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The influence of the sex of the teaching staff on   
the perception of inclusion

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Abstract

The greatest challenge facing education systems today is ensuring educational inclusion. This means treating all students in terms of fairness and justice. The research problem that we ask ourselves is the following: Are there differences in the perception of inclusion according to the sex of the teaching staff? The sample comprises 133 teachers from the Spanish field of secondary and primary education. The methodology used is bivariate analysis through independent sample tests and association using chi-square. The results show that sex is not a decisive variable when determining the degree of inclusion. However, there are some significant differences in relation to diversity strategies and information on inclusion, mainly. Women have a higher degree of inclusion. Therefore, educational centres and inclusion policies must achieve greater awareness in the case of the male sex.

Keywords: Education, inclusion, sex, teachers.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, many groups have suffered educational and social discrimination (people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, women, etc.) and unfortunately some of them are still the protagonists of this unfortunate event.

One of the most important challenges facing the education system today is providing an inclusive education system for all people. This means guaranteeing the foundations of an education based on justice, equity and equal opportunities for all people without discrimination on any grounds. In spite of the meritorious and honourable nature of the subject, we are aware of the difficulties involved in tackling it, since we are basically referring to combating and eliminating cultural and personal aspects that are deeply rooted in certain societies.

Education is the fundamental element for social development. To guarantee this development in an equitable manner, with equal opportunities, the educational system must be inclusive. Agenda 2030 (UNESCO, 2014) considers education as a privileged tool to make effective important aspects such as sustainability, inclusion, social justice, equity and cohesion.

Focussing on the process of educational inclusion, the UNESCO (2011) states that it is a process that aims at transforming educational systems so that they can offer an adequate response to the diversity of each and every student in order to achieve the right to education with all the guarantees required for equal opportunities.

The relevance and appropriateness of this educational model based on inclusion is supported by the international community through a normative framework, such as that provided by the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1990), as well as the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (2015), specifically in this case through Sustainable Development Goal 4, which supports all the guiding principles that mark the World Education Agenda 2030 and specifically points out the need to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’.

For all these reasons, inclusive education has become the central axis to combat situations that promote inequality or discrimination, and therefore it is imposed as the fundamental and most suitable mechanism to guarantee a more just and social development.

Once we have contextualised the central theme of our work, through its development we will try to respond to our research problem which is the following: Are there differences in the perception of inclusion according to the sex of the teaching staff? For this purpose, we carry out a background review on the subject in question and, together with the development of quantitative research, we try to check whether there are finally differences in the perception of inclusion according to the gender of the teaching staff.

1. Inclusive education: a challenge for the educational system of the 21st century

As we have stated in the introduction, inclusive education is currently a challenge for our education system and the international community has expressed this through its reports (UN, 2017), the Education for All movement (UNESCO, 2005) and the Global Education Agenda 2030. Therefore, we can affirm, as Peters (2007), that inclusive education is relevant current in the development of educational policies in the international panorama.

To define inclusive education, we must start from the idea of Ainscow (2005), which states that the model of inclusive school implies introducing students in teaching, learning and socialisation contexts that are structured to generate participation and collaboration among all in the construction of knowledge and competence. This idea is consolidated by Opertti (2017), who states that the key to inclusion is to offer everything necessary to guarantee learning based on equity and quality for all students.

It is clear that this idea of inclusive education implies attending to the diversity present in each of the students with the aim of achieving one of its premises: equality of opportunities and equity, i.e., a school designed for all people (UNESCO, 2009) that focuses on promoting social justice (Howe, 1996; Kerzner & Gartner, 1996; Porter & Stone, 2001; Slee, 1996). In short, working towards the achievement and acquisition of the values of the inclusive school means taking into consideration the future of our society (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

*Previous research*

Previous research studies related to inclusion and teachers indicate that teachers value them as key players in implementing educational inclusion (De Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011), although they show opposing attitudes on issues such as its development and benefit or utility (Monsen, Ewing & Boyle, 2015). In general, teachers are concerned and uneasy about their training and competence in carrying out practices to implement inclusion (Horne &Timmons, 2009; Jordan, Glenn & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). In this sense, the importance of information and knowledge of teachers to develop inclusive practices is evident in research studies, such as that of Vaz et al. (2015), based on the results obtained when applying the Opinions Regarding the Integration of Students with Disabilities(ORI) scale developed by Antonak and Larrivee (1995). On the contrary, results of a survey carried out in Greece on 155 teachers showed, on the one hand, positive attitudes towards the inclusion model and, on the other hand, they showed misgivings and doubts about how to include students with disabilities –an issue that disappears with teachers with background and practice in the subject. In short, it shows training and development of skills as a key element in promoting positive attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Finally, the revised Scale of Feelings, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education carried out by 131 teachers in Singapore showed an indifferent stance towards inclusion. Also, aspects such as experience, training and safety are relevant and change the elements of perception of inclusion (Poon, Ng, Wong & Kaur, 2016). Therefore, teachers must acquire knowledge and skills in inclusive education as indicated in there search by Vanderpuye, Obosu and Nishimuko (2018).

If we focus on the topic at hand, the gender difference of teachers in the perception of inclusion, according to Murphy’s (2014) existing research, offers inconsistent conclusions on this issue. The work of Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), carried out on 135 students in training, indicates differences between men and women, with the latter showing more inclined attitudes towards inclusion than men. On the contrary, research studies, such as Van Reusen, Shoho and Barker (2000), as well as the works of Poon et al. (2016), do not show a relationship between gender and attitude towards educational inclusion. Despite the fact that gender is not a determinant for the perception of inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), there is research that continues to point to women with more positive attitudes (Eichinger, Rizzo & Sirotnik, 1991). The same is true in the conclusion offered by Hutzler, Meier, Reuker, and Zitomer (2019), which points to varied results in physical education classes that do not indicate the direct effect of gender on the subject. However, the authors state that there are studies aimed at physical education teachers that highlight the teachers with a more positive attitude. These data are not found in studies aimed at men.

1. Methodology

This work has as its population secondary school teachers and other professionals of the autonomous community of Andalusia, Spain. The sample was obtained through the use of the non-probabilistic snowball technique. On the other hand, the field work was carried out throughout the month of January 2016.

Finally, from a population of between 9,000 teachers in the mentioned region under analysis, we achieved a sample of 133 subjects, characterised by a sampling error of 3.7% and a confidence rate of 95%. The total number of responses was 142, but after debugging the results we eliminated the responses completed in less than 5 minutes and eliminated those with similar response patterns in all questions. Next, we offer in detail the properties of the sample in which we point out aspects such as the following: 60% claim to have medium/high information and knowledge about disability, compared to 20.2% who claim to know nothing about the subject. 65% of the sample is made up of women and the same percentage is from publicly owned centres.

Table 1. Characterisation of the sample.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Category | Sample | |
| n | % |
| Gender | Man | 47 | 35.3 |
| Woman | 86 | 64.7 |
| You have knowledge of disability | Yes | 86 | 64.7 |
| No | 27 | 20.2 |
|  | N/A | 20 | 15.0 |
| Years of teaching experience (years) | 1–5 | 28 | 21.1 |
| 6–10 | 32 | 24.1 |
| 11–15 | 18 | 13.5 |
| 16–20 | 9 | 6.8 |
| More than 20 | 45 | 33.8 |
| N/A | 1 | 0.8 |
| Type of school | Public school | 86 | 64.7 |
| Private school | 16 | 12.0 |
| Arranged school | 24 | 18.0 |
| N/A | 7 | 5.3 |
| Age | 21–30 | 23 | 17.3 |
| 31–40 | 39 | 29.3 |
| 41–50 | 37 | 27.8 |
| 51–60 | 30 | 22.6 |
| N/A | 4 | 3.0 |

*Instrument*

The instrument used in our study for data collection is a questionnaire composed of 53 items in total. Specifically, it is a self-administered online questionnaire consisting of two parts. One part refers to the socio-demographic variables and the other part consists of 40 Likert-type scale questions (from 1 to 5) which include questions such as: knowledge and information on disability, assessment and perception of strategies for dealing with diversity, and finally opinion on inclusive education.

An ad-hoc scale has been developed with elements closely linked to educational inclusion according to the literature review carried out. The validation of the content of the scale has been carried out through consultation with experts, in this specific case through 10 university professors from the region under study in the area of teaching and school organisation who have extensive experience in validating instruments such as the one presented.

A pilot test was carried out in 2015. The results were analysed by 26 teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience in public schools. The results found served to improve the instrument. The validity and reliability of the content was also checked, obtaining an Alpha of Cronbrach higher than 0.7 (0.803). To confirm these values, the method of the two halves was performed, obtaining a 0.887, and for the second part a value of 0.801, which confirms the results previously found.

*Results*

The results of the association between variables show the following results (differences are found in only 5 of the 50 items on the questionnaire scale):

When asking teachers about the effectiveness of diversity measures, we found that women agreed more with this statement (47.6% was the highest score y women against 29.8% presented by men).

With regard to the measures of broadening and deepening as an element that takes into account diversity, the differences between men and women are maintained, since they disagree with this measure. Thus, in the case of men we find 4.4%, while in the case of women their position is 12.8%. A slight difference of 8.4 points, but which denotes differences.

The item ‘transit between stages is a mechanism that serves for the integration of the students’ offers us some interesting results since, about the answers according to this question, differences of almost 20 points are extracted, specifically 19.7 between the answers offered in this sense regarding men (58.7%) and women (39%).

When it comes to knowing the differences between the concepts of integration and inclusion, the teachers surveyed show a significant difference about the answer to this question. It is women who in 30.6% show a greater knowledge on the matter contrary to men, wherein only 10.9% differentiate between both concepts. The disparity is such that it is almost 20 points.

One of the most interesting questions that we intend to extract from this work is to know in which model teachers place their educational system; therefore, one of the items addresses the idea of whether ‘it is our inclusive educational system’. In view of this, women show a position of agreement of 49.4%, a difference of little relevance with respect to men who are in favour of this issue at 42.5%; therefore, the difference is minimal.

The results with respect to the differences in averages are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Independent t-test samples

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sex | Male | | | Female | | |  |
|  | x̄ | n | SD. | x̄ | n | SD | p-value |
| Transit between stages | 3.63 | 46 | 0.97 | 3.16 | 82 | 0.97 | 0.010 |
| Explains the training of teachers the difficulties | 3.00 | 47 | 1.22 | 2.63 | 82 | 1.17 | 0.095 |
| The terms impairment and disability are similar | 2.04 | 46 | 1.05 | 2.48 | 84 | 1.26 | 0.049 |
| Special education students belong to the students | 3.30 | 46 | 1.28 | 3.73 | 84 | 1.08 | 0.048 |

When considering the average rating according to sex, we highlight the analysis of the items whose significant differences are most relevant.

When asked if the transition between stages is a mechanism that serves integration, we observe a difference of 0.47 tenths between the answers given by men and women. In the first case, men are more likely to agree with this statement, unlike women who are closer in their answers to the indifference regarding the relationship reflected in the item.

In the case of the next item, it is clear that, for men, teacher training is indifferent to the difficulties of integration. On the contrary, with regard to the responses offered by women, it is understood that teacher training has nothing to do with the difficulties of integrating students.

Another difference regarding the responses offered by men and women is produced in the clarification of terms such as deficiency and disability, in which case, men express knowledge regarding the difference of concepts, and on the contrary, in the case of women, they consider that both terms are indifferent.

Finally, the difference in responses regarding sex is evident in their opinion regarding whether the special education student body belongs to students with NAS, in which case men consider this question to be indifferent, unlike women, since their responses tend to agree with that posed in this item.

1. Conclusion, discussion and recommendations

This socio-demographic variable is related to five items that have to do with measures and strategies for attention to diversity and information and training on inclusion. There are slight differences in the answers given by women, who agree more on the effectiveness of diversity measures, on the complementarity of the terms integration and inclusion and on the opinion that our educational system is inclusive.

Gender is the variable we observe that implies significant differences with some of the items we present below:

1. Men are more likely than women to understand that the transition between stages is a mechanism that serves integration.
2. Regarding the item that relates teacher training with the lack of integration of students, the difference between sexes shows men indifferent and women in total disagreement.
3. The difference in concepts such as impairment and disability is a reason for disagreement, since men show the disparity in terms and women value them as indifferent.
4. When asked if special education students belong to students with NAS, men understood it as indifferent and women positioned themselves in favour of it.

Thus, the results of our research generally coincide with the findings of the studies, such as that of Avramidis and Kalyva (2007), which reveal the diverse opinions among teachers about the difficulty of guaranteeing educational inclusion. But if we focus on the topic at hand, the results of our research reveal slight differences in the responses given by women, coinciding with the results of the research by Avramidis et al.(2000) and Eichinger et al.(1991), which conclude that female teachers can express more positive attitudes about inclusion than male teachers.

In short, it can be seen that sex is not a decisive variable in determining the degree of inclusion. However, there are certain significant differences with respect to sex and some concepts or ideas that are related to the idea of educational inclusion.

These issues should be considered when carrying out studies or launching initiatives related to the implementation or study of the educational inclusion model. On the other hand, the educational policies and governing bodies of educational centres must consider these results when implementing improvements in their centres and educational systems with regard to guaranteeing a truly inclusive educational system.

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