Barriers to educational inclusion in Mexico.

Barreras de la inclusión educativa en México.

Resumen

En la época contemporánea, numerosos países han logrado avances notables en la búsqueda de fomentar la inclusión dentro de las instituciones educativas. Sin embargo, existen ciertas limitaciones que siguen sin resolverse y requieren una evaluación desde el punto de vista de la educación inclusiva. El objetivo principal de este estudio fue investigar los obstáculos a la educación inclusiva tal como los perciben los docentes en México. La investigación empleó una metodología cualitativa y utilizó un diseño de historia inmersiva. Los datos se recolectaron de una muestra de 59 docentes que laboran en seis instituciones educativas públicas de México, utilizando el método de indagación narrativa y la metodología de grupos focales. Los hallazgos han revelado cinco obstáculos distintos que impiden la implementación de la educación inclusiva: la integración de la comunidad educativa, el logro educativo de los estudiantes, la preparación y habilidades inadecuadas para la educación inclusiva, la resistencia a la diversidad y los desafíos en las transiciones educativas.

Palabras clave: Barreras de inclusión, diversidad educativa, inclusión educativa, barreras a la educación.

Abstract

In contemporary times, numerous countries have achieved notable advancements in the pursuit of fostering inclusivity within educational institutions. Nevertheless, there exist certain constraints that remain unresolved and necessitate assessment from the standpoint of inclusive education. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the obstacles to inclusive education as perceived by teachers in Mexico. The research employed a qualitative methodology and utilised an immersive story design. Data was collected from a sample of 59 instructors working in six public educational institutions in Mexico, using the narrative inquiry method and the focus group methodology. The findings have revealed five distinct obstacles that impede the implementation of inclusive education: the integration of the educational community, students’ educational attainment, inadequate preparation and skills for inclusive education, resistance to diversity, and challenges in educational transitions. In order to ensure the comprehensive inclusion of kids, it is imperative for educators and school administrators to cultivate a heightened understanding of the unique capabilities and requirements of each individual student.

Keywords: Inclusion barriers, educational diversity, educational inclusion, barriers to education.
Introduction

Various countries have made significant progress in making schools more inclusive; in fact, in the Americas, Canada is considered one of the most successful globally in promoting inclusive education (Lord, 2020). However, progress has not been consistent, and old forms of special education persist in many nations (Mouchritsa et al. 2022). Every school day, thousands of children with different abilities experience prejudices and isolation, preventing them from participating in the same learning environment as their classmates (Guenot and Jaber, 2022).

According to Brown et al., (2022), inclusive education can be hindered in various ways. These barriers can be physical, technical, structural, financial, or due to an education provider's inability to offer the necessary adjustments promptly (Lewis and Doorlag, 1999). Pegalajar and Colmenero (2017) argue that different barriers influence the change and evolution towards inclusive education. Over time, various barriers, such as financial, structural, and pedagogical, have been studied (Jia, et al., 2022). Although some of these limitations have been successfully overcome in some institutions, other barriers still persist, hindering educational inclusion (Symeonidou, 2020).

Decades of study on the barriers have not yet resulted in the removal of these obstacles, making research in these areas vital for the field (Ciuffetelli and Conversano, 2021). In Mexico, the National Congress enacted the General Education Law, aiming to effectively guarantee an inclusive approach to education. Additionally, the law promotes that the state ensures the support of the educational community attending to student diversity (Acho, et al., 2021). However, Acho demonstrates that in Mexico, inclusive education has not yet developed as the law dictates. Urcos (2018) shows that teachers are aware that inclusive education allows student development, though it is not efficiently carried out. Martínez (2017) assumes that while steps are being taken to promote inclusive education, barriers still limit genuine inclusion in Mexican institutions.

A teacher's involvement is essential for achieving the desired outcomes in an inclusive learning environment (Brown, et al., 2022). The teacher has a comprehensive view of what happens with their students, capable of observing their behaviors, activities, and how they socialize (Ginja and Chen, 2021). Although there is much evidence highlighting various limitations to educational inclusion, and plans have been implemented to eliminate these limitations, there have been no studies in Latin America that address this issue from the teacher's perspective. For this reason, this study aims to explore the barriers of inclusive education from the perspective of Mexican teachers. The findings of this research are of theoretical importance, as they reveal new angles of this problem that have not been considered in previous studies. Moreover, this study serves as a basis to identify these impediments and develop ways to reduce and eliminate them.

Methods

This research is based on a qualitative approach and an experiential narrative methodological design. The use of this methodology allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences regarding inclusive education in both their current institution and those where they previously worked (Clandinin, 2006). Within this methodology, the narrative inquiry method was used, which allowed participants to recount and relive their experiences.
The study consisted of 6 groups (educational institutions) made up of 59 teachers (between 9 and 10 teachers for each group). The educational institutions belong to the public sector of Ugel south and Ugel north in the city of Mexico.

The focus group method was used for data collection. For this, the teachers from each institution were gathered, and a focus group was conducted for each group of participants at different times and places. The lead researcher presented the objective, which was to identify the barriers to inclusive education. The moderator posed the following base question to guide the group:

a) In Mexico, there is the right to inclusive education; however, evidence shows that it has not yet been fully achieved. What do you believe are the barriers or limitations to educational inclusion?

Through this question, further inquiries were made using a top-down strategy to obtain information. Themes, categories, and theoretical propositions were triangulated. The use of narratives that explored the core values of the participants was pursued as a means to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. The data were examined by eliminating all sources, reading and coding the issues, coding the meanings relevant to the problem as patterns, and finally merging the codes into themes (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The research was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration. The study's preparation was done in partnership with the management of each institution, who also approved participation on behalf of the staff. Based on this, it was especially important to provide full information to each participant in advance, focusing on the right to freely given consent. In this article, participants' comments were made anonymous concerning their names, languages, positions, and other identifying information.

Results and discussion

Following the completion of the exercise conducted within the six groups, the educators of each group identified various obstacles pertaining to inclusive education. A collective total of no less than 20 barriers were identified across all groups, which are prevalent inside each educational institution. Several commonly cited factors included the financial allocation of the school, insufficient backing from administrators, unfavourable attitudes exhibited by certain educators, restricted resources, teacher training, curriculum, and inadequate parental comprehension, among other considerations. Nevertheless, the six groups reached a consensus and devoted more substantial attention to the following five obstacles to inclusion. They assert that these hurdles are presently impeding the progress of inclusive education.

The first barrier that hinders progress in the educational community is the lack of integration.

As per the instructors' perspective, there appears to be a lack of integration within the educational community. This implies that there is a lack of collaborative efforts among parents, teachers, psychologists, social workers, and other relevant stakeholders in order to effectively promote educational inclusion. Frequently, parents attribute the lack of inclusion of their children in the classroom to instructors or the administration. Conversely, teachers express a similar sentiment, positing that parents ought to be more attentive to their children's needs. While many educational institutions make efforts to foster family engagement, their
approach typically falls short since they mostly rely on electronic communication, such as emails, and fail to establish direct physical interactions with parents to address their children's individual requirements (G1, G2, G5, G6). According to Jia et al. (2022), it is argued that within an inclusive educational framework, effective collaboration among special educators, general educators, specialised educational support personnel, and other education professionals is essential in order to adequately address the diverse needs of children. Collaborative efforts foster enhanced educational outcomes and increased engagement among students of all backgrounds. Furthermore, scholarly research suggests that the presence and active involvement of parents of children with disabilities contribute to the enhancement and overall success of a learning community (Clandinin, 2006).

Obstacle 2: The educational attainment of students

The values instilled inside individuals at their place of residence serve as a substantial impediment. The responsibility for fostering inclusion also lies with the students themselves, as they may be the ones who resist accepting their peers, so impeding educational outcomes. The current prevalence of bullying in educational institutions in Peru serves as a clear indication of students' deficiency in discernment and empathy towards their fellow classmates (G1, G3, G4, G6). According to Roberts and Webster (2022), the provision of home-based education by parents contributes to the enhancement of education for all pupils and assumes a pivotal role in the transformation of discriminatory attitudes (Smogorzewska, et al., 2020). Primary school has a crucial role in fostering the development of social connections and interactions, since it establishes the initial platform for a child's initial involvement with the broader society outside of their immediate family unit. According to Jia et al. (2022), the education of pupils in values has been found to contribute to an improvement in mutual regard and understanding.

Barrier 3: Insufficient readiness and competencies for the implementation of inclusive education

Despite the existence of regulations pertaining to inclusive education in Peru, universities in the country are found to be inadequately equipped to effectively implement it. A significant portion of these talents are obtained through practical experience as opposed to adherence to academic protocols. Consequently, certain educators lack the necessary resources to effectively foster inclusive education (G2, G5, G6). Teachers may have a lack of confidence in their instructional efficacy and their capacity to accommodate students with diverse abilities if they do not possess the requisite skills and experience (Brown, et al., 2022). According to Guenot et al. (2022), the aforementioned circumstances may result in increased pressure for certain children to explore alternative educational settings, such as segregated classrooms or resource rooms. The absence of sufficient information and competencies has emerged as a systemic barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Brown, et al., 2022; Smogorzewska, et al., 2020). From a systemic perspective, the presence of educators who hold the belief that they possess insufficient knowledge and abilities to effectively teach diverse children in inclusive classrooms poses a significant barrier to the implementation of inclusive education approaches (Guenot, et al., 2022).
Barrier 4: Resistance towards embracing diversity

The issue of diversity in Peru, encompassing several dimensions such as gender, customs, and races, continues to provide a significant challenge for society. One illustrative instance of an adverse impact on diversity occurred with the influx of Venezuelan migrants into Peru. These individuals, compelled to seek refuge in Peru as a result of challenges faced in their home country, contributed to changes in the demographic makeup of the Peruvian population. A significant portion of students and parents exhibited hesitancy in integrating Venezuelan students into their social circles or educational institutions. Over the course of time, there has been a prevailing disposition characterised by habitual behaviour and a reasonable level of acceptance. Nevertheless, the matter of diversity remains a pressing concern that necessitates further enhancements in order to establish a more inclusive educational environment. One prevalent issue that often goes unnoticed inside educational settings is the lack of willingness to embrace diversity. When students witness customs or behaviors that are not similar to theirs, they distance themselves; they act evasively, and in some cases, insult the other classmate (G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6).

Limitations

While the study provided valuable insights into the barriers of inclusive education in Arequipa, it was limited in its geographical scope, primarily focusing on teacher perspectives and lacking quantitative validation. Future research should broaden its sample across different regions of Peru, integrate the viewpoints of students and parents, and employ quantitative methodologies to gauge the prevalence and severity of the identified barriers. Longitudinal studies might further enhance our understanding of the evolving landscape of inclusive education and the effectiveness of implemented interventions.

Conclusions

The research into inclusive education barriers in Arequipa highlights significant challenges faced by educators and institutions. Chief among these are the lack of holistic community integration, prevailing societal attitudes towards diversity, inadequate teacher preparation, and deep-rooted cultural and value-based obstacles. These barriers not only underscore the complexity of the issue but also emphasize that a multifaceted approach is required to foster genuine inclusivity.

Moving forward, it's essential to view inclusive education as a collective responsibility, where the entire educational community, from policymakers to parents, collaborates effectively. The experiences shared by the teachers serve as both a call to action and a roadmap. Addressing the identified barriers and fostering a culture of acceptance and understanding will be pivotal in truly realizing the promise of inclusive education for all students in Arequipa and, by extension, in broader contexts.

References


Ley nº 30797. Ley que promueve la educación inclusiva, modifica el artículo 52 e incorpora los artículos 19-a y 62-a en la ley 28044, Diario Oficial el Peruano.


Nota del editor: la revista se mantiene neutral con respecto a las reclamaciones jurisdiccionales en los mapas publicados y las afiliaciones institucionales