

Inclusive Education and Higher Education from the Viewpoint of Students with Functional Diversity

Educación Inclusiva y Enseñanza Superior desde la mirada de estudiantes con Diversidad Funcional

Educação inclusiva e ensino superior a partir da perspectiva dos estudantes com diversidade funcional

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ABSTRACT. This article presents the results of a research that sought to analyze the facilitators and obstacles that three students with functional diversity identified during their career in the university, namely how faculty Members had been able to contribute to their social and educational inclusion. From the biographical-narrative method was intended to give voice to people with functional diversity. For the collection of information, a variety of qualitative instruments were used: biographical interviews, focused interviews, semi-structured interviews, photographs, self-reports, lifeline, researcher's field diary, Emails and the technique "A day in the life of ..." A narrative analysis was carried out that allowed to construct three histories of life. In particular, the results of this work, through the narratives of Marper, Andrés and Rafa, focus on analyzing how faculty contributed or not to the inclusion of students and what were the main barriers that identify referred to it. Among the main conclusions, it should be pointed out that some teachers were not sufficiently trained to respond to the needs of the students or because the necessary adjustments were not made for student learning and participation.

Key words:
Higher
Education,
Functional
Diversity,
Inclusion,
Faculty
Members, Life
History.

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RESUMEN. Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación en la que se analizaron los facilitadores y obstáculos que tres estudiantes con diversidad funcional identificaron durante su trayectoria en la universidad. Concretamente, se estudió cómo el profesorado había podido contribuir o no a la inclusión social y educativa. A partir del método biográfico-narrativo se pretendía dar voz a personas con diversidad funcional. Para la recogida de información se hizo uso de diversos instrumentos cualitativos: entrevistas biográficas, entrevistas focalizadas, entrevistas semiestructuradas, fotografías, autoinformes, línea de vida, diario de campo de la investigadora, notas de campo de la investigadora, observaciones, correos electrónicos y la técnica “Un día en la vida de...”. Se llevó a cabo un análisis narrativo que permitió construir tres historias de vida. En concreto, los resultados de este trabajo, a través de las narraciones de Marper, Andrés y Rafa, se centran en analizar cómo el profesorado contribuía o no a la inclusión de los estudiantes y cuáles eran las principales barreras que identificaban referidas a éste. Entre las principales conclusiones cabe resaltar cómo algunos docentes no estaban suficientemente formados para responder a las necesidades de los estudiantes o cómo, en ocasiones, no se realizaban los ajustes necesarios para el aprendizaje y participación de los estudiantes.

**Palabras
claves:**
Enseñanza
Superior,
Diversidad
Funcional,
Inclusión,
Profesorado,
Historia de
Vida.

RESUMO. Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma pesquisa onde foram analisados os facilitadores e os obstáculos que três estudantes com diversidade funcional identificaram durante a sua carreira na universidade, especificamente na forma como os professores tinham sido capazes de contribuir ou não a sua inclusão social e educacional. A partir do método biográfico-narrativo pretendeu-se dar voz às pessoas com diversidade funcional. Para a coleta de informações utilizou-se vários instrumentos qualitativos: entrevistas biográficas, entrevistas focalizadas, entrevistas semi-estruturadas, fotografias, auto-relatórios, linha de tempo, diário de campo da pesquisadora, notas de campo da pesquisadora, observações, e-mails e a técnica “um dia na vida de ...”. Foi realizada uma análise narrativa que permitiu construir três histórias de vida. Especificamente, os resultados deste trabalho, através das narrações de Marper, Andrew e Rafa, concentram-se em analisar como os professores contribuíram ou não na inclusão dos estudantes e quais foram as principais barreiras identificadas em relação a este. Entre as principais conclusões destaca como alguns professores não foram suficientemente treinados para atender as necessidades dos estudantes ou como, às vezes, não foram feitos os ajustes necessários para a aprendizagem e participação dos alunos.

**Palavras-
chave:**
ensino
superior,
diversidade
funcional,
inclusão,
professorado,
história de
vida.

Access to university by people with functional diversity is a legally recognized right (Yssel, Pak & Beilke, 2016). For example, progress has been made in Spain in this sense with the Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013 (Official State Gazette [BOE], 2013) about the rights of persons with functional diversity and their social inclusion. In it, it is established that inclusive education should be part of the integral

attention process of persons with functional diversity, imparted with the resources, support, and adjustments considered necessary. Also, Organic Law 4/2007 of Universities (BOE, 2007) states the imperative of responding to the needs and demands of this collective as well as adopting measures to guarantee, among other aspects, the adaptation of access tests, their continuity in university studies, fee exemption, increase of scholarships and study help, creation of accessible architectural spaces, adaptation of training aspects, and full integration of students (Aguirre & Miguel, 2011; Rodríguez & Álvarez, 2014; Vander Kloet, 2015).

Although regulations exist, the legal vacuum in their implementation is recognized, since, on occasion, practices in the university do not promote inclusive processes. Different works that give students a voice echo this reality and denounce that students have to go through an obstacle course which, often, generates an early drop out of university (Fuller, Bradley, & Healey, 2004; Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Mullins & Pride, 2013; Novo, Muñoz, & Calvo, 2011; Shaw, 2009; Strauss & Sales, 2010). These research works share the idea that, although higher education institutions offer an opportunity and can empower those students, there is still a long way to go for this institution to be inclusive (Alcain, & Medina, 2017; Dalmau, Llinares, & Sala, 2013; Denhart, 2008; Fuller et al., 2004; Gibson, 2012; Hopkins, 2011; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). In fact, as Thomas (2016) has concluded, it is not enough to guarantee access; policies and plans are also required to achieve continuation and success in university studies.

However, it should be recognized that, gradually, there is a greater commitment by universities to walk towards inclusion. In this context, initiatives should have a triple commitment: generation of critical knowledge, professional development, and social intervention (Rodríguez & Álvarez, 2014; Salvador, 2003) demanding compliance with quality standards, where the attention to students with functional diversity and the response to their needs and demands is one of them (Alonso & Díez, 2008).

In this sense, currently educational and inclusion policies applied in Spain impact in a satisfactory and positive manner on the university training of students with functional diversity (Cerrillo, Izuzquiza, & Egido, 2013). However, there are still problems with access to education and staying in the classrooms during their academic years that limits their learning process (Foreman, Dempsey, Robinson, & Manning, 2001; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010).

Works such as the ones by Castro de Paz, Llorca, Álvarez, and Álvarez (2006) or González, Guzmán, Sánchez, and González (2006), highlight curricular barriers as the main obstacle. For the inclusion of students, reasonable adjustments may be needed, such as using diverse methodologies, resources allowing access to contents, extra time, or adaptation of evaluation tests. For all of this, faculty training is considered essential. In fact, this training is convenient, since as Doktor (2010) and Ruiz Hidalgo (2015) indicate, the faculty members can help to improve the learning experience of the student body. However, there are works like the ones by Borland and James (1999), Fuller, Healey, Bradley, and Hall (2005), Hopkins (2011), Moriña (2017a), and Moriña, Cortés, and Molina (2015), that conclude that the faculty is the main barrier identified by students, emphasizing training of the faculty as the conducting vehicle to offer an empathetic, open, and flexible attitude towards the students' needs.

In this sense, rigid and non-inclusive curricula (Hopkins, 2011) hinder access to content and participation in university classrooms. Authors such as Fuller et al., (2005) or Wessel, Jones, Blanch, and Markle (2015), propound that this situation causes students to have difficulties achieving the of curricular modifications: material given in advance, recording of classes, adaptation of exams, diverse methodologies, etc. These inconveniences, on many occasions, are associated with the idea that carrying out curricular modifications would position students with functional diversity in a situation of advantage over their classmates or that this would suppose lowering the curricular level of the subject and, therefore, the no-acquisition of its outcomes (Riddell, Tinklin, & Wilson, 2005; Tinklin, Riddell, & Wilson, 2004).

These works, definitely, show the existing gap between policies and the real practice by presenting significant evidence that impede, on occasion, participation in learning of people with functional diversity. For that, many studies propose the need for faculty training to improve the teaching-learning strategies facing the student body (Debrand & Salzberg, 2005; Doughty & Allan, 2008; Healey, Fuller, Bradley, & Hall, 2006; Leyser & Greenberger, 2008; Murray, Lombardi, & Wren, 2011; Teachability, 2002). In Spain's case, for example, the training proposals by Escandell et al. (2008), Guasch and Hernández (2011) or Moriña (in press) stand out. These authors propose the creation of specific training material to train faculty members on diverse and accessible methodological approaches. However, it is still necessary to propose more training processes as well as offer more resources to guarantee their development.

For all this, we consider that inclusive education should respond to diversity, being an issue that needs to be considered in the agendas of all universities as a point of debate, sensitization, and training (Novo et al., 2011). In fact, it is necessary and indispensable for the faculty to have the opportunity and the space to train and give educational responses to diversity.

Definitely, the main purpose of this article is to present the narratives of three students referring to their experiences in the university and how the faculty has contributed or not to their social and educational inclusion.

METHOD

Design

The results presented in this article are linked to the doctoral thesis (Cotán, 2015), developed within the framework of a research project financed by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of Spain (ref. EDU2010-16264)¹. The purpose was to identify, from the perspective of students with functional diversity, the barriers and help found throughout their university years. Specifically, in this doctoral thesis we analyze the obstacles, facilitators, and proposals for improvement that three students identified in their university training, referred, in particular, to the faculty.

¹ Project I+D+I "Barriers and help that disabled students identify at the University" (Ref. Edu2010-16264), financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and under the direction of Dr. Anabel Moriña Díez.

The research methodology we have used has been biographical-narrative (Moriña, 2017b). The main reason we have selected this type of research is that it allows making the voices of the students heard in the university context. In this research, we are not only interested in the construction of new knowledge, but also in being able to unveil and offer the thoughts and experiences of students with functional diversity, as well as the circumstances that condition and shape the university educational environment..

Context

This research was carried out in a public university in southern Spain. Through the narratives arising from life stories, we will try to learn and analyze the different university contexts in which students are immersed. In any case, the study of these university contexts offers an explanation of the culture that surrounds the students, carrying out a deconstruction of reality based on their experiences, reinterpreting the events that happened over the course of their experience.

Specifically, the university contexts in which we are focused and that surrounded the narratives were the School of Law, Information Technology, and Journalism. From this and their contextualized narratives, we tried to find information about how the facility, its characteristics, location, communication and transportation lines, etc. and everything related to the institution and university classrooms influence the students' experiences, identifying them as obstacles or facilitators.

Participants

We accessed to participants through the Disabled Students Service of the University in which the study took place. We based the selection of participants on the procedure established by Goetz and LeCompte (1988) called "criteria-based selection," where the selection is previously determined by established criteria. In this sense and following Patton (1987) and Pujadas (2002), we carried out a selective sampling, paying attention to relevant features, criteria and characteristics: students with functional diversity, accessibility, participation, availability to participate, relevance, willingness, and interest or need.

A total of three students included in a sample of 44 students that participated in the aforementioned research participated in this research. The three participants were pursuing different study programs: Law, Engineering, and Journalism. Regarding their stay in the university the first student had been 10 years in the university, the second one six and the third, four.

The first informant, who we are giving a fictitious name for reasons of anonymity and data protection², is Marper, with cerebral palsy. At the time the data was collected, this participant was 38 years old; her stay in the university had been 11 years (from the 2001/2002 term to the 2012/2013 term), and was taking the final courses to obtain a Degree in Law.

With regards to the second participant, Andrés, at the time the data was collected was 27 years old and had started studying Engineering³, under the plan of 97, in 2006, changing years later to the

² Following the ethical principles by which we abide at all times during the investigation, the names used in this work have been chosen by the participants.

³ According to the ethical criteria of our research and at Andrés's express request, this research does not show his real name or any data that could identify him.

current Degree. His stay in the university had been six years and was in the second year. He has a visual functional diversity.

Finally, the last participant with whom we maintained contact in order to write down his in-depth life history is Rafa. He is 20 years old and is affected by Duchenne muscular dystrophy. He was in the second term for a Degree in Journalism, and his academic term of access is 2011/2012, for a total of four years in the university.

Table 1
Profile of Participants

Name	Age	Degree	Term	Years in university	Diversity
Marper	38	D. Law	4º	10	Physical (Cerebral Palsy)
Andrés	27	D. Engineering	2º	6	Visual (Blindness)
Rafa	20	D. Journalism	1º/2º	4	(Duchenne muscular dystrophy)

Instruments for data collection

Data collection in this research work has been based on several qualitative techniques: biographical interviews, focused interviews, semi-structured interviews, photographs, self-reporting, lifeline, field diary of the researcher, field notes of the researcher, observations, electronic mail, and the technique “One day in the life of...”

Procedure

To access the sample and taking into account the Law for Data Protection II *Royal Decree 1720/2007*, of December 21st, approving the Regulations for the Development of Organic Law 15/1999, of December 13th, for personal data protection, the first step was to contact (through a telephone interview) with the responsible for the Disabled Service and explain our research project and the purpose of the contact.

Once this step was completed, this person interceded to request student participation, sending an email with an attached presentation letter from the research group BUDA⁴, where the whole research was explained and their participation requested.

Data analysis was carried out in parallel to data collection: since we started transcribing and analyzing the information collected from the moment we accessed the field. From this progressive work, we proposed new topics or contents to continue going deeper into the life histories. Following

⁴ BUDA is the Spanish acronym of the research group coordinated by Dr. Anabel Moriña whose meaning is Barriers, University, Disability and Help [Barreras, Universidad, Discapacidad y Ayuda].

Bertaux (2005), we consider that data analysis is not something that arises only in the moment of realization (Moriña, 2017b), but from the start of our work we have questioned, oriented and reflected ourselves, for which we can affirm that during data collection, the analysis has contributed information about the development of the project: difficulties, improvement aspects, topics to be treated, etc.

In this research, we have carried out two types of analysis: narrative and structural (Bolívar, Domingo, & Fernández, 2001). However, narrative analysis has been exclusively utilized for this article. The preparation and interpretation of the history started by exploring and getting to know the in-depth stories, looking for various perspectives and understandings to organize the story around central themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The presentation of the history data focused on essential and important moments for the protagonists, interpreting the meaning of the facts, relating them to the social, cultural, and political context in which it developed.

Ethical Considerations

From the point of view of our research work and, specifically, from the biographical-narrative research, we propose certain ethical considerations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Opazo, 2011; Pacheco, 2012; Richaud, 2007; Sikes, 2006; Stutchbury & Fox, 2009; Vain, 2011) that we should take into account during data collection and subsequent publication. For this, all participants had access to an informed consent to become part of the study. They were informed about the procedure and about how the compiled information would be treated.

In this study, the students had access to the compiled information being able to modify or suppress any if they deemed it appropriate. Also, they were informed that in case they did not want to continue with the study once it started, their data would not be taken into consideration for the analysis and later be destroyed and not published.

RESULTS

In this section, we present the histories obtained from the three participants in the research: Marper, Andrés, and Rafa. Thus, following the chronological order in which we made first contact, we present in the first place Marper's life history, marked by her tireless and self-improving spirit. Secondly, Andrés' life history, centered mainly on the barriers existing in the university context. In third place, Rafa's life history, who went from being a shy and reserved student to becoming a journalist with a promising future.

Marper's Life History

My name is Marper. Although born in Seville, I lived for several years in Gibraltar, Algeciras. But as they say, one always returns to its homeland, so I currently reside in Seville, my hometown. I am 38 years old and am studying the last year of the Law Degree.

It has not been an easy road; my problems started when I was taking the BUP [Spanish acronym for "Multipurpose Unified Baccaulaureate"] and the COU [Spanish acronym for "University Orientation

Course”]. In these courses, teachers would not give me the necessary help and, because I had not finished the Baccalaureate, I wasn't able to take the Selectivity test in the University Access Test [PAU, per its acronym in Spanish] until I turned 25. I passed the test so I fulfilled my dream: be admitted to the university.

I started studying in the 2001/2002 term in the School of Law. My beginnings were not easy, particularly if you have problems like the ones I had in the previous courses (BUP and COU). I did not know how to study or organize myself, I did not make friends in the university, had trouble with some faculty members... But I also had many satisfactions, the most important? The opportunity to study Law.

However, the main barriers I have encountered have been the teaching methodologies and syllabus. Most faculty members limit themselves to lecturing in class and following a book. In truth, I do not learn with a book, it is so much material... I don't know how to study with it... On occasion, not even the faculty members understand the book.

There are faculty members that get to class one day, They give instructions on an activity that has to be done and, once the class period is up, they collect it and take it with them. I do not have enough time and have to finish them at home. Frankly, I feel rather bad because I have to take time at home to finish it while my classmates don't. They have that time to study.

From my point of view, classes are boring because I arrive and the professor is lecturing, my classmates are copying and I cannot keep up with the dictation because I am paying attention to the professor, but sincerely, it is somewhat boring... It is always the same, no dynamic from the faculty, classes are very monotonous but, in the end, you have no choice and get used to it.

In any case, I have almost no relationship with professors, just strictly what has to do with the classes, except for one who has helped me do my *practicum*. There are professors and then there are professors! For example, I had a professor who refused to give me a multiple choice type exam because she said that would be discrimination with regards to my classmates. Discrimination! I did not want less material or an easier exam; I just wanted a multiple choice type exam! In the end, after one year asking for the adaptation and with great effort, I got her to do it... But it took me a lot of effort!

I have also encountered another professor, how could I define him? He is a person who lacks empathy, at least that's how I see it. I had to go twice to his office to speak to him because I did not understand well his classes or material and he told me to my face that he could not understand what I was saying when I talked to him. He did not try to understand me neither, so, I stayed with the same doubts with which I walked into his office and with a gigantic indignation.

I believe faculty members should be evaluated or trained in pedagogy. From my point of view, I consider that would help them respond to the needs of people with functional diversity, but I may be wrong...

But this has only happened with a few professors; truly, most of them help me. Maybe the fault has been mine for not talking with the professors at the beginning of the term; I have not told them about my

needs, but, OK, I have gone to them during the term and the general response has been very positive: *“Do not worry, I will give you a multiple choice test and will give you the time you need.”* The truth is I am very happy with the faculty and, I believe, they are happy with me too; the only thing is that there are some professors who are more problematic than others, but that’s the same with everything else.

However, I believe professors should be trained to be able to attend to functional diversity, I do not know if in Pedagogy or other field, but they should be trained. Classes should be enhanced, they do not have to be lectures, and they should favor communication in class. There is only one direction for communication: what the professor instructs students to do.

Activities should be adapted to needs. I want to finish activities at the same time as my classmates or find alternative mechanisms to be able to do presentations. And, of course, foster comradeship among the students in the center.

Andrés’ Life History

I will start telling about me. My name is Andrés, I am a 27 year old man, born in a town in the northern area of Seville, although I currently reside in the central zone of this beautiful city, in an apartment I share with my brother. I come from a large family, I am the seventh child of eight. My family means everything to me.

I started going to the university in 2006, the study level I had worked so hard and striven for. However, not everything was light in my path; there have also been shadows, quite complicated to pass.

My beginning was chaotic; starting with the Selectivity test as I had problems with the resources they offered me, which caused me major concentration problems and nervousness. I passed it in September and started university at the end of the selection phase, in November.

However, I found courses for which I needed to be present in class 80% of the time and at the time I started that was already an impossible mission. I gave up on that term. I took the second term with more strength but was also a disaster: I only passed one course, which guaranteed me staying in school.

In this term, my first problems started with the course that has marked me throughout my school career. The professor would only impart class with handwritten slides through the projector, an inaccessible tool for me and, although I requested his notes to study them, all I found was a negative response from him.

One professor even said that he did not understand why I was there or that I was not good for studying for that Degree. However, I did all I could to pass: I went to tutoring with two classmates but it was useless; well yes, he divided our group and approved those he seemed fit.

From my point of view, I can say that the main obstacles I have encountered are the professors. They did not do adaptations well and, therefore, no responses have been given to my demands or my needs. Specially, I have to highlight my experience with the problematic department: since the first year, not only was I denied access to the information but also my stay in school was questioned.

Extra time for exams has always been a battle. A battle that is absurd because from a legal standpoint it is stipulated that if there is one person with functional diversity and he has a problem, this should be taken care of according to the problem, not according to a pre-established standard or pattern. So, we always have the battle of one term, two terms, three terms... The problem is that with one term it would not allow me the best time to finish due to the visual complexity of the materials to consult.

Also, I have had to request the adaptation of the material to other professors and they have even told me that I was in a position of advantage with respect to my classmates; even other professors that did not recognize functional diversity as such and told me that they were not going to do more work than what I deserved.

On certain occasions, I have felt discriminated by the professors' attitudes; they have not facilitated the adequate tools or resources, for example, relief images. Consequently, my situation was not one of advantage over my classmates but just the opposite; I was at a disadvantage because they were not giving me the opportunity of being able to access the information and the exam material: if I cannot see the material of the exam, I cannot do it.

Or, for example, the class presentations with the aid of Power Point. It is a graphical and visual tool which is very hard to access and if, on top of it, the professor declines to facilitate it to you, things get even worse. He is discriminating you because he is not respecting the right to information which we all have.

The truth is that this situation, in particular moments, has discouraged and devastated me, because when you hear, almost daily, things like *"go someplace else to study," "leave Erasmus and run from the problem," or "change careers,"* that is not the type of response that one thinks is going to get when entering university. And, even though most faculty members motivate you and tell you *"keep going forward and you will succeed,"* negative comments wind up standing out more than positive ones.

Another one of the problems which I have encountered are the syllabus. I do not believe they have adapted to the stipulations of the Bologna Plan one hundred percent. We have gone from the ideal of this Plan, with an ideal methodology in which I can rest when I need it and organize myself as I want to, to completing exams within a set timeframe, mandatory practices, and group works. It has evolved from having a lot of work and being able to organize it as one wishes and be able to do it, more or less, with a more open field of action, to having more work with mandatory attendance that afterwards is not valued and with a stricter follow-up.

What I need is more freedom to organize my time. And, in reality, it works; if you can organize it your own way, you end up getting it all done. That is the problem: we have gone from a very flexible model that was being tested to a very rigid model that does not let you do anything. Also, in the case of syllabus, nothing is specified regarding adaptations of the material; they are very generic and only limit themselves to indicate the topics and content to be worked on during the term.

I understand that the content should be the same for everyone, the university cannot make content selection or indicate specific adaptations since functional diversity is heterogeneous and everybody's

individual need cannot be included in the teaching plan; but it can be adapted, or at least indicate in the specific adaptations section what measures and actions will be taken in a timely fashion depending on the needs of the student or of their functional diversity.

Let's see, I cannot ask to have some practices removed, they are necessary for my training but I can ask for adaptations and resources to be able to do them. Syllabus should specify and consider, which they do not do, channels and paths for communication and negotiation with faculty to reach an agreement about the subject, where I can do the same as my classmates but adapted to my needs; otherwise, every so often I will have the same issue of inaccessibility to information and my training.

Definitely, I believe that the university should help the student not to be marked by specific circumstances and not having to ask for additional resources. I consider that the day in which I can be just one more student, in equal conditions, and with an equitable and quality education, then, on that day, I will say that the university at last is an institution that generates mechanisms for inclusion.

Rafa's Life History

My name is Rafa and I am 21 years old. I live with my mother and my sister in Dos Hermanas. We are a humble, working family; all we have is thanks to our efforts and work.

I consider myself a nice and simple guy but also shy and reserved. However, I think that I have to introduce you to my colleague that has been with me since I was 3 years old: Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. A genetic degenerative disease that little by little makes my muscles weaken and disappear.

My disease has evolved throughout my life limiting my independence. Currently, I have lost all of my body's mobility although not my sensitivity and I totally depend on my mother for my daily activities: Eating, moving, getting dressed, washing up... However, this has not caused any inferiority complexes despite my functional diversity. I have always considered myself a completely normal person; on the contrary, my disease gives me more strength to improve every day and be a better person.

My first year at university was very negative; I saw plenty of ignorance towards functional diversity in my classmates and a lack of empathy. They already had preconceived ideas of what was happening and, frankly, they had no idea. Some of them did not want to do assignments with me because they thought that I would do less than them... Some have dared saying, "why are you studying journalism with your functional diversity!" It was clear that they did not know anything about me or my limitations. I am capable of staying up one whole day with no sleep in order to hand in my part; in that sense I am very responsible.

I know I am a shy person and that, even though I am working on it and improving, it hard for me to establish relationships with other people but I expected something else when entering university like, for example, more responsible people. But what I saw has nothing to do with what I was thinking. That discouraged me and I started skipping classes because I did not see any comradeship. But then a classmate let me the class notes and in the summer I studied like crazy: I passed four out of five.

Also, together with the lack of comradeship, I faced the barrier of the faculty that, when seeing me there, did not know about my situation and the reason why my mother had to be there. There were professors who would even question me for this and would not understand. For them, I should ask for help from the Disabled the Disabled Service. I could see that they did not know well my situation.

As days went by and they would see me in class, little by little it would seem they started to understand my needs, but this is like everything else: there are professors that give you as much helps as possible, they facilitate resources so you can study, and try to give knowledge that you can apply later in your career. But there are other professors that, even after years of explaining my needs, they do not facilitate anything.

For example, when I have had to perform some class activity and then hand it in, it has been my mother who did it and professors, when they did not know my situation, would fail the assignments or reprimand me because I would submit them with grammar mistakes. But of course, it is my mother who writes them. She is doing so much already! Then, when the faculty learned of the situation they would either adapt the activity to me or would let me submit it with mistakes, not penalizing me.

However, I also have to mention those professors who have helped me, both personally and academically. In particular, professor María with whom I take two courses. She has adapted everything I needed. When absent due to health problems, she has done tutoring with me and has answered all doubts I might have had, has delayed deliveries, modified exam dates etc. Although on occasion I have to miss class, she understands my situation and knows that I go to class because I want to and it is my calling, I am not there to waste time. Alas, I can only say that I hope the university had more professors like her, with that great humanity, empathy, and awareness.

Additionally, the professor of Journalistic Production has also supported me a lot. One of the activities that we had to do was a blog⁵ where we had to upload ten news articles. Having trouble writing it and feeling out of place, lost and discouraged, he put me in touch with a journalist who helped me with the task and, frankly, I did quite well.

In general, I can say that I what I have missed has been counseling and orientation for professors about the needs of people with functional diversity because I understand one cannot know them all, but when the university knows that there is a student with particular needs in a classroom, it should prepare and train the faculty.

DISCUSSION

Different universities recognize the importance and need for the student body with functional diversity to participate and be included in higher education institutions in equal footing as the rest of their classmates. As indicated by Fernández Batanero (2011), the Higher Education Area is based on a change of paradigm from where excellence-based learning it is proposed and where the professor becomes a guide for the student body. Within this context, participants in this research identified the

⁵ Rafa's blog, "From my wheelchair" can be accessed at the following link: <https://goo.gl/FHHAa>

faculty as a fundamental milestone to guarantee inclusive educational practices. This work reveals important data in which the leading need for a positive attitude towards functional diversity by the faculty is stressed, fostering inclusive practices as well as the utilization of different methodologies that are not only lectures. . For this to be achieved, reasonable adjustments are required, ones where several and different didactic resources are applied, using new technologies in a didactic fashion and training on topics related to functional diversity.

If we focus on the data obtained in this research, we can conclude that faculty creates more barriers than learning opportunities. Participants expressed that the support received from professors, on occasion, was due more to their good will, exerting a positive impact on their personal motivation and academic performance. However, these positive attitudes were more difficult to get since they depended on the attitude and will from the faculty (Tinsley & Beale, 2010).

On the contrary, in the university environment, these attitudes are not always the most adequate, since participants in the study commented how specific professors did not respond to their problems, did not propose solutions, did not make any adaptations or offer the necessary resources and, in some particular case, tutoring was excessively rigid and standardized.

The results obtained in this work coincide with prior research (Fuller et al., 2004; Hadjidakou & Hartas, 2008; Konur, 2002; Nielsen, 2001; Tinklin et al., 2004). Also, in these works, on occasion, some professors were not willing to make reasonable adjustments, because they considered that it would lower the level of teaching or supposed a favorable treatment versus other classmates.

Also, in works like Borland and James (1999) and Moswela and Mukhopadhyay (2011), the conclusions obtained were similar to the ones we reached in this article. In these works, it was pointed out that attitudinal barriers were exerting the greatest impact on the students' learning and academic performance.

It is of special interest that the findings obtained in this work related to barriers identified by the students (excessively broad course topics, faculty rigidity when it came to teaching, distant relationships with the students, lack of empathy) have nothing to do with functional diversity, but can be issues affecting the rest of the students too. Works by Castro de Paz et al., (2006), Fuller et al. (2004), González et al., (2006), or Jacklin, Robinson, O'Meara and Harris (2007), also reached similar conclusions. However, we cannot forget that, for this collective, these questions are more complex than for the rest, having on occasion to run an obstacle race (Foreman et al., 2001).

Another of the issues that we would like to highlight is the extra effort that these students had to exert to be able to exceed their academic challenges. For most of them, the university contributed with new life opportunities (Prowse, 2009) and new employment paths. However, this path, on occasion, was not easy. For them, their educational and vital performances were marked by obstacles and situations that they had to resolve and, even though they achieved the objectives set, the work they had to do was tough and lengthy. Consequently, their resilience was based on the creation of adaptation, organization, and study strategies, essential to adapt to the university context, many times adverse (Ewert & Yoshino,

2011; Hartley, 2011; Sandín et al., 2014). We consider that, even though the changes and transformations that need to occur in universities are complex and profound, on occasion, those are simple modifications such as facilitating the material in advance, adapting the slides, utilizing resources that allow access to information, allowing audio recordings in class, or informing the faculty in advance of the students' needs. However, these questions that at first sight seem within reach, on occasion become a great barrier for some students when the faculty neither shows a positive attitude nor is empathetic, to initiate these initiatives.

With regards to educational practices and teaching methodologies, participants in the study recommended that the faculty updated and utilized technologies different to lectures, favoring more participatory and active methodologies that included the students.

In reference to the course material and the access to it, most of the students mentioned major barriers to access them, particularly, access to information. They highlighted that professors did not have the material prepared or adapted in advance. In this sense, in Andrés' case with his visual diversity, his problem became more serious, since he could not have class notes or had them later than his classmates. To resolve this problem, among possible solutions put forward, it was pointed out that the bibliography of the course be given in advance.

Lastly, we would like to highlight that currently, there are strategies to respond to this type of barrier and that foster an inclusive learning: project-work, cooperative learning, multilevel teaching, etc. Also, works such as those by Watchorn, Larkin, Amg, and Hitch (2013), talk about the experiences of students recommending the use of practices designed based on the principles of universal design (Dell, Dell, & Blackwell, 2015). The implementation of teaching practices based on the principles of universal learning design may suppose in the future the elimination of learning barriers, not only for the students with functional diversity but also for the rest of the students. Along these lines, we agree with Riddell et al. (2005) and Shaw (2009) who indicate that, if teaching practices improve for students with functional diversity, this will revert positively on both the teaching and learning of all students.

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