INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

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The present study provides partial findings from research currently underway at the University of Seville: Hurdles & Help as Perceived by University Students Disabilities. (Directed by Dr. Anabel Moriña, project funding: MICINN, I+D+I, ref. EDU 2010-16264). How does the university, as an institution, open doors and/or put hurdles in the way of students with special needs? The present study adopts a qualitative methodological approach. More specifically, biographic-narrative methods are employed to give shape to a series of life stories. A wide range of data gathering techniques were used, including discussion groups, in-depth interviews, classroom observation sessions, photographs, biograms, etc. Data analysis was carried out in two phases. In the first, the focus was on individual life stories. The second phase involved applying comparative data analysis methods to transcriptions of documents generated using aforementioned methods, in line with Miles and Huberman (1994). Maxqda10 data analysis software was the tool of choice. Results will be discussed with the following questions as a backdrop: Is the University *inclusive*? We will analyse institutional barriers and aids, as perceived by the students themselves. Architectural and structural hurdles affecting access to university classrooms, infrastructures and other spaces will be assessed here. Finally, we will take a closer look at student expectations with respect to their conception of the *ideal university*. Is the University an institution that opens or closes its doors to students with disabilities? Based on the analysis in the previous section, a number of conclusions can be reached. The first and foremost is the fact that the students coincided in their opinions, independently of the disability they might have and the courses studied, both when identifying help and barriers. Having said that, the number of barriers identified surpassed the help.

Introduction

Annually, the number of university students with disabilities increases in many countries (Hadjikakou and Hartas, 2008). Some of the questions that help explain this change in the statistics is linked to the development of legislation that recognises this right[1] (Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall, 2004) as well as the implementation of inclusive educational practice, the incorporation of new technologies, the creation of university support services for students with disabilities, etc.

Students with disabilities are a challenge for the university, not only in terms of eliminating architectural barriers, but also with regards to more ample access to the curriculum, teaching, learning and evaluation.

It has been concluded that universities are among the most discriminating institutions, both in terms access for certain students – as is the case of students with disabilities – and in facilitating their continuity in Higher Education so that they do not abandon their educational career prior to earning a degree (Bausela, 2002).

Within this context, an inclusive education could be defined as a model that proposes an educational model in which all students are able to learn, participate and are welcomed as valuable members of the university (Ainscow, 1998; Barton, 2009; Parrilla, 2009; Sapon-Shevin, 2003).

Different studies discuss the barriers and supports universities offer: inaccessible curricular, negative attitudes on behalf of the staff or architectural barriers (e.g., Fuller et al. 2004; Hopkins, 2011; Mullins and Preyde, 2013). As Moswela and Mukhopadhyay (2011) stated, students with disabilities face additional barriers and more challenges than the rest of the student body. Such barriers may be structural, organisational, behavioural and/or attitudinal (with the first two being analysed in this paper). In this regard, the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) allows us to propose the need to restructure the educational environments in such a way that all students

[1]In the case of Spain, students with disabilities are protected by Legislation 4/2007 for universities. In this regard, the law states that the principle of equal opportunity and non-discrimination must be guaranteed. Likewise, university environments must have accessible buildings, facilities and dependencies. More specifically, at the University of Seville, the institution where this study was undertaken, rules were established for the academic benefit of this group, including the need for professors and lecturers to adapt the curriculum and free or low-cost tuition for initial or future registrations (Agreement 8/CG 9-12-08, BOUS January 12, 2009).

are able to participate and learn. It should be understood that university experiences, both for these students and the general student body, are an opportunity for empowerment as they contribute to increasing knowledge, developing social skills, while at the same time maximising opportunities for employment and an independent life (Fuller et al. 2004; Hadjikakou and Hartas, 2008; Hurst, 1996).

The goal of this paper was to analyse the barriers as well as aid that students with disabilities identify in the university classroom and at the university in general.

Method

This study is part of a wider research project financed by Spain's Ministry of Science and Innovation: Barriers and support that students with disabilities identify at the University. This study was carried out by a research team made up of a multi-disciplinary group of University of Seville professors (Educational Science, Economics, Health Sciences and Experimental Sciences).

Three research phases were established, using a bio-graphic-narrative methodology. This study focuses on the first phase research. This phase included two stages. In the first, a number of discussion groups and biographic interviews were established ($N = 44$ students). For the second, data collection stage, 16 students who had already participated provided micro-stories of their lives during their University career.

Instruments used were: lifeline[2] (Lifelines are visual depictions of an individual's life events in chronological order), focus interviews (focus interviews focus on critical incidences in the life of a person) and self-reports (this is a document in which the actual participant in the research narrates, in first person, those aspects that he/she considers most significant for the topic being studied: his/her university life story.)

The study group included students with disabilities enrolled at the University of Seville (US) during the 2009/10 academic year. The sample group ranged between 19 and 59 years of age (Mean = 30.5 years). Twenty-two were men and 22 women. Twenty-five per cent were in their first year, 16% in second, 25% in third, 14% in fourth and 9% in their fifth year of University studies. The rest (11%), were in official master's courses. Sixty-three per cent of them have been at University for 1–5 years, while 37% of them had been studying for more than 5 years. It is important to note that 14% of the students had been studying at the University 10 years or more. Lastly, 38% of them had a physical disability, 15% a mental disability, 36% sensory disability and 11% had difficulties associated with some type of medical problem.

[2]For further information on this technique, you may consult Berens (2011).

For the comparative analysis of the information collected using all of the techniques and participants, a structural analysis was implemented (Riessman, 2008) following Miles and Huberman (1994). An inductive system of categories and codes were included in the MaxQDA10 data analysis program (Table 1).

Results

University architecture: building walls or laying bridges?
One of the problems identified is unawareness and a lack of knowledge on behalf of the teaching staff, when it comes to the rules regulating the academic attention that students with disabilities should be provide with and the subsequent organisational and attitudinal encumbrance they run into. They had problems to access to the University and bureaucracy related to their registration and/or official changes, request scholarships and help relative to their needs.

At the institutional level, one of the most appreciated aids refers to the immediateness and continuity of the online information received about grants, employment offers and training courses. However, there are those who request some type of organisation, department or support to help them during their first academic year, as they feel abandoned and dependent upon the goodwill of the University staff.

Most of the participants concur that the University fails to provide lecturers with information about their students' disability; this is also considered an obstacle because lecturers are unable to plan the class programme with sufficient time in advance.

Lecturers are considered attentive to these students. The fact that they are flexible with the learning rhythm is appreciated, as lecturers facilitate their turning in papers and study material through the University's virtual learning platform, as well as sharing presentations for each topic beforehand so that students can see them on their own laptops, etc.

Related to the subjects, students find help when it comes to changing the time of a class to be able to receive material, access to the virtual learning platform or flexibility to take exams. Nonetheless, students find that the Bologna Plan has not been fully integrated into the organisation and planning of subjects; they explain that it had been reduced the amount of course time and duration, but not the material, in which case, they find themselves saturated with work and study material. Furthermore, they understand that for certain careers, the subjects should not be mandatory, but rather optional and in keeping with their schedule and needs.

With regard to architecture and infrastructures, substantial improvements in spaces have been perceived (hall width and classroom accesses) and the buildings (where there is evidence of repair, refurbishing and adaptations). The stu-

Table 1: System of categories and codes:

Institutional barriers	Institutional	General barriers at the university as an institution, with no specification
	SAD	SAD (University Assistance Service for Disabled Students)
	Architectural and infrastructure	Spaces at the university in general
Institutional assistance	Institutional	General aid/assistance from the university as an institution, with no specification
	SAD	Aid referring to the SAD
	Social	Aid and assistance provided by services and bodies outside the university (for example, associations)
	Architectural and Infrastructure	Architectural aid, infrastructures; spaces at the university in general

dent's experience indicates that the structure of the classrooms does not facilitate learning and the classroom equipment needed for the subject – projectors, blackboards, podium – are not accessible for students with certain disabilities.

Are we opening or closing doors from the Service for Students with Disabilities?

With regards to the SAD, participants expressed their satisfaction with the work performed, as well as the staff attending the needs of students with disabilities. It is perceived that inclusion is less difficult thanks to the help received from this service. Nevertheless, there is dissatisfaction with the limited coverage this service provides as there is only one person at the University of Sevilla to attend all of the students with a disability.

The geographic location of the SAD is isolated due to it is centralised in a single location. Likewise, mobility and building access where the SAD is located are two aspects that confirm it as obstacles to be overcome. Lack of information is considered a barrier in terms of the work performed by the SAD, including the services they offer, the specifications for grants and even their existence.

Of the help provided by the Service, the most appreciated and at the same time most criticised is the student collaborator.[3] The task of the collaborating student is to facilitate the student with disability with access to information, help said student in his/her movements and take notes in class; in many cases, there are comprehension problems.

A final barrier focuses on the rigid bureaucratisation of the SAD when it comes to granting help. Many students with a disability accessing the University for the first time are totally unaware of this service. They are of the opinion that they miss the opportunity to take advantage of the help offered, as for the most part, when they finally receive information on this specific matter, the deadline to request it has concluded.

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[3]The programme *estudiante colaborador* (collaborating student) is an initiative by Proyecto Contigo (With You Project), the objective of which is to create a group of people who are committed to actively participating in disability-related solidarity activities.

Conclusions

Is the University of Seville an institution that opens or closes its doors to students with disability? The participants recognise that on occasion, they have received aid and assistance that have facilitated their inclusion; however, they state that there are so many obstacles that it translates into daily hindrances for their learning process. Similar results were found by Borland and James (1999), Hadjikakou and Hartas (2008), Prowse (2009), Ryan and Struhs, 2004 or Tinklin and Hall (1999).

With regard to the barriers identified at the institutional level, some students denounce that the University should provide their staff with timely information to allow them to adequately respond to the educational needs of their students.

Access to the university is perceived as a complex time, characterised by a lack of information. Currently, there is too much dependence upon the goodwill of the University staff – coinciding with other international studies, such as those by Fuller et al. (2004), Leyser et al. (2000), or Tinklin and Hall (1999).

The student registration process could help lecturers as they would be informed about the needs that their students with a disability. Therefore, it would be a good idea for the professor to have this specific information in advance, something that does not happen at the University of Sevilla.

It is essential to recognise that although advances have been made in terms of the response that the University offers students with disabilities, firm steps must be taken to truly guarantee more inclusive spaces at the universities. Almost all of the participants agreed that having free tuition is very positive for their education. Moreover, one of the services that participants appreciated most is linked to the immediateness and continuity of the information they receive about help, scholarships, job offers and training courses.

Most of the participants point out that the SAD is the main help they obtain from the institution. However, the lack of resources is a hindrance for the effectiveness and

responsiveness of the endeavour. Likewise, both accessibility and the decentralisation of services are two aspects to be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, recognising all of these barriers and a strong commitment to overcome them would facilitate specific proposals for improvement through policies, strategies, processes and programmes that lead to new practices that favour inclusion.

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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