

Educar para la inclusión: percepciones del estudiantado universitario

Educating for inclusion: perceptions of university students

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RESUMEN

El presente estudio analiza las creencias, actitudes y experiencias de estudiantes de primer curso de los grados en Pedagogía y Educación Infantil de la Universidad de Sevilla en torno a la inclusión educativa, tratando de identificar relaciones entre ellas y sus expectativas como profesionales inclusivos. La investigación pretende identificar los niveles de inclusión en experiencias previas del alumnado; conocer sus expectativas profesionales; analizar las relaciones entre las experiencias previas, sus expectativas docentes y examinar si existen diferencias significativas según la titulación respecto a la inclusión educativa. La metodología empleada presenta un enfoque cuantitativo aplicado a una muestra de 285 estudiantes de la US. Los resultados muestran una predisposición positiva hacia la inclusión, con tensiones entre los ideales inclusivos y concepciones tradicionales que asocian la homogeneidad con una mayor facilidad para la enseñanza. Los estudiantes que vivieron situaciones de exclusión tienden a reproducir creencias menos inclusivas en su proyección profesional y quienes experimentaron apoyo y colaboración reflejan actitudes acordes con el modelo inclusivo.

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of first-year students enrolled in the degrees of Pedagogy and Early Childhood Education at the University of Seville regarding educational inclusion, seeking to identify relationships between these dimensions and their expectations as future inclusive professionals. The research objectives were to identify the levels of inclusion in students, educational experiences; explore their professional expectations; analyse the relationships between prior experiences and their teaching expectations regarding educational inclusion; and examine whether there are significant differences as a function of the degree programme. The methodological design follows a quantitative applied to a sample of 285 students from the US. The results reveal a positive predisposition toward inclusion, with tensions between inclusive ideals and traditional conceptions that associate homogeneity with greater ease of teaching. The students who experienced exclusion tend to reproduce less inclusive beliefs in their professional outlook, whereas those who encountered support and collaboration exhibit attitudes aligned with the inclusive model.

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PALABRAS CLAVES

educación inclusiva, evaluación de conocimientos anteriores, competencia profesional, creencia, educación superior

KEYWORDS

inclusive education, prior learning assessment, skill requirements, belief, higher education



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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of educational inclusion began to consolidate during the 1980s as a replacement for the term integration, which had previously been used within the educational field (Shaeffer, 2008). Unlike integration, which primarily focused on addressing the needs of students with special educational needs, inclusion proposes a broader approach aimed at ensuring access, participation, and achievement for all learners, particularly those at risk of social or educational exclusion (Ekins, 2017; Dainez y Smolka, 2019; Isaacs y Mansilla, 2014). Likewise, inclusion should not be restricted to students requiring specific educational support, but rather encompass all individuals, regardless of their cultural, biological, or social background, so that everyone can develop under equal conditions (Ainscow, 2020; Echeita, 2017). In recent years, educational inclusion has become an aspiration for many educational institutions, constituting a *sine qua non* condition for education to genuinely contribute to the development of more just, democratic, and supportive societies (Echeita y Duk, 2016). Educational inclusion, understood as an educational response to the diversity present in classrooms from a positive perspective, seeks to promote the participation of all students and members of the educational community by acknowledging their achievements and removing barriers across all educational agents (Plancarte, 2017).

From a pedagogical and psycho-pedagogical perspective, this implies recognising the diversity derived from the social background, individual characteristics, motivations, abilities, and interests of students, and orienting practice toward equity in educational, personal, social, and occupational opportunities, while valuing the uniqueness of each learner, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, or psycho-emotional background. Within this paradigm, related concepts emerge, such as school for all, integrated employment, diversity, and multiculturalism, all of which entail redesigning more open and equitable educational environments that transcend the traditional model based on homogeneity, adopting instead a vision that recognises and values learner heterogeneity.

UNESCO has broadened the notion of inclusion, indicating that it should not only address students with disabilities in mainstream settings but also respond to the diversity of all learners, understood as the eradication of marginalisation and the exclusion of disadvantaged groups from access to education (UNESCO, 2015). Subsequent studies have emphasised that education should facilitate the learning of those requiring additional support and methodological adaptations in order to participate and achieve the intended learning outcomes within a given educational programme (UNESCO, 2011). The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011) highlights that this approach must be grounded in quality education, supported by cooperative work, collective action, and the promotion of learning groups within the classroom.

In the same vein, Booth y Ainscow (2005) define inclusion as the set of processes aimed at increasing students' participation in the culture, curricula, and communities of schools. Today, educational inclusion is understood as a political-pedagogical project that promotes equity and participation, and therefore requires the transformation of educators' attitudes, beliefs, and practices, as well as of institutional organisation and values (Ainscow, 2001, 2020 y 2022). This involves embracing diversity in all its forms (genetic, sociocultural, affective, and intellectual) and committing to guaranteeing the right to education and effective participation within a common environment.

From this perspective, the inclusive school pursues three strategic objectives:

- To recognise and respect individual differences.
- To ensure the quality of teaching and learning processes.
- To develop attitudes that foster interaction and social participation.

However, for inclusion to have a real impact, it must not be confined solely to the classroom but must also extend to the social, occupational, and political spheres. Otherwise, the inclusive experience will remain limited to the academic domain without generating broader social change (Ortiz y Zacarías, 2020). Achieving this requires systemic transformations involving students, families, teachers, and communities (Simón y Giné, 2016; Messiou, 2019; Camacho-Vallejo et al., 2025). The importance of promoting inclusive education lies in evidence showing that educational contexts characterised by diversity yield better outcomes in terms of attitudes, cognitive development, and civic behaviour, thereby fostering responsibility and socially constructive dispositions (Sobrero et al., 2014, p.154). Consequently, inclusion must operate as a transversal principle guiding all educational policies (including curriculum design, assessment, teacher training, and funding) rather than as an isolated initiative. This commitment is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015), which establishes the aim of ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In the university context, educational inclusion likewise represents both an ethical and a practical challenge, demanding improvements in teaching systems and the implementation of mechanisms that guarantee the full participation of all students (Granja, 2021; Sutton, Kearney y Ashton, 2023; Macías-Cedeño et al., 2024). This requires defining the role of educators in constructing such learning and teaching conditions. To move toward full inclusion in higher education, it is necessary to act across three interdependent domains (Vera et al., 2022):

- Inclusive culture, understood as the set of shared values, attitudes, and beliefs.
- Inclusive policies, expressed through institutional regulations and strategies.
- Inclusive practices, articulated through diversified methodologies and adapted support mechanisms.

The present study focuses on exploring the beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and actions of prospective teachers in order to understand their expectations regarding inclusion in their future professional practice. Following Pozo (2006), such beliefs may act either, as facilitators or barriers to the development of inclusive educational processes. For our research group, the inclusive model remains a key reference in our professional work, underscoring the importance of examining this topic within initial teacher education. In order for this model to function effectively, it is essential to consider factors such as beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward inclusion, as these have been the subject of numerous studies in recent years (Ainscow et al., 2006; Cardona-Moltó et al., 2020; Polo, Fernández y Díaz, 2011).

Among the main indicators of successful inclusive practices are the attitudes of members of the educational community toward others, toward collaborative work, toward students with special educational needs, and toward inclusion itself. Therefore, teachers' attitudes play a crucial role in the process of educational inclusion (Idol, 2006; Granada et al., 2013). Indeed, for school inclusion to be implemented effectively and satisfactorily, legislation alone is insufficient; teachers' attitudes are fundamental to preventing them from becoming major barriers for their students (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2001). On the other hand, the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was proposed in Spanish legislation in 2020 with Organic Law 3/2020, but its implementation, slow as with most educational innovations, has meant that the majority of our students have not experienced its effects. Therefore, the benefits of UDL, such as the creation of accessible and equitable learning environments, the facilitation of inclusion for students with diverse abilities and learning styles, and the increase in student motivation and engagement at different stages, as described by Montoya et al. (2024), should be included in the prior training of future teachers, thus avoiding some of the difficulties in its practical application, such as the lack of teacher training (Montoya et al., 2024).

The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify the levels of inclusion perceived in students' previous (pre-university) educational experiences.
2. To explore their professional expectations regarding inclusion.
3. To analyse the relationships between previous experiences and their teaching expectations concerning educational inclusion.
4. To examine whether there are significant differences according to degree programme.

2. METHODOLOGY

A non-experimental, quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, and relational design was employed (Montero y León, 2007). An ad hoc instrument was developed for this study, consisting of two sections, in addition to demographic questions. The first section included eight items referring to pre-university educational experiences, while the second section comprised six items focused on professional expectations. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from complete disagreement to complete agreement. The 14-item scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .625.

2.1. Sample

The convenience sample consisted of 285 first-year students enrolled in the Degrees in Pedagogy (N = 117; 41.1%) and Early Childhood Education (N = 168; 58.9%) at the University of Seville, with a mean age of 20.4 years. The slightly higher average age is attributable to the diversity of access pathways to the degree programmes: 25.3% entered directly from upper secondary education (Baccalaureate), 23.5% had previously completed a Higher Vocational Training programme, 21.4% were admitted through the entrance examination for students over 25 years of age, and 16.8% through the examination for those over 45 (13% did not respond). The gender distribution mirrors that typically found in Education Sciences programmes, with 94% women, 5.6% men, and 4% identifying as non-binary.

2.2. Data analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted initially. After applying the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, the data were found not to follow a normal distribution (p greater than α), thus non-parametric tests (Spearman's rho) were used for correlation analyses. To determine whether there were significant differences according to degree programme and gender, Levene's test for equality of variances was applied. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d and Hedges' g , respectively, given the unequal sample sizes.

3. RESULTS

Objective 1: To identify levels of inclusion in students' pre-university experiences.

Regarding their perceptions of classroom groups, 50% of students considered that there were no classmates who hindered the class pace, while 34.3% believed there were and 14.7% were indifferent. A similar proportion (49.8%) disagreed that learning is easier in classes where all students are at the same level, whereas 22.5% agreed and 27.7% remained neutral. Responses were more decisive regarding the statement "Learning is easier when there are no classmates who require more attention from the teacher", with 69.8% disagreeing and only 9.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Concerning perceptions of faculty members, 46.3% believed that the faculty did not know how to adapt instruction to individual student characteristics, while 35.5% thought they did and 18.2% expressed no clear opinion.

In terms of preferences, experiences, and feelings, 23.5% reported that they only liked to work in groups with their friends, whereas 42.1% disagreed and 34.4% were indifferent, which was the item with the highest central response. A total of 63.8% students had at some point felt lost in class or unable to keep up, compared to 22.8% who said they did not have this feeling and 13.3% who were indifferent. The items with the highest percentages were those related to peer support: 89.1% had helped classmates and 79.3% had requested help, with low levels of indeterminate responses (7.7% and 14%, respectively) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive analysis: block 1

Pre-university experience	Mean	SD	Percentages				
			CD	D	I	A	CA
1 There were students in my class who slowed down the pace	2.63	1.367	29.5	21.4	14.7	25.6	8.8
2 I only like working in groups with my friends	2.72	1.073	14.0	28.1	34.4	18.6	4.9
3 It is easier to learn in classes where everyone is at the same level	2.61	1.183	19.3	30.5	27.7	14.4	8.1
4 Learning is easier when there are no classmates who need more attention from the teacher	2.09	1.013	33.0	36.8	20.4	7.7	2.1
5 In my experience, teachers know how to adapt instruction to each student's characteristics	2.82	1.236	15.8	30.5	18.2	26.7	8.8
6 I have never felt lost in class; I have been able to keep up	2.41	1.200	24.2	39.6	13.3	16.5	6.3
7 I have usually helped classmates in class	4.29	.772	.7	2.5	7.7	44.9	44.2
8 I have usually asked classmates for help in class	3.99	.868	1.4	5.3	14.0	51.9	27.4

Notes: CD: completely disagree; D: disagree; I: indifferent; A: agree; and CA: completely agree.

Objective 2: To explore professional expectations regarding inclusion.

In this section, very high levels of agreement were observed concerning expectations and self-perceived ability to ensure that all students feel comfortable and participate equitably in class (95.5%), as well as to promote the optimal development of all learners regardless of their characteristics (91.9%). Levels of disagreement or indifference were minimal.

Opinions were more divided regarding the idea that teaching is easier in homogeneous classes: 30.6% agreed, 36.5% disagreed, and 33% were indifferent. Concerning the likelihood of seeking help from a support teacher, 58.6% reported they would do so, 22.5% said they would not, and 18.9% were uncertain.

Regarding professional requirements, 95.5% believed they would need strategies and resources to address diversity, while 34.4% thought a positive attitude alone would suffice; 18.2% were uncertain, and nearly half (47.3%) disagreed that attitude alone was sufficient (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive analysis: block 2

In my future professional practice, I believe that...	M	SD	CD	Percentages			
				D	I	A	CA
1 I will be able to make all my students feel comfortable and participate equitably	4.39	.677	.7	1.4	2.5	48.8	46.7
2 I will be able to foster the optimal development of every student, regardless of their characteristics	4.23	.678	.4	2.1	5.6	57.9	34.0
3 It will be easier to work with homogeneous classes (similar characteristics)	2.89	1.138	13.0	23.5	33.0	22.5	8.1
4 If I have a child with difficulties in class, I will ask the Support Teacher for help so that they can teach them better	3.55	1.164	4.6	17.9	18.9	35.1	23.5
5 I will need to acquire strategies and resources to address diversity	4.65	.631	.4	1.1	3.2	24.6	70.9
6 Having a good attitude will be sufficient to attend to differences in my classroom	2.91	1.332	14.0	33.3	18.2	16.5	17.9

Notes: CD: completely disagree; D: disagree; I: indifferent; A: agree; and CA: completely agree.

Objective 3: To analyse relationships between prior experiences and teaching expectations regarding educational inclusion.

To complete the characterisation of the respondents and to determine whether their experiences as students are related to their expectations as teachers, correlation analyses were conducted: firstly among the items of the first block (Table 3), and subsequently between the items of the first and second blocks (these latter correlations are not presented in tables but are reported in the results). Finally, the relationships among the items in the second block are shown (Table 4).

Table 3

Correlations of block 1: previous experiences

			1E	2E	3E	4E	5E	6E	7E	8E
Spearman's Rho	1E	Corr. Coef.		.162**	.293**	.360**	.030	-.073	.077	.141*
		Sig. (bilateral)		.006	.000	.000	.618	.219	.197	.017
	2E	Corr. Coef.	.162**		.187**	.157**	-.046	.048	-.070	-.026
		Sig. (bilateral)	.006		.002	.008	.438	.421	.240	.666
	3E	Corr. Coef.	.293**	.187**		.526**	.146*	-.003	.022	-.036
		Sig. (bilateral)	.000	.002		.000	.014	.953	.716	.545
	4E	Corr. Coef.	.360**	.157**	.526**		.095	-.013	-.029	.067
		Sig. (bilateral)	.000	.008	.000		.108	.826	.620	.263
	5E	Corr. Coef.	.030	-.046	.146*	.095		.243**	.113	.145*
		Sig. (bilateral)	.618	.438	.014	.108		.000	.058	.014
	6E	Corr. Coef.	-.073	.048	-.003	-.013	.243**		.194**	-.062
		Sig. (bilateral)	.219	.421	.953	.826	.000		.001	.301
	7E	Corr. Coef.	.077	-.070	.022	-.029	.113	.194**		.264**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.197	.240	.716	.620	.058	.001		.000
	8E	Corr. Coef.	.141*	-.026	-.036	.067	.145*	-.062	.264**	
		Sig. (bilateral)	.017	.666	.545	.263	.014	.301	.000	

Notes: **. Correlation is significant at 0.01 (bilateral). *. Correlation is significant at 0.05 (bilateral).

Significant correlations were found, with a 99% confidence level, between students who considered that there were classmates in their lessons who slowed down the pace (item 1E) and those who only liked to work with their group of friends (item 2E) ($p = .006$), who believed it was easier to learn in classes where everyone had the same level (item 3E) ($p = .000$), and who stated that learning was better when there were no classmates requiring extra attention from the teacher (item 4E) ($p = .000$). Moreover, the latter statement correlated, with a 95% confidence level, with the belief that these same students usually asked classmates for help in class (item 8E) ($p = .017$). In their future teaching practice, this item correlated with item 3F "It will be easier to work with homogeneous classes (students with similar characteristics)", with $d = .010$, $p = .153$. All correlations were positive, low, or very low. A logical pattern emerges: as students agree more strongly that there were peers who hindered the pace of their lessons, they also tend to view homogeneous classes (those not requiring additional attention from teachers and preferably composed of their own friends) as easier learning environments. Conversely, agreement with the need to seek help also increases in parallel.

Additionally, significant positive but very low correlations were found, at the 99% confidence level, between students who only liked to work with their group of friends (item 2E) and those who believed it was easier to learn in

classes where all students had the same level (item 3E) ($p = .002$) and, consequently, where no classmates required more attention from the teacher (item 4E) ($p = .008$). In their projected teaching practice, this variable correlated with item 3F “It will be easier to work with homogeneous classes (students with similar characteristics)”, with a 95% level of significance ($d = .131$, $p = .027$). This relationship is consistent, indicating that those who prefer homogeneous groups and, within them, restrict collaboration to their circle of friends, also consider teaching easier in classrooms with similar characteristics. Conversely, those who do not prefer working exclusively with friends are less likely to regard homogeneous settings as facilitating either learning or teaching.

Likewise, moderate correlations were found between item 3E “It is easier to learn in classes where everyone has the same level” and item 4E “Learning is better when there are no classmates who require more attention from the teacher”, with a significance level of .01 ($p = .000$). Those who believed that learning was easier in classes of the same level also agreed, although weakly, with item 5E “Teachers know how to adapt their teaching to each student’s characteristics” ($p = .014$, 95% confidence). In their future professional outlook, item 3E correlated weakly or very weakly with item 3F “It will be easier to work with homogeneous classes” ($d = .249$, $p = .000$), item 4F “If there is a pupil with difficulties, I will ask the support teacher to teach them better” ($d = .163$, $p = .006$, 99% confidence), and item 6F “Having a positive attitude will be enough to attend to differences in my classroom” ($d = .134$, $p = .024$, 95% confidence).

Item 4E “Learning is better when there are no classmates who need more attention from the teacher” did not correlate with any item within its block but did show significant correlations with item 3F “It will be easier to work with homogeneous classes” ($d = .351$, $p = .000$), item 4F “If there is a pupil with difficulties, I will ask the support teacher to teach them better” ($d = .214$, $p = .000$, 99% confidence), and item 6F “Having a positive attitude will be enough to attend to differences in my classroom” ($d = .134$, $p = .024$).

These findings suggest that students with exclusionary experiences may carry such attitudes into their future teaching, preferring homogeneous classes, delegating responsibility for pupils with difficulties to specialist teachers, and assuming that attitude alone suffices to address diversity. Conversely, those without such experiences do not display exclusionary expectations in their professional future.

Students who observed that teachers were able to adapt their teaching to each student’s characteristics (item 5E) correlated with those who had never felt lost in class and were able to keep up with the pace (item 6E) ($p = .000$, 99% confidence), as well as with those who reported usually asking peers for help in class (item 8E) ($p = .014$, 95% confidence). These correlations were low and very low, respectively. Similar patterns were found with item 1F “I will be able to ensure that all my pupils feel comfortable in class and participate equitably” ($r = .135$, $p = .023$, 95% significance). This indicates a positive relationship: agreement across these statements reflects an inclusive professional outlook, while disagreement aligns with a less inclusive orientation. However, a contradiction emerges with item 4F (“If there is a pupil with difficulties, I will ask the support teacher to teach them better”) ($d = .157$, $p = .008$) and item 6F “Having a positive attitude will be enough to attend to differences in my classroom” ($d = .223$, $p = .000$), both at the 99% confidence level. It is noteworthy that inclusive teaching capacity appears directly related to seeking support from specialist teachers, possibly due to the fact that participants understood such support as complementary and not exclusionary.

Students who reported never feeling lost in class and being able to keep up with the pace (item 6E) also correlated positively, albeit very weakly, with those who usually helped their classmates (item 7E) ($p = .001$, 99% confidence). Regarding their future teaching, they showed a very low correlation with item 1F “I will be able to ensure that all my pupils feel comfortable in class and participate equitably” ($d = .126$, $p = .034$, 95% significance). Students who

feel capable of following the learning rhythm, seeking and offering help among peers, tend to conceive learning as a collaborative process and, also view themselves as future inclusive professionals.

Students who reported usually helping their classmates (item 7E) also tended to seek help from others (item 8E), with a low but significant correlation ($p = .000$, 99% confidence). In their professional expectations, they saw themselves as able to make all pupils feel comfortable and participate equitably (item 1F) ($d = .287$, $p = .000$), to achieve the maximum development of every student regardless of individual characteristics (item 2F) ($d = .239$, $p = .000$), and to recognise the need to acquire strategies and resources to address diversity (item 5F) ($d = .193$, $p = .001$). Although all correlations were low or very low, they outline a profile of students more aligned with inclusive professional attitudes: those who conceive learning as a shared construction of knowledge and who are aware of the need for continuous training show more inclusive expectations, whereas disagreement with these items corresponds to more exclusionary attitudes.

Finally, item 8E “I have usually asked classmates for help in class” correlated with item 1F “I will be able to ensure that all my pupils feel comfortable in class and participate equitably” ($d = .171$, $p = .004$), item 2F “I will be able to achieve the maximum development of every student, regardless of their characteristics” ($d = .191$, $p = .001$, 99% significance), and item 5F “I will need to acquire strategies and resources to address diversity” ($d = .126$, $p = .034$, 95% significance). These correlations reinforce the previous findings: students who are willing to seek help are likewise inclined to promote equitable participation among all pupils (recognising that doing so requires training) and vice versa.

Table 4

Correlations of block 2: future expectations as professionals

			1F	2F	3F	4F	5F	6F
Spearman's Rho	1F	Corr Coef.		.636**	-.036	.055	.160**	.061
		Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.540	.357	.007	.303
	2F	Corr Coef.	.636**		-.041	.075	.175**	.084
		Sig. (bilateral)	.000		.492	.207	.003	.158
	3F	Corr Coef.	-.036	-.041		.252**	.086	.113
		Sig. (bilateral)	.540	.492		.000	.148	.058
	4F	Corr Coef.	.055	.075	.252**		.179**	.182**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.357	.207	.000		.002	.002
	5F	Corr Coef.	.160**	.175**	.086	.179**		-.020
		Sig. (bilateral)	.007	.003	.148	.002		.740
	6F	Corr Coef.	.061	.084	.113	.182**	-.020	
		Sig. (bilateral)	.303	.158	.058	.002	.740	

Note: **. The correlation is significant at 0.01 (bilateral).

In this second block of the questionnaire, referring to future expectations as inclusive professionals, correlations were also found among several variables. Students who believed they would be able to ensure that all their pupils feel comfortable in class and participate equitably (*item 1F*) showed a strong correlation, with a 99% level of significance ($p = .000$), with those who thought they would be able to achieve the maximum development of each and every student, regardless of individual characteristics (*item 2F*). At the same significance level, but with a very low correlation ($p = .007$), they also agreed that they would need to acquire new strategies and resources to address diversity (*item 5F*). Likewise, *item 2F* “I will be able to achieve the maximum development of every pupil, regardless of their characteristics” correlated with *item 5F* “I will need to acquire strategies and resources to address diversity” ($p = .007$, 99% significance), consistent with the previous relationship. These results indicate that students who believe they will be capable of becoming inclusive professionals (supporting the development of each pupil and promoting participation) are also aware of the challenges involved and the need for training to acquire strategies and resources to make inclusion possible. Those who agree with these statements demonstrate a genuine commitment to making inclusion a reality in their professional future, recognising that it requires substantial technical knowledge, unlike those who disagree.

On the other hand, a low correlation was found between *item 3F* “It will be easier to work with homogeneous classes” and *item 4F* “If there is a pupil with difficulties, I will ask the support teacher to teach them better”, with 99% significance level ($p = .000$). The analyses suggest that students who agree with both statements represent a professional profile that views diversity as a difficulty beyond their responsibility, tending to delegate the education of pupils with difficulties to specialist teachers. These students have yet to conceive diversity as an asset, or its attention as a shared responsibility, in contrast with those who disagree.

Students who stated they would seek help from specialist teachers when having pupils with difficulties in their classrooms (*item 4F*) also showed low correlations with *item 5F* “I will need to acquire strategies and resources to address diversity” and *item 6F* “Having a positive attitude will be enough to address differences in my classroom”, both with $p = .002$. Respondents who agreed with these statements appeared to lack clarity regarding the respective roles of attitude and training in addressing diversity, or else considered both to be equally determinant, alongside reliance on specialist support. This suggests a certain sense of incompetence, as they assume that specialists would teach those pupils better, unlike respondents who expressed disagreement.

Objective 4: To examine whether there are significant differences according to degree programme.

After conducting mean difference tests to identify whether differences existed based on degree programme, only two statistically significant differences were found in the first block. For *item 1E* “There were students in my class who slowed down the pace”, with a significance level of $p = .031$, Early Childhood Education students reported a slightly higher mean ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.420$) than Pedagogy students ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.293$). This difference represents a Cohen’s d of -0.022 and a very small effect size (-0.01), favouring the Pedagogy group in terms of inclusive orientation.

In the second block, statistically significant differences were found only for *item 5F* “I will need to acquire strategies and resources to address diversity” ($p = .013$), with mean scores of 4.59 ($SD = .733$) in Pedagogy and 4.68 ($SD = .549$) in Early Childhood Education. The difference represents a very small effect size (-0.069) and a d value of -0.138 , suggesting that Early Childhood Education students perceive a slightly greater need for training than Pedagogy students, although the difference is minimal.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding *Objective 1*, on students' experiences prior to entering university, almost 70% reject the belief that learning improves when there are no classmates requiring greater teacher attention. Half of the students reported not having peers who hindered the pace of the class, and nearly half denied that learning in diverse environments was more difficult, reflecting generally positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, high percentages of indecision were still observed. Moreover, exclusive preferences regarding group formation and a high degree of indifference were also noted. Finally, more than 75% of the sample reported having given or received help from classmates during this stage, suggesting a certain level of empathy and collaborative capacity.

With respect to *Objective 2*, concerning students' professional expectations regarding inclusion, almost all respondents expressed high expectations for their future as inclusive teachers. They felt capable of fostering a classroom climate in which all students feel comfortable, participate equitably, and achieve their maximum development regardless of individual characteristics, while recognising the need for specific training to achieve this. Nevertheless, beliefs remained divided regarding classroom heterogeneity and its perceived difficulty or ease, with many still failing to view diversity as a resource. Almost 60% stated they would seek assistance from support teachers, revealing a lack of understanding that inclusion is a shared responsibility, not one reserved for specialists.

Concerning *Objective 3*, which analysed the relationships between prior experiences and teaching expectations regarding educational inclusion, students with more exclusionary experiences and beliefs (preferring homogeneous groups, working mainly with their friends, etc.) also tended to consider it easier to work in homogeneous classes and to rely on specialist teachers. In contrast, those with more inclusive experiences (having observed teachers adapt instruction to each student's characteristics, having given and received help) believed they would be capable of adapting their teaching to classroom diversity in their future professional practice, ensuring the optimal development of every student and acknowledging the need to acquire strategies and resources for diversity management.

Lastly, for *Objective 4*, examining whether there were significant differences by degree programme, Pedagogy students displayed less exclusionary beliefs than Early Childhood Education students regarding learning in heterogeneous classes, whereas the latter perceived a slightly greater need for training, although differences between the two groups were minimal.

Overall, the findings indicate that educational inclusion remains both an ethical and practical challenge. Students' perceptions are ambivalent: they recognise inclusion as a right and an opportunity, yet also perceive it as a complex process lacking sufficient support. While their attitudes are generally favourable, traditional conceptions persist, revealing tensions between the inclusive ideal and the traditional belief that homogeneity facilitates learning, a notion that contradicts the inclusive paradigm. Despite advances, significant challenges and exclusionary practices persist (Moriña y Carballo, 2020).

Initial teacher education plays a decisive role, as it makes explicit the need for resources and strategies. However, a proportion of students still consider a "positive attitude" sufficient. This highlights the urgency of solid technical training that goes beyond goodwill: a positive attitude alone is not enough; technical knowledge and concrete pedagogical strategies are required. Teacher training is therefore a key factor for advancing inclusion (Debrand y Salzberg, 2005; Lombardi et al., 2013), as insufficient preparation in issues related to diversity can become a barrier for students.

Lledó (2009) and Lledó and Arnáiz (2010) also confirmed the training needs of both classroom and specialist

teachers to support students from an inclusive perspective. These authors noted a widespread belief among both groups that classroom teachers lack sufficient preparation to meet the needs of students with special educational requirements, and they call for stronger initial training from Faculties of Education. Prior experiences carry significant weight, as they shape future expectations and practices concerning inclusion: those who experienced exclusionary environments tend to replicate less inclusive models in their professional outlook, whereas experiences of collaboration and mutual support foster pedagogical visions more aligned with the inclusive model (Granada et al., 2013).

Peer support constitutes a key pedagogical resource. The high frequency of collaboration among students is a positive indicator and a resource to be further developed during university training and in future professional practice.

Differences between degree programmes are minimal, although Pedagogy students exhibit slightly more inclusive attitudes. Overall, the results highlight the shared need to strengthen an inclusive culture across all branches of teacher education. Inclusion transcends the school environment, demanding cultural, social, and institutional commitment to guarantee participation and equity. The university training period should therefore be used to transform students' experiences and beliefs.

To this end, it is proposed that:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and methodological diversification be incorporated into study plans.
- More spaces for critical reflection on prior experiences and their influence on inclusive conceptions be developed.
- Inclusion be integrated as a cross-cutting axis throughout all teacher education curricula.
- An inclusive university culture be promoted through projects, campaigns, and activities involving the entire academic community.

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