training in matters of inclusive education and disability was a common element in the discourse of most of the participants. Although some of them had undertaken a training course, others pointed out the lack of knowledge and previous experience as a main difficulty.

It rather makes me uneasy, because I do not have specific training to apply this kind of teaching with the students. So, let us say that I try to help them with common sense, but the lack of training makes me worry (Faculty 95).

The participants worried that the lack of knowledge could lead them to an excess of attention toward their students with disabilities. They were aware of the fact that such excessive attention could have a negative impact on these students, thus finding the middle ground posed a difficulty for them.

What I liked the least was that, sometimes, I do not know if I am hurting them, I mean, I bring them up very often in the class to ensure their participation and presence, but I could be interacting too much with them, and they may feel criticised (Faculty 43).

They also mentioned the difficulties to communicate fluidly with their students with disabilities, especially those with auditory or psychological disabilities.

The girl in the wheelchair. I did not know how to communicate with her, or whether or not she understood or heard me. She expressed herself but I did not understand her, so that was my problem (Faculty 3).

Despite this lack of training, the faculty had great interest in offering the students whatever they needed for their integration, and they highlighted that the experience was a source of training, that is, they learned from practice.

Well, the reality is that, in my case, this has changed with the passage of time. Now I have more tools, experience and training to tackle the situation of having a student with a disability in the classroom. At first, this was totally new to me; I did not know how to react. I simply tried to guess or put myself in their shoes to know what they needed (Faculty 58).

The lack of support: the role of the university and faculty colleagues

Facing these attention-to-diversity situations made the participants wish their institutions provided them with the adequate information, tools and training. However, they resorted to their empathy and common sense to solve the problems they encountered.

The lack of training and help from the university. In the case of blind students, we do not know what to do, because our subjects involve drawings projected on the screen. I called the disability services of the university and they told me: “well, you will have to make a change in the curriculum”. So, I ask myself “what adaptation can I make for this person?” (Faculty 80).

When the information does not flow properly from the institution to the faculty, in some cases, the faculty may never realise that they had a student with a disability in their classrooms. Many of the participants detected that some of their students had some type of difficulty. However, when they tried to help them, it was too late.

In some cases, it was too late when I discovered that a certain student had a disability; that is, I was never informed that I was going to have a student with a

disability. I did not like that, because I could have acted accordingly from the beginning, but I did not have such information (Faculty 13).

Another lack of support was identified among faculty colleagues. The participants highlighted cases in which other faculty members did not make the adjustments required by the students with disabilities, which they pointed out as a very common aspect among their colleagues.

I had the case of a girl who made it to fourth year in Psychology, and she had to fight since the first year to get the faculty to adapt the exam for her... Her testimony was so heartbreaking that I went to the vice dean of students and presented the situation to her. How could the university allow the fact that a student had to fight since her first year for a right that was already hers? (Faculty 107).

Classmates as a barrier to inclusion

Lastly, the participants also mentioned, as a negative aspect of their experience, the problems that could arise between their students with disabilities and the rest of the students. Although in many cases the support of the classmates was a very positive aspect for the classroom dynamics, this was not always the case, since situations of rejection occurred, for example, when they had to work in groups.

The most important barrier I encounter is the one posed by their classmates. Sometimes, they can be very competitive, because they are aiming at getting high marks, and so they do not want to be in the same group with students with disabilities. In other cases, if we are playing a game and there is a person with motor difficulties, they are also rejected. So, it is that rejection what I detect as a barrier, which is not always the case; actually, in general, they are quite sympathetic, but sometimes they are reluctant (Faculty 89).

Interestingly, regarding the negative aspects of their experience, the faculty members also mentioned the excessive attention from the other students toward those with disabilities. In some cases, they were driven by a feeling of pity, which was rooted in their prejudices, when interacting with them. This led to an imbalanced relationship that was not entirely positive.

Sometimes there is some kind of misunderstood paternalism that, in the end, comes from prejudice. I understand, it is common, and I do not like it (Faculty 103).

Discussion and conclusions

This study presents the positive aspects and challenges that the participating faculty identified when attending to the needs of students with disabilities. Although numerous studies have shown the limitations that faculty members encounter when they have students with disabilities in their classrooms (Babic and Dowling 2015), few investigations have been focused on the faculty's valuation of diversity as a positive aspect in the classroom.

An important idea can be observed in relation to the areas of knowledge of the participants. Although students with disabilities from all fields of study were contacted to propose inclusive faculty members, we can identify two areas with a lower participation: Engineering and Sciences and Health Sciences. The lower participation in these areas is in line with other studies that have pointed to inclusive practices as more characteristic of the Social Sciences, Education and Humanities (Vasek 2005). However, there is evidence of faculty members in Engineering and Sciences and Health Sciences developing inclusive pedagogy, although it is less common (Ashcroft and Lutfiyya 2013).

Among the positive experiences of the faculty regarding students with disabilities, it is clear that these students showed a great capacity to work hard and improve themselves. In line with Frank McLinden and Douglas (2019), these attitudes can be an example and a source of motivation for the rest of the students. About students with disabilities, the faculty pointed out their enthusiasm and interest for learning, resilience, strength to overcome barriers and determination to continue and complete their university studies (Tee and Cowan 2019).

One of the main findings of this study is that faculty members perceive diversity as a positive aspect rather than as a difficulty. They stated that experiences with students with disabilities promote the development of human values, raising awareness of the diversity that exists in society and of the barriers that people with disabilities are still facing (Moriña and Biagiotti 2021; Tee and Cowan 2019). From the perspective of inclusive pedagogy, diversity is an enriching element. Therefore, the presence of students with disabilities at the university promotes values of empathy, respect and equity, promoting personal growth in classmates and faculty members. In this sense, faculty staff is responsible for promoting this learning. These faculty members are aware that training should not be limited to transmitting knowledge, but that they should also act not only as teachers, but also as agents of inclusion and social justice, as educators (Pantić and Florian 2015). This holistic view of education, beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, is reinforced by their experience with students with disabilities in their classrooms, which influences their commitment to teaching and ultimately has a positive effect on all students (Moriña and Orozco 2020).

Apart from the personal contributions, having students with disabilities in the classroom is also an opportunity of professional development for educators. These situations require the design and use of other teaching methodologies and learning

resources, which forces the faculty to find solutions to individualise their teaching (Frank, McLinden and Douglas 2019). Numerous studies have shown that students with disabilities find significant problems when the faculty do not make adjustments to the teaching and evaluation methods that would allow these students to participate (Elbeheri et al. 2018). In some cases, this is due to the fact that the faculty consider that making reasonable adjustments would pose an advantage for students with disabilities over the rest of the students. However, the inclusive faculty consider these situations as challenges from which to learn and not as obstacles. Although they admit that this implies greater effort in the search for solutions, gratification overcomes the extra effort involved in the process of providing individualised responses, and they see this as a very valuable experience that will help them to attend to future students with disabilities (Becker and Palladino 2016).

Furthermore, the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom is beneficial also for the rest of the students. In most cases, the faculty pointed out the eagerness of the students to help and support their student with a disability as much as they could. Moreover, the direct contact with students with disabilities promotes the development of positive attitudes toward disability and makes everyone question their prejudice and reevaluate stigmatisation (Moriña and Biagiotti 2021). Nevertheless, what is usually perceived as support, in some cases is also identified as a limitation. In previous studies, the opinions of students with disabilities themselves were in line with those of the faculty members of the present study, as they identified their classmates mostly as a fundamental support, but also as a barrier when they showed negative attitudes (López-Gavira and Moriña 2014).

The main difficulty encountered by the faculty was related to the lack of training and information (Black, Weinberg and Brodwin 2014). In previous studies, faculty

members also demanded this type of training, stating that they require further knowledge about didactic strategies to respond to the needs of students with disabilities, about services and resources that the university provides to the faculty and about university regulations regarding disability (Gelbar et al. 2015; Martins, Borges and Gonçalves 2018). Moreover, the scientific community claims that inclusive education will not be a reality in the university until faculty members are trained, informed and sensitised. The consequences of this lack of training can result in a lack of flexible and inclusive teaching methods and resources, the inability to find counselling or a lack of skills to communicate with certain students, which was also highlighted by the participants of the present study (Wray and Houghton 2019). Additionally, faculty members also identify a lack of coordination when the disability support services do not transmit the information about the student to the faculty, or when they do not provide such information in time, thus putting the faculty in a situation in which they do not know how to act (Phillips et al. 2012). Another situation in which they do not receive information is when a student decides not to reveal his/her disability in order to prevent other people from giving him/her a different attention or with the aim of avoiding stigmatisation and prejudice (Kendall 2018).

The lack of training had a greater influence in the first experiences of the faculty with students with disabilities in their classrooms. Authors like Florian (Florian 2014) state that the faculty can learn from such experience and search for resources, strategies and solutions when they do not have the necessary training. Such statement is also demonstrated in the present study, where the participants reported that they learned from their experience and from their own search for solutions, providing an increasingly appropriate educational response (Becker and Palladino 2016).

Based on the difficulties reported by the participants in this study, we can offer a number of recommendations for universities to improve the processes of inclusion of students with disabilities and support for teaching staff. Firstly, institutions should propose more faculty training programs on disability, inclusive teaching, universal design for learning and development of reasonable adjustments for students with disability. Along with this measure, universities can strengthen communication processes between disability support services and teaching staff, so that all faculty members have the necessary information and advice on how to respond to the needs of students with disabilities (Moriña, Perera and Melero, 2019). As has been stated in other studies, faculty members indicate that they are unaware of the resources that the university can offer to help them in this process (Ortiz, Agreda and Colmenero 2018). In addition, it is common for many faculty members to be unaware of their legal obligations in relation to teaching students with disabilities. This last idea, in addition to being addressed in teacher training processes, is related to a lack of sensitivity of both staff and students. Through programmes, seminars and sensitisation actions, universities should help all faculty members and students to develop a more positive view of disability. Initiatives such as involving students with disabilities in these actions to share their experiences often have a very positive impact (Carballo, Morgado and Cortes-Vega 2021). In this sense, good faculty members recommend establishing close links with these students in a way that allows them to know their specific characteristics in order to establish participatory methodologies that benefit the whole group. They value the effort and ability to overcome the difficulties of these students and encourage other colleagues to opt for a more positive view of diversity where it is understood as an opportunity and an enriching element of the classroom (Carballo, Aguirre and López-Gavira, 2021).

The aim of this contribution is to show that there are faculty members with a positive conception of disability, perceiving it as an enriching element of the classroom. We hope that these testimonies serve as an example to other faculty, students and universities, as they show the benefits of diversity, and contribute to creating a more inclusive and humane university.

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