Systematic review of the experiences and perspectives of inclusive education in Latin America

Revisión sistemática de las experiencias y perspectivas de la educación inclusiva en América Latina

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Autores:

Isabel Cecilia Aguirre Vargas
Universidad Nacional de Educación UNAE
Ciudad: Azogues   País: Ecuador
Correo Institucional: isabel.aguirre@unae.edu.ec
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7583-4693

Karina Maribel Castillo Pinos
Universidad Nacional de Educación UNAE
Ciudad: Azogues   País: Ecuador
Correo Institucional: karina.castillo@unae.edu.ec
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1154-1297

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an essential approach to respond to the needs of children with disabilities who often experience a series of difficulties in accessing quality basic education. Although this is a prevalent problem that is repeated in different countries of the world, mainly in those that are developing, there are also several factors that may affect the experiences and perspectives of those involved may vary depending on the conditions and scenarios in which they interact. In this case, the deployment of policies, the availability of resources and the commitment of the actors of the educational process can be decisive to achieve inclusion, therefore it was necessary to carry out a comparative analysis to identify the similarities and differences in the framework of the approach of this approach. Based on this perspective, this article was carried out with the objective of knowing the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders (teachers, students, relatives of children with disabilities) regarding inclusive education in different Latin American countries. For this purpose, an exploratory and descriptive research methodology was applied under a documentary modality, through which documents were searched in repositories and indexed journals that were related to the topic analyzed, which were subsequently synthesized and discussed to establish the pertinent conclusions. For the selection of sources, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, so that a total of 8 publications were reviewed. The results showed that there is a perception that the measures implemented to promote inclusive education have not been sufficient to eliminate the multiple barriers that still exist, it is also recognized that in many cases there are no clear policies, the resources available to teachers are usually insufficient and training and support is required so that educators can respond satisfactorily to the needs of students with disabilities. On the other hand, although there are specialized institutions to serve these students, it can be counterproductive since it leads to perpetuating the segregation that is currently perceived.

Keywords: Inclusion, inclusive education; educational experiences; systematic review; students with disabilities.
**Resumen**

La educación inclusiva es un enfoque esencial para responder a las necesidades de los niños con discapacidad que a menudo experimentan una serie de dificultades para acceder a una educación básica de calidad. Aunque este es un problema prevalente que se repite en diferentes países del mundo, principalmente en aquellos que se están desarrollando, también hay varios factores que pueden afectar las experiencias y perspectivas de los involucrados pueden variar dependiendo de las condiciones y escenarios en los que interactúan. En este caso, el despliegue de políticas, la disponibilidad de recursos y el compromiso de los actores del proceso educativo pueden ser determinantes para lograr la inclusión, por lo que fue necesario realizar un análisis comparativo para identificar las similitudes y diferencias en el marco del enfoque de este enfoque. A partir de esta perspectiva, este artículo se realizó con el objetivo de conocer las experiencias y perspectivas de los actores (docentes, estudiantes, familiares de niños con discapacidad) con respecto a la educación inclusiva en diferentes países de América Latina. Para ello, se aplicó una metodología de investigación exploratoria y descriptiva bajo una modalidad documental, a través de la cual se buscaron documentos en repositorios y revistas indexadas que se relacionaron con el tema analizado, que posteriormente fueron sintetizados y discutidos para establecer las conclusiones pertinentes. Para la selección de fuentes se aplicaron criterios de inclusión y exclusión, por lo que se revisaron un total de 8 publicaciones. Los resultados mostraron que existe la percepción de que las medidas implementadas para promover la educación inclusiva no han sido suficientes para eliminar las múltiples barreras que aún existen, también se reconoce que en muchos casos no existen políticas claras, los recursos disponibles para los docentes suelen ser insuficientes y se requiere capacitación y apoyo para que los educadores puedan responder satisfactoriamente a las necesidades de los estudiantes con discapacidad.

**Palabras clave:** Inclusión, educación inclusiva; experiencias educativas; revisión sistemática; estudiantes con discapacidades.
INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Children’s Fund, through a study carried out in 2021, estimated that in Latin America and the Caribbean there were approximately 19 million children with disabilities, of which one in ten experiences some type of deprivation of conditions that determine their well-being and consequently can influence their quality of life. According to this report, those belonging to this vulnerable group generally have fewer opportunities to be included in the educational field and to obtain the didactic resources they need for their training. Although there is currently universal agreement among the countries of the region regarding the importance of guaranteeing education for the entire population, children with disabilities continue to be segregated at the time of receiving it; In addition, those who have a disability that restricts their autonomy tend to have greater difficulties in attending an educational institution, which affects that the rate of unschooling is higher among children with disabilities compared to children who may experience other types of difficulties to integrate into the educational system, either due to economic or cultural factors (UNICEF, 2021).

From this perspective, inclusive education involves a series of transformations both in the way in which pedagogical processes are developed and in the attitudes adopted by teachers and students attending different educational institutions, since it requires a behavior based on respect for each of the characteristics that distinguish one individual from another and the recognition of the need to provide the same opportunities for Participation for all. The development of pedagogical processes that place inclusion as a central axis requires the active involvement of various social agents, since not only the integration of people with disabilities at all levels of education is pursued, but also in the different areas of society to overcome
the problems of exclusion and segregation that are still evident (Bert & Alvarado, 2019; Baron, et al., 2020).

It should be noted that inclusion cannot be achieved without first eliminating the barriers that limit access to education, as well as respect for the diversity found in the classrooms must be reflected in society in general. However, it must be considered that it is not enough only to guarantee the reception of students with disabilities to educational institutions, it must also have the necessary support mechanisms to respond to each specific situation. In Ecuador, because of the reforms made to the Constitution of the Republic in 2008, policies were redefined with the main purpose of transforming the education system to ensure the quality of education and eradicate forms of exclusion, which have been diminished over the years. However, there are still challenges to be faced (Quintero, 2020; Clavijo & Bautista, 2020).

Inclusive education must be based on an ideology that excludes any discrimination, that guarantees equal treatment of all people, but also creates equity in the conditions and opportunities in their education. Experience shows that some children drop out of any rigid education system because the system is not prepared to meet their individual learning needs. From this perspective, it may be favorable to identify and recognize recommendations formulated from international experiences associated with the processes of educational inclusion of children with disabilities, so that they can recognize which have been the most effective policies or actions to achieve this purpose (Rivas, 2018; Tárraga, et al., 2021).

Consequently, this article is contextualized within the framework of a systematization of different theoretical contributions in which the experiences and
perspectives of the different stakeholders in the processes of inclusive education in
different countries of the region have been analyzed. Taking into account that there
is a generalized approach through which it seeks to promote the inclusion of people
with disabilities in the educational field, there are also different environmental
factors among other conditions that may influence the results obtained to date to
differ from each other.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Inclusive education is the process of development of general education, which
implies the availability of education for all, in terms of adaptation to the diverse
needs of all children, which ensures access to education for students with
disabilities. Inclusive education seeks to develop a child-centered methodology
recognizing that everyone is an individual with different learning needs; It also
seeks to develop a teaching approach that is more flexible to meet different learning
needs. If teaching and learning become more effective as a result of the changes
introduced by inclusive education, all children would have the possibilities to
access regular education institutions (Escalante et al., 2021; Brunot, 2019;

An important component of the inclusive education model is the creation of a
specially organized barrier-free environment in educational institutions. Some of
the actions that have been implemented to promote this approach include:
developing an education and training system for managers and teachers; organize
various forms of dissemination of the experience of educational institutions on the
introduction of elements of inclusive education and carry out explanatory work on
diversified education; involve associations, municipal administrations among other
agencies to address the problems of change of the current situation; Strengthen interaction and cooperation with all structures of society that deal with inclusive education issues, recognizing the priority of public organizations (Calizaya, 2021). The processes taking place in contemporary education require new approaches to the implementation of tasks related to the education of children with disabilities, the achievement of a new quality of education, which is determined by its fulfillment of the current and future needs of modern society. In this regard, the provision of state guarantees of the availability of resources to guarantee quality education is particularly relevant (Hernández & Samada, 2021).

However, children with disabilities cannot receive quality education in a special education system isolated from the regular education system, so the main problem at the current stage is the inclusion of a child with disabilities in the general educational environment, the education and upbringing of children with disabilities in institutions where they can interact with other students would facilitate their subsequent integration into society, creating a comfortable environment for the student. Each child should have special conditions that give him the opportunity to succeed, receive socialization and develop the skills he needs (Pérez, et al., 2021).

Therefore, an educational institution must implement special educational programs, methods and techniques of work that have proven their effectiveness over a long period of application and special learning conditions. The availability of resources is an essential condition for promoting learning whether through the use of textbooks, teaching aids and teaching and visual materials, methods and techniques, technical means of teaching for collective and individual use, the
media, as well as psychological, medical, social and other services that enable children with disabilities to develop skills and achieve active learning. This implies a transdisciplinary view of inclusive education, which transcends the idea of the impact or importance of a single discipline (Méndez, 2020).

Conditions should be created in educational institutions that ensure the possibility of: achieving the intended results of mastery of the educational program by all students; an adequate formative assessment of the dynamics of the development of life skills of a child with disabilities jointly by all participants in the educational process, especially included in the educational community parents (Delgado, et al., 2021).

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

*Scope and focus*

The research had an exploratory descriptive scope, considering that it sought to identify the experiences and perceptions of teachers, students, managers, among other actors of the educational system with respect to inclusion in different countries of the region. This implied knowing from the contributions made by other authors, how the process of transformation of traditional models towards inclusive education at the basic level has been taking place. Therefore, a documentary modality was applied based on the review of different publications that have been made with respect to the subject analyzed.

We worked with a qualitative approach, considering that given the scope of the study, the information was obtained only from secondary sources, that is, the execution of statistical processing was not required for the presentation of data obtained through the study of primary sources. The research that is framed within this approach allows to collect in-depth information to later contrast it with other
findings obtained from similar studies, in this way it was possible to carry out a
comparative analysis regarding the experiences associated with inclusive
education.

**Search and selection of information sources**

The search for information focused on repositories, google scholar and databases
of indexed journals such as Redalyc, Scielo, Dialnet, among other similar, since
this type of studies are subjected to an evaluation process prior to publication,
which allowed to guarantee the quality of the contributions presented in these
documents and their scientific validity. On the other hand, to ensure that the
selected reference studies were framed in the context of the present research, the
following keywords were used in the search engines: "inclusive education",
"experiences of inclusive education", "perspectives on inclusive education",
"reflections on inclusive education".
Likewise, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, in order to filter the search
and choose only those studies of greatest relevance to the research, the criteria
used are listed below:

Inclusion criteria:

• Scientific articles or reports published in indexed journals or repositories of
  international organizations.
• Research conducted during the last five years.
• Studies carried out under a qualitative or quantitative approach.
• Systematic reviews.
• Research conducted in Latin American countries.

Exclusion criteria:
•Research conducted in English.
•Research conducted in other countries outside the region.
•Research with more than 10 years old.
•Research conducted on a population of university students.
•Publications made on blogs or web pages.
•Undergraduate thesis.

Once the search was carried out through the indicated platforms, a total of 17 articles associated with the subject of study were found. In this case, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied for the selection of the most relevant research, seeking to collect information regarding the experiences of teachers, students and their families and the directors of educational institutions in different countries of the region, considering that in some studies the perception of multiple actors was analyzed. The results are summarized in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Type of applied research</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Experiences analyzed</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Children with disabilities and their families</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis procedure**

The analysis procedure was based on the synthesis of the findings found, for its categorization concepts related to "experiences, attitudes and perspectives" and "inclusive education" were combined on each group of involved. A critical and comparative analysis was carried out under the results and other assumptions that were identified in each of the reviewed studies, from which it was possible to
identify the similarities and differences found. In this way, a discussion was held regarding the subjective experiences of each actor in the educational process and the corresponding conclusions.

RESULTS

For the presentation of the results obtained from the systematic review, the analysis of the experiences of each of those involved was carried out to organize and synthesize the findings found. In this case, although the purpose of the study was to know the reality that is presented in different Latin American countries within the framework of this theme, only studies were found on three countries in the region that met the previously indicated inclusion criteria. This situation highlights the need to carry out complementary research in other Latin American countries, to know how feasible the actions aimed at guaranteeing inclusive education at the basic level that have been implemented in each of them have been.

• Experiences and perspectives of the directors of educational institutions:

In the research carried out by Tárraga, et al., (2021) the perspective of different actors in relation to inclusive education in the Ecuadorian context was analyzed, including the directors of different educational institutions in the city of Cuenca. According to the findings found, even though most Directors consider that the institution they manage meets the necessary inclusion criteria, highlighting the application of policies and the deployment of actions aimed at guaranteeing the inclusion of students with disabilities. The reality observed by the researchers reflected that there are still barriers that have not been eradicated, so that the positive vision possessed by this interest group does not correspond to the real conditions in which this issue is addressed. While it is true that the perceptions of
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each of those involved can be subjective and affected by different biases, the level of abstraction and the knowledge that the Directors of the educational centers have regarding all the components that are required to promote inclusive education can be decisive in the formation of a value judgment in this regard (Seade, et al., 2020).

•Experiences and perspectives of teaching staff:
Studies by Montoya, (2021) analyzed the perception and experiences of teaching staff regarding inclusive education. The findings reflected that most teachers consider that there is a joint responsibility between the different actors of the educational community and parents, who must work collaboratively to form a support network that favors the learning and inclusion of students with disabilities. (León, et al., 2023).

In another of the studies reviewed, it was identified that a large part of the teaching staff considers that educational innovations favor inclusion, in which case they also contribute to the formation of competences that are necessary to adapt to the transformations that are currently taking place in the educational field. The availability of resources is perceived as a fundamental aspect to face the challenges that arise in the process of promoting inclusive education, however in some cases these tools are not available, so educators recognize that there are still aspects that must be improved.

•Experiences and perspectives of students and their families:
Tárraga, et al. (2021), also conducted a study on the perception of families of children with disabilities, in which case they managed to identify that the perceptions of this interest group are less optimistic, since they consider that there is still segregation and exclusion towards students with disabilities in educational
institutions in the city of Cuenca; Similar findings were found in the study by Hurtado, et al. (2023) On the other hand, in the research carried out by Calle, (2021), a case study was carried out to know the experience of a girl with disabilities and her relatives in a city in Colombia, it was identified that she has often been affected by the exclusion of her classmates in the classroom, in turn the parents of the student have the perception that the pedagogical approaches applied intend to be oriented more towards The deficits that it presents instead of focusing on potentiating their skills, that is to say that the applied teaching models are not adapted to respond to their needs (Bert & Alvarado, 2019).

In the research conducted by Hurtado, et al., the perceptions of students regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities were analyzed, which reflected a high rate of acceptance and respect for the differences that each of the individuals may present. However, field evaluations also found that some adopt negative and exclusionary behaviors toward students with disabilities, suggesting that problems associated with discrimination and rejection still prevail. From the perception and experiences of students with disabilities, it was possible to identify that there are those who feel excluded and consider that Colombian educational institutions are not inclusive enough.

**DISCUSSION**

From the systematization of the selected articles in which the experiences of the different stakeholders in relation to inclusive education were analyzed, divergences were found regarding the way in which each of the actors of the educational process perceives inclusion in basic education institutions in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. On the one hand, although only one study was found in which the position of the
directors was evaluated, the results reflected that unlike the teaching staff, students with disabilities and parents, they show a positive perception regarding the progress made in the framework of inclusion. In many cases these opinions do not fit with the reality of schools in which there are still various aspects that must be improved to ensure the integral inclusion of students with disabilities.

On the other hand, teachers adopt a more realistic position in recognizing that there are challenges that must be addressed and highlight the importance of working together to achieve inclusion in the educational field. Regarding students with disabilities and their families, it was identified that in most of the cases reviewed there is a perception that educational institutions in the countries analyzed are not inclusive enough, the prevalence of problems related to exclusion, discrimination and rejection experienced by many students with disabilities was identified. This situation shows that in addition to educational resources and the application of pedagogical approaches that adapt to the specific needs of children with disabilities, actions must be applied to eradicate destructive behaviors that contribute to segregation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Through the development of this article, it was identified that despite the importance of knowing the current conditions under which inclusive education is promoted in the different countries of the region and the perceptions of those involved, there are still information gaps regarding the situation in certain Latin American countries. In this sense, it is considered important to know the experiences of the actors involved, since from this it is possible to adopt measures that allow to cope with the unfavorable conditions that would be limiting full access to quality education for children with disabilities.
On the other hand, it is important to highlight that similarities were found regarding the experiences of children with disabilities and their families. This suggests that although actions have been implemented to promote inclusive education, barriers and negative behaviors that prevent ensuring inclusion still prevail. Most of the actions are focused on the pedagogical context, however, the importance of educating students without disabilities and the community in general is left aside, in relation to the respect and appreciation that should exist towards people with disabilities, both in the educational field and in any other environment in which they operate.

REFERENCES.


**Conflict of interest**

The author indicates that this research has no conflict of interest.