

BETWEEN THE EXPLICIT AND THE IMPLICIT: Inclusive institutional policies in the context of a Faculty of Physical Education in Uruguay

ENTRE LO EXPLÍCITO Y LO IMPLÍCITO: políticas institucionales inclusivas en el contexto de una Facultad de Educación Física de Uruguay

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ABSTRACT

This study examines inclusive institutional policies aimed at students with disabilities in a particular Faculty of Physical Education in Uruguay, with a particular focus on the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sport. A qualitative perspective was adopted, structuring the analysis at three levels: political, structural and procedural, through a documentary review and the description of actions focused on inclusion implemented by various institutional actors. The results reveal that, although some initiatives exist within the framework of inclusive education, they lack adequate support from macro institutional policy, which prevents such actions from being integrated in an effective and sustainable way.

KEYWORDS: Educational policies; Inclusion; Faculty of Physical Education; Disability.

Introduction

Students¹ with disabilities constitute an emerging group in Uruguayan higher education. This reality calls for promoting equitable conditions for this population in university environments, in order to mitigate the existing barriers that hinder and/or limit inclusive education. In this regard, Lissi et al. (2009) propose that a university is more inclusive to the extent that it takes charge of the diversity of its students, without considering it as an obstacle, but as a scenario that complicates and at the same time enriches the teaching and learning processes.

Uruguay has a regulatory framework to ensure that people with disabilities can access the educational system. This is observed in national regulations and in the

¹ "Students" will be used generically from now on to refer to both male and female students.

international regulations to which the country adhered, which places people with disabilities as subjects of law.

In this context, the objective of this study is to explore the institutional policies related to inclusion developed by a particular Faculty of Physical Education in Uruguay. The results will provide an overview of existing initiatives and possible gaps, which will allow the generation of more inclusive educational policies.

Literature Review

The General Education Law, No 18,437, of 2008 and the Comprehensive Protection Law for people with disabilities, No 18,651, of 2010, focus on the right to education of minority groups or those in vulnerable situations and their effective social inclusion. Emphasis is placed on guaranteeing access to education at all levels with the necessary supports; to this end, physical and communication accessibility, and curricular flexibility will be ensured, respecting the diversity of the students.

In turn, the Action Protocol for the inclusion of people with disabilities in educational centers (Decree No 72/017) includes the following four aspects: a) academic support strategies for people with disabilities (curricular adaptation, concepts of universal design, among others); b) guide to performance indicators and good pedagogical and didactic practices; c) accessibility in the facilities, such as furniture, teaching materials, tools and work equipment and d) awareness-raising, information, prevention and training actions for all people who directly or indirectly make up the educational centers (Ministry of Education and Culture, MEC, 2017).

In the 1990s in Uruguay, educational policies linked to the population with disabilities focused fundamentally on the school level and somewhat on secondary education. At that time there was no talk of inclusion, much less of inclusive processes in university education. The focus was on educational integration in regular schools, overcoming the sole focus of special schools for the population with disabilities (Míguez et al., 2017).

It was only in the 21st century, with the holding of the World Education Forum in 2000, that, among the commitments assumed by the participating countries, the notion of inclusive education emerged and the transition from integration to inclusion began (Míguez et al., 2017). Six years later, the United Nations General Assembly proclaims the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), consolidating the notion of inclusive education within the framework of the right to education for all, at all levels of education, including here tertiary and university

education (United Nations Organization, UN, 2006). Uruguay integrates the Convention into its legal system through Law No 18,418 since November 2008.

The gap between the number of students with disabilities who complete primary education and those who continue in higher education is a significant challenge facing the country. The low participation rate in tertiary and/or university studies for this group of students could be attributed to various barriers that make it difficult for them to access and remain in higher education institutions, and which become more evident when the deficiencies are more severe.

Data published in 2014 reveal that, of the 51.2% of students with disabilities who completed regular primary education, only 8.2% continued with tertiary studies (Nuñez, 2014). The absence of updated data that shows the trajectories of these students from initial to higher education represents a significant lack in understanding the educational panorama of the population with disabilities in Uruguay, which makes the planning and execution of educational policies difficult that promote inclusion.

Thinking about disability from higher education implies considering not only the presence of students with disabilities, but also comprehensively addressing the realities faced by teaching, technical, administrative staff and the university community as a whole. In this sense, it is necessary to adopt a broader view that promotes inclusion and guarantees equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their disability status (Méndez et al., 2023).

Inclusive education is a process of continuous reform, in which modifications in the context, approaches, structures and strategies in education are systematically developed, to overcome barriers and provide a participatory and egalitarian learning experience that fits as best as possible to the needs of each person.

This means that it is the educational system that needs to be transformed to address the implicit richness found in student diversity, with modifications in the political, ideological and pedagogical dimensions that impact the ideas and perceptions that are generated about their attention in the context university (Fontana-Hernández & Vargas-Dengo, 2018; Garzón et al., 2016; Lustosa & Ribeiro, 2020).

It is essential to keep in mind the barriers that restrict the full development of individuals (UN, 2006) to understand the complexity of inclusion in higher education. The barriers, whether: a) physical, b) social or c) attitudinal (World Health Organization, WHO, 2001); a) structural, b) environmental or c) attitudinal (French, 2017); a) social, attitudinal and communication, b) architectural and spatial, c) technical and human and d) economic and other supports (Inclusive Virtual Higher Education - Latin America,

ESVI-AL, 2013), are not static, they are molded or modified by the interaction between individuals and their environment (Thomas, 2014). They are the result of socio-historically conditioned collective ideas and actions, with effects on the physical and cultural environment (Pérez-Castro, 2019).

Along these lines, the social approach to disability maintains that the limitations that people experience are not simply the result of their individual characteristics, but of the barriers present in society that can restrict their participation, a reality that is also reflected in the higher education (UN, 2006).

Definitely, the theoretical contributions made by various academics guide inclusive practices, but higher education institutions require genuine commitment and concrete actions to transform into truly inclusive environments. This implies a restructuring not only in terms of policies, but also in the way in which educational and administrative practices and physical and communication accessibility are designed and executed. The active and coordinated participation of all sectors and actors within the institution is essential to achieve this change and students with disabilities are not only recipients of inclusive policies, but also participate in their design and execution (Méndez et al., 2023; Solano, 2021).

Materials and methods

From a qualitative-descriptive perspective (Yuni & Urbano, 2014), this study is developed in the first private Faculty of Physical Education in Uruguay, based in the city of Montevideo and 24 years old, which teaches undergraduate courses, postgraduate and technical. It obtained recognition from the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2000 and since 2001, it has taught the university degree course of Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sports (LEFRYD).

The Bachelor's Degree is taken as a case study, which is a university degree that has a curricular duration of four school years, organized into eight successive semesters and 2,865 contact hours (60-minute classes).

It has a common path that extends until the second semester of the third year. In said semester, students choose to continue in one of the three paths offered, which allows them to build their training flexibly according to their interests and preferences. The available options are: (a) Training and Sports, (b) Physical Activity and Health and (c) Free Time and Recreation. The workload for each journey is similar, guaranteeing a balance in training

To enroll in the LEFRYD, the applicant must have completed secondary education or have a Technical High School degree from the Labor University of Uruguay. If you have completed your secondary studies abroad, you must have the revalidation of said courses, issued by the national authorities (Regulations for the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sports, 2019).

The Faculty does not have systematized indicators that allow it to determine precisely how many students with disabilities have entered the program. The information available comes from more than 20 years of experience at the institution and what has been observed is that the number of students with disabilities is really small.

From the first generation, the intake did not exceed 15 students (without considering learning difficulties and dyslexia, which, although addressed later, are not classified as disabilities). Within this limited group, there are two students with otological conditions, but without hearing disabilities, one student with hearing loss, two students with physical disabilities (one of them acquired the deficiency during the course of the degree and the other had the deficiency in a upper limb) and the rest with psychosocial disabilities.

In the study, a descriptive analysis is carried out by reviewing the actions implemented by the institution in terms of inclusive policies. This review is based on Bachelor's documents, which were selected considering their relevance in relation to the research objective.

The documents analyzed include: Curriculum (2022 update); Regulations for the Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sports (effective as of 2019); digital records of students who requested some type of support prepared by the Assistant Director of the degree and reports submitted by students at the time of admission or during their academic career (student file), which contextualizes key information at the time for the development of the career.

For the process of treatment and analysis of the texts, we sought to identify paragraphs, articles and fragments of notes in the documents (by action or omission) that would allow discussion of institutional policies regarding inclusion (Martínez-Corona et al., 2023).

The results of the study are discussed based on the classification of interaction levels for the implementation of inclusion developed by Bagnato (2017).

Results and discussion

The presentation and discussion of the results is organized into three levels that allow us to understand the policies regarding inclusive education of the Bachelor's Degree. In turn, the levels are supported by what could be called a theoretical level that precedes them, referring to the conceptualization of inclusion in higher education.

Political level

It involves making decisions explicitly oriented towards inclusion, promoting concrete actions for their implementation through the allocation of necessary resources (Bagnato, 2017).

Although in informal conversations the institution has expressed its interest in being inclusive, no evidence of these intentions was found in the documents analyzed. Specifically, no references were found to clear policies or guidelines regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in line with the Convention (CRPD). Article 4 of the Regulations for the Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sports states that "all registration for admission is conditioned according to the admission process and the existence of available places, which will be set by strict academic and methodological criteria..." (IUACJ, 2019, p. 3). The admission process consists of filling out an online form and a personal interview, but no reference is made to potential students with disabilities who intend to enroll.

In this context, the LEFRyD lacks a regulatory framework that complies with the principles of participation, cooperation, equalization of opportunities, non-discrimination and solidarity, essential elements for inclusion in higher education (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Ciantelli et al., 2021).

A notable aspect within the framework of the institutional policy on inclusion, which involved the allocation of budgetary resources and which transcends the Bachelor's Degree, was the incorporation of teaching, research and later extension activities in the field of Physical Education and disability. This process began to be consolidated with the inclusion of a subject in the 2012 LEFRyD Curriculum, and was strengthened a few years later with the implementation of a postgraduate degree in Adapted Physical Activity and Disability.

In addition, a line of research on Physical Education, inclusion and disability was created, as well as an extension project in a state institution where people with disabilities and in conditions of socioeconomic vulnerability reside.

Structural level

It refers to the materiality of the events. It covers the concepts of eliminating physical and communication barriers, encompassed under the principle of universal accessibility (Bagnato, 2017).

Universal accessibility refers to the set of characteristics that an urban environment, building, product, service or means of communication must have to be used in conditions of comfort, safety, equality and autonomy by all people, including those with disabilities (Hernández, 2011). It implies a comprehensive intervention model, in which measures, policies, programs and strategies are combined that transcend the mere elimination of physical barriers (Alonso, 2007).

The Bachelor's degree teaches most of the classes in a building built more than 50 years ago, where, due to the historical context, the principles of universal design were not considered. The institution presents numerous barriers from the point of view of physical accessibility and although various infrastructure works have been carried out over the years, the physical barriers have not been adequately addressed, despite being the most visible and the first that should be addressed (Chiavone et al., 2017).

These barriers were only tangible when a student who was finishing his degree decided to resume his studies after acquiring a physical disability (spinal cord injury) as a result of a traffic accident that led him to move around with a self-propelled wheelchair. At that time, the management of the Bachelor's Degree chose to assign a room on a floor that is accessed by elevator and where the bathrooms had been recently updated and were larger than the rest (however, they did not comply with the regulations established regarding accessibility).

The management's response is a positive step, but the lack of physical accessibility throughout the institution limits the full participation of students with disabilities, creating barriers to their inclusion. The life of a university student is not limited to a classroom; you must be able to use and move around the institution in conditions of comfort, safety and autonomy like the rest of the students.

But the barriers are not limited to the physical (architectural), there are also communication, access to information and attitudinal barriers (Ciantelli et al., 2022; Nozu et al., 2018); the latter will be discussed at the procedural level.

Regarding communication barriers, students who need it can record classes with prior authorization from the teacher in charge. In the case of the student with hearing loss, no barriers were observed in the theoretical classes or in the practical ones. As a strategy, the teachers were located close to the student, who used oral language and did not communicate through sign language.

However, barriers to access to information and communication persist, since the institution does not have easily accessible multimedia devices. Neither the website nor the Moodle platform are accessible, and texts in accessible formats, auditory systems, and other augmentative or alternative modes, means and formats of communication are not available, including easily accessible information and communications technology (CRPD, 2006).

Furthermore, no aspect of communication or access to information is mentioned in the Bachelor's Regulations (2019), nor in the methodological guidelines of the subjects that make up the Study Plan (2022).

Procedural level

It focuses on the elimination of attitudinal barriers, the establishment of protocols, the creation of services or support units, flexibility and curricular adaptation.

The Bachelor's Degree recently developed a general protocol for the inclusion of students with disabilities, but it has not yet been approved by the Dean's Office team (which is why it was not considered as an analysis document). It lists general guidelines for improving the educational transit of people with disabilities in the LEFRyD. Its objective is to make the entry, progress and graduation of all students viable, minimizing obstacles that make effective participation possible, protected by current national regulations.

On the other hand, the support units or services for accompanying students with disabilities during their educational career provide direct support to students (Alonso & Diez, 2008); in addition to preparing them for the transition to the labor market (Cobos & Moreno, 2014; Martins et al., 2021; Moriña & Cotán, 2017).

With a broader vision, other authors mention the cores of accessibility and inclusion in higher education institutions, which enable contact between management, teachers and students, contemplating the development of administrative, pedagogical and psychosocial aspects (Louzada & Martins, 2022; Medrado et al., 2019).

Although the Bachelor's Degree did not allocate economic resources to create a support service, the role of accompanying students with disabilities falls to the Assistant Director. This person establishes links between the different areas of the degree program, coordinators, teachers, and the office of the Registrar with the objective of facilitating the educational transition of the students. The following are selected from among the written records prepared by the Assistant Director:

alternatives are sought with the student to see how they can take the swimming subject, without being in contact with chlorine. You will also talk to the subject teacher to explain the situation"; "... the student comments that it is very difficult for him to create written texts, to develop ideas. He says he feels more confident orally. The situation is discussed and it is suggested that you speak directly with the teachers. But it is also explained that in the last year of the degree you will have to prepare an undergraduate research, which is a written text"; "from the conversation with the student, she wonders if she doesn't see it as more viable to choose some subjects to take, even if she is slower in her degree. It is suggested that you review the preview system. Meanwhile, I am going to raise the situation in Students services office"; "I suggest the student make the proposal to the area coordinator to find solutions together.

The accompaniment of students is initiated by their own motivation, by indicators that arise at the time of admission or when teachers detect a particular situation, and continues for as long as necessary.

Although at the political level there are no elements that account for an inclusive institutional policy in the Bachelor's Degree, at the operational level there is an interest and a lot of receptivity on the part of teachers and coordinators in making curricular adjustments when students request them.

A curricular adaptation is any teaching action that adjusts the subject to the student who needs it. This includes the adaptation of methodological elements, activities, evaluation, or even access to content (Luque-Parra et al., 2014), which give flexibility to the curriculum without harming the quality of the training (Bagnato, 2017) or lowering the educational level.

Among the adaptations made are the exam format, the extension of time to carry out the evaluations and the modification in the structure of the content of the evaluations. These results are similar to findings found by Cobos y Moreno (2014) and Pérez-Castro (2019) in studies carried out on inclusion in Colombian and Mexican higher education.

Small excerpts are presented from the reports submitted by the students that are part of the file and from the digital records prepared by the Assistant Director from the meetings held with the students, which illustrate some curricular adjustments.

Provide more time in the application of written tests and preferably use the multiple choice modality (true or false); "explain the questions asked if they are not understood by the student"; "read the work instructions out loud, checking that they understood them"; "give more time in class so that they can elaborate their ideas when expressing what they know"; "evaluate preferably orally; "allow you to fully complement your written productions with oral presentations"; "look for other methodological alternatives to present the contents.

Although learning difficulties and dyslexia are not always considered by the authors as a type of disability, it is considered appropriate to mention them, since these are the cases that best exemplify the adaptations made based on the characteristics of the students.

Likewise, modifications were made in the course of subjects related to the aquatic environment based on the request of two students. Neither of them could participate in the practical activities carried out in the pool area. Although they had alterations in their ears, it was not hearing impairment or hearing loss. This situation allowed them to take the subjects partially by attending theoretical classes. With one of the students, an attempt was made to carry out practical activities in other water courses (which was allowed by the treating doctor), while, in the case of the other student, the degree specifies that he is not authorized to work in the aquatic environment. This resolution was supported and approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

On this topic, Pérez-Castro (2019) explains that the organization of study plans is a barrier repeatedly pointed out by students with disabilities, but it can become a facilitator if the necessary adjustments are made, such as the examples that were shared previously. Both in the adaptations of the evaluations and in the programs, the importance of flexibility and adaptability in education is highlighted, to guarantee that all students have the opportunity to study in various ways the subjects that make up the curricular mesh of the Degree. In this sense, curricular adaptations contribute in this case to the possibilities of inclusion of students in the career they selected.

In relation to attitudinal barriers, in 2019 the institution planned awareness-raising events on disability and inclusive education aimed at the teaching, non-teaching and student groups. Unfortunately, they only carried out with the students, leaving a large part of the university community out. On this topic and focused on teachers, Luque (2017) explains that to improve work, awareness-raising and training

policies are needed. Despite this, the implementation of training courses aimed at the teaching community has not materialized to date and is a relevant aspect to consider in the near future.

Conclusion

The Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education, Recreation and Sports implements a series of valuable actions to promote the educational trajectories of students with disabilities. However, these initiatives lack inclusive macro-institutional support, which makes their long-term consolidation difficult within the framework of a cultural, political and practical transformation.

The levels at which the discussion of the results is articulated should be in constant interrelation to guarantee the coherence of practices (Bagnato, 2017). However, it is observed that actions at the procedural level are not accompanied by the allocation of economic resources or documented policies.

In fact, the absence of an inclusive educational policy is evident in the regulations of the course and study plan analyzed. In this sense, although the teaching staff, coordinators, Assistant Director and Director show a commitment to inclusion through the actions exemplified, inclusive education cannot be sustained without a clear commitment on the part of the institution. It is necessary to have programs, strategies and funding sources that contribute to consolidating a perspective of inclusion in the institution (Association for Higher Education Access & Disability [AHEAD], 2017), as well as coordinated work at different levels.

The recent design of a general protocol for the inclusion of students with disabilities will certainly help fill the existing documentary gap on inclusive education in the institution.

Finally, the different expressions of human movement are present in the Bachelor's curriculum in all those subjects that have mixed components (theoretical-practical) such as sports, body expression, gymnastics modalities and aquatic activities. This characteristic distinguishes the Bachelor's degree from other university courses where theoretical content predominates. In this sense, it is essential to consider the challenges that curricular flexibility implies in subjects that integrate both theoretical and practical content.

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RESUMEN

Este estudio examina las políticas institucionales inclusivas dirigidas a estudiantes en situación de discapacidad en una Facultad de Educación Física particular en Uruguay, con un enfoque particular en la Licenciatura en Educación Física, Recreación y Deporte. Se adoptó una perspectiva cualitativa, estructurando el análisis en tres niveles: político, estructural y procedimental, mediante una revisión documental y la descripción de las acciones centradas en la inclusión implementadas por diversos actores institucionales. Los resultados revelan que, aunque existen algunas iniciativas en el marco de la educación inclusiva, estas carecen de un respaldo adecuado desde la política macro institucional, lo que impide que dichas acciones se integren de manera efectiva y sostenible.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Políticas educativas; inclusión; Facultad de Educación Física; Discapacidad.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa as políticas institucionais inclusivas dirigidas a estudantes com deficiência numa determinada Faculdade de Educação Física do Uruguai, com especial incidência na Licenciatura em Educação Física, Recreação e Desporto. Adotou-se um enfoque qualitativo, e análise estruturou-se em três níveis: político, estrutural e processual, através de uma revisão documental e da descrição de ações voltadas para a inclusão implementadas por diversos atores institucionais. Os resultados revelam que, embora existam algumas iniciativas no âmbito da educação inclusiva, elas carecem de apoio adequado da política institucional, o que impede que essas ações sejam integradas de forma efetiva e sustentável.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas educacionais; Inclusão; Faculdade de Educação Física; Deficiência.