

## Pedagogical practices of university teaching staff and their relationship with inclusive education

### *Prácticas pedagógicas del profesorado en la enseñanza universitaria y su relación con la educación inclusiva*

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### Abstract

This research has inquired about the pedagogical practices of university teaching staff and their relationship with inclusive education. This is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach where focus groups of students and teachers from the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast - Bluefields University Campus were established. The main results show the contextualized definitions of the categories of inclusive education and inclusive pedagogical practices that teachers manifest in the effective exercise of university teaching, likewise, the experiences of students are expressed in relation to their learning process. It is concluded that inclusive pedagogical practice is the transmission of personal experiences in their family and social life for the understanding of the difficulties and problems of the students that facilitates the construction of experiences and joint learning alternatives through reflection on daily life, the respect and recognition to the different peoples.

**Keywords:** pedagogy, education, inclusion, practice, teaching, learning

### Resumen

Esta investigación ha indagado sobre las prácticas pedagógicas del profesorado en la enseñanza universitaria y su relación con la educación inclusiva. Se trata de una

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investigación cualitativa con un abordaje fenomenológico donde se establecieron grupos focales conformados por estudiantes y docentes de la Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense – Recinto Universitario Bluefields. Los principales resultados muestran las definiciones contextualizadas de las categorías de educación inclusiva y prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas que manifiestan los docentes en el ejercicio efectivo de la enseñanza universitaria, así mismo, se expresan las vivencias de los estudiantes en relación con su proceso de aprendizaje. Se concluye que una práctica pedagógica inclusiva es la trasmisión de experiencias personales en su vida familiar y social para la comprensión de las dificultades y problemas de los estudiantes que facilita la construcción de vivencias y alternativas de aprendizaje conjuntas mediante la reflexión sobre la vida cotidiana, el respeto y reconocimiento a los diferentes pueblos.

**Palabras clave:** pedagogía, educación, inclusión, práctica, enseñanza, aprendizaje

## I. Introduction

Higher education in Nicaragua suffers a phenomenon of university desertion of 18.28% (CNU, 2021), because of the factors such as migratory, emotional, economic, motivational, regulatory, religious vocation, exclusive pedagogies, health problems, pregnancies at an early age, cultural marginalization, linguistics, disability, and accessibility (Calderón *et al.*, 2018; Flores-López *et al.*, 2016). Also, the appearance of COVID-19 has fragmented access to higher education. The pandemic affects vulnerable groups and those at risk of social exclusion with greater force, exacerbating inequalities and social inequities between different sectors of the population (Flores-López, 2020), for example, although higher education has generated innovative pedagogical practices with help of technologies not all students from vulnerable groups have access to internet services or different educational platforms.

The study of the inclusive pedagogical practices of the teaching staff is fundamental, because they assume the conception of inclusive education, which carries the premise of an education for everyone and all without any discrimination and exclusion, accepting diversity as social wealth to generate greater access and better opportunities (UNESCO, 2009). In the literature there are already investigations that try to describe pedagogical practices and their importance in the classroom, as well as to respond to the diversity of students from a perspective of the ecology of equity (Ainscow *et al.*, 2012).

In accordance with the above, the purpose of this research is to inquire about the pedagogical practices of teachers in university education and their relationship with inclusive education. For this, two focus groups (students and teachers) were developed in order to know: What do we understand by inclusive education? What pedagogical practices do teachers use in university teaching? How are the pedagogical practices

used in university teaching related to inclusive education? The analysis of the data was carried out from a content analysis by Voynnet (2012) applying a codification of meaning units of the texts (Blais & Martineau, 2006) and establishment of previous categories from previous studies by Ainscow (2016), and González-Lara (2014).

## II. Literature review

Inclusion and equity are the foundations for quality education (UNESCO, 2015). Inclusion becomes a way to achieve the comprehensive improvement of educational systems (Ainscow, 2020), in addition, it is a process related to the identification and elimination of barriers to the presence, participation and achievement of all students (Ainscow & César, 2006), with particular emphasis on those groups of students who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or low performance (Ainscow, 2016), while equity seeks to universalize access to educational opportunities for all, as well as, tries to identify all available resources at the national and community level, and apply them to overcome systemic barriers to access and participation of women and men in education (UNESCO, 1994).

Then, inclusive education emerges as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity among all students (Ainscow, 2020). For this reason, the United Nations (2007) expresses that the right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, politics, and practice in all educational settings to adapt to the different requirements and identities of individual students, together with the commitment to remove the barriers that prevent that possibility. In this sense, inclusive practices in educational environments play an important role in the development of student learning, because they respond to the diversity of thoughts through an ecology of equity (Ainscow *et al.*, 2012), that is, learning experiences and results are equitable based on educational practices of student's social and experiential context (Ainscow, 2020).

From this perspective, pedagogical practices can be built from the experiences of the students (González-Lara, 2014; Aguilera-Martínez *et al.*, 2015; & Ríos, 2018), because educational spaces are places where people learn about the behavior, dialogue, decision-making, as well as a variability of skills, knowledge and values that allow them to act as thinking, critical, responsible and supportive citizens in a society (Murphy, 2010), in addition, students learn and develop through active participation in organized activities with real situations in the community in collaboration with the educational institution (Verjee, 2010). For this reason, educational institutions should urge teachers to incorporate didactic strategies that adequately integrate preparation for professional practice and for the exercise of social responsibility of their students (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2014).

Likewise, it is necessary to advance in pedagogical actions that link academic, work practice, and experiences that enrich social, communicative, and emotional skills, as

well as learning values such as solidarity and respect (Rodríguez-Gallego & Ordóñez-Sierra, 2015) because students learn from experiences, that is, it is important that students solve authentic and experiential cases with their own methodologies that encourage reflection, collaborative and inclusive work (Puig *et al.*, 2011). In addition, there are factors that promote inclusion in educational contexts that are characterized by guaranteeing quality practical sessions and tutorials; dedication and commitment of the teaching staff; awareness of the academic institution; availability for mentoring by faculty; and endowment of resources and technological infrastructure (Uleanya, 2023).

### III. Materials and methods

#### 3.1 Methods

The methodology is qualitative, and phenomenology was chosen (Creswell, 2013), because it is intended to discover and understand the phenomena from the point of view of each participant and from the collective construction, that is, through the life experiences of teachers and students belonging to the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast in relation to inclusive education and their pedagogical practice.

#### 3.2 Participants and ethical approach

To collect the information, the technique of focus groups of teachers and students at the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast based in Bluefields was chosen. These groups aimed to generate a space for dialogue with the purpose of knowing the feeling, thinking, and living of their life experiences on inclusive education and pedagogical practices (Hamui-Sutton & Varela-Ruiz, 2013). See Table 1.

**Table 1. Participants in the research process**

Focal groups	Women	Men
Teachers	5	2
Students	4	3
Total	9	5

The inclusion criteria were carried out through the fulfillment of the following criteria: (a) teaching staff of the Bluefields University Campus; (b) active students at the Bluefields Campus; and (c) interest in participating in the study. The people participating in both focus groups belong to all the careers of the Bluefields University Campus. Both focus groups were held during the second semester of 2022, with prior authorization through the prior, free, and informed consent of the student body and faculty, as well as the authorization of the university authorities.

### 3.3 Data analysis procedure

The data collected from the two focus groups (teachers and students) were fully transcribed. It is important to mention that the data obtained were subjected to content analysis (Voynnet, 2012) by coding the meaning units of the texts (Blais & Martineau, 2006). The coding process of two previous categories began in previous studies by Ainscow (2016) and González-Lara (2014): inclusive education; and pedagogical practice. From this first coding, two subcategories emerge for inclusive education: equality and equity; and accessible learning environment. In the case of the inclusive pedagogical practice category, three subcategories emerge: personal experiences; learning alternatives; and respect and recognition of the different peoples (see Table 2).

## IV. Results

This research focuses on investigating the pedagogical practices of university teaching staff and their relationship with inclusive education. To demonstrate the findings, the categorization process (categories and subcategories) derived from the data analysis was developed. To understand the meanings, the following interpretation strategies were used: directly and categorically. From the above, the central categories “inclusive education” and “inclusive pedagogical practices” emerge. Table 2 shows the categories and corresponding subcategories established in the investigative process.

**Table 2. Categories of analysis in the research process.**

Category	Subcategory
Inclusive Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equality and Equity</li> <li>- Accessible Learning Environment</li> </ul>
Inclusive Pedagogical Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal experiences</li> <li>- Learning alternatives</li> <li>- Respect and recognition to the different peoples</li> </ul>

Note: Information processing from field work

### 4.1 Inclusive Education

To understand an inclusive pedagogical practice, one must understand the concept of inclusive education of university teachers. Inclusive education is based on the belief that education is a human right and the basis for a more just society (Ainscow, 2016). Specifically, inclusive education is: [...] “a process of equality and dignity where students interacting in inclusive pedagogical practices, based on relevant and equitable curricula with affective, accessible contextual and technological environments that recognize differences, diversities and cultural identities for the experience and achievement of learning for all” (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022).

Inclusive education as a process of equality and dignity seeks “the interaction and reflection of the different educational practices where all students can share their ideas respecting their points of view and their different procedures” (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022). In addition, it should be seen as an incessant search to find better ways to respond to diversity (Ainscow & César, 2006), then, pedagogical proposals based on relevant curriculum are used, whose bases are based on the recognition of the group and individual potentialities (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022) that involve a process related to the identification and elimination of barriers to the presence, participation and achievement of all students who are at risk of social exclusion (Ainscow, 2016).

Then, the need arises to establish accessible learning environments, to develop awareness and trust with an emphasis on mutual challenge and self-critical reflection of the student, thus, “a positive, interactive and dialogical environment is generated so that the shyest students or with different mother tongues feel motivated and confident” (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022), “enabling students to develop and feel included in the educational environment” (Focus Group with Students, 2022), for this reason, the pedagogy of the teacher in the classroom adapts to the different identities of the students through a cultural, political and educational practice transformation with the commitment to eliminate the barriers that make educational exclusion possible (Ainscow, 2020).

In addition, “seek integration actions with students through collaborative work and the use of inclusive and equitable tools within the classroom to avoid discrimination” (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022), that is, “promote a creative pedagogy with an emphasis on interaction or coexistence talks between all students” (Focus Group with Students, 2022), it is about finding ways to serve students who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities with emphasis in equity and inclusion (Ainscow, 2016).

#### 4.2 Inclusive Pedagogical Practice

The notion of “pedagogical practice” has a polysemic conception as teaching practice, educational practice, teaching practice, pedagogical work, and teacher work (González-Lara, 2014), although pedagogical practice is much more than what the teacher does in the classroom (Ríos, 2018), the teacher not only interacts in his classroom, but in the experiential and community context of social projection of the universities. From this perspective, it can be said that an inclusive pedagogical practice is: [...] “the transmission of personal experiences in their family and social life for the understanding of the difficulties and problems of the students that facilitates the construction of experiences and alternatives of joint learning through reflection on daily life, respect and recognition of different peoples” (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022).

This conception of inclusive teaching practice of teachers has three categories, which need to be examined: personal experiences; learning alternatives; and respect and recognition of different peoples. Furthermore, that practicing teaching skills in authentic settings provides students with rich examples of professional life and helps them acquire professional skills and develop their intellectual capacities (Murphy, 2010; Verjee, 2010).

Therefore, the transmission of personal experiences in their family and social life satisfies the needs of the community or territory and understand the curricular contents, because “teachers teach, communicate, socialize, reflect and evaluate our educational experiences” (Focus Group with Students, 2022). It is a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities to help the community while facilitating academic learning and the development of professional skills (Rodríguez-Gallego & Ordóñez-Sierra, 2015). These personal experiences are complemented through the construction of joint learning experiences and alternatives, teachers seek various strategies that make learning experiences possible (Focus Group with Teachers, 2022), that is, “they explain and guide their teaching practice through diagrams, videos, photos, flipcharts with group and individual methodologies, which are facilitated by interactive talks or conversations, using audiovisual materials” (Focus Group with Students, 2022).

These learning alternatives facilitate the formation of reflective and critical skills that encourage the development of a commitment to solidarity and allow the responsible exercise of citizenship (Puig *et al.*, 2011). Reflection on daily life, respect, and recognition of different peoples, consolidates the personal, and spiritual identity, moral development, and personal values of the students (Rodríguez-Gallego, 2014). So, “teachers look for a way for all of us to learn equally, regardless of our cultural differences, in addition, they reflect through the opinions and perspective of each town, where each student expresses their pros and cons in a respectful manner and recognizing their cultural diversity” (Focus Group with Students, 2022).

In short, an inclusive pedagogical practice is one that takes into account the individual needs and characteristics of each student, and that provides all of them the opportunity to participate and learn in a meaningful way. Some characteristics of an inclusive pedagogical practice are flexibility, diversity, collaboration, responsibility, participation, equity, and accessibility (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Characteristics of an Inclusive Pedagogical Practice**

Characteristics	Descriptor
Flexibility	It adapts to the needs and learning styles of each student and allows each one to work at their own pace and at their own level.
Diversity	Recognizes and values the individual differences of each student and provides all of them with the opportunity to participate and learn.
Collaboration	It encourages collaboration and teamwork among students and promotes communication and intercultural dialogue.
Responsibility	It is based on the shared responsibility between the teacher and the students and promotes independence and critical thinking.
Participation	It involves students in planning and assessing learning and encourages active participation and engagement.
Equity	It guarantees equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their individual differences.
Accessibility	It provides all students with access to the information and necessary tools to learn and takes into account the needs of those with disabilities or limitations.

Note: Information processing from field work.

## V. Conclusion

This study has inquired about the pedagogical practices of university teaching staff and their relationship with inclusive education. The findings describe the notion of inclusive education that has been implemented in university education, for example, the teaching staff defines inclusive education in university education as a process of equality and dignity that seeks integration in an accessible and effective learning environment through a creative and collaborative pedagogy in the classroom, this notion is related to what was stated by Ainscow (2016) in the sense that inclusive education refers to a process of transformation of education that seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their individual differences, can participate and learn in a meaningful way in educational spaces and in society. Likewise, integrating into teaching and learning environments using social strategies (Uleanya, 2023).

About inclusive pedagogical practices are defined as the transmission of personal experiences in their family and social life for the understanding of the difficulties and problems of students that facilitates the construction of experiences and joint learning alternatives through reflection on daily life, respect, and recognition of different peoples. This conception is linked to what was expressed by Finkelstein *et al.* (2021) who describe five aspects of inclusive practice that allow teachers to design lessons that remove educational barriers for students: collaboration and teamwork; instructional practices; organizational practices; social and emotional practices; and monitoring and evaluation processes.



So, inclusive pedagogical practices are characterized by promoting dialogue, reflection, and respect through group and individual methodology with the help of audiovisual materials in an accessible and effective learning environment with relevant curricula that recognize the diversity of learning, which is consistent with studies previous ones such as those of Lindner and Schwab (2020) who identified various forms of inclusive teaching practice that go back in differentiation and individualization, which can be implemented in appropriate environments with flexible curricula, accessible resources and teachers with knowledge about inclusive education, as an opportunity for a beneficial education for all students.

It is clear, then, that there is a responsibility on the part of teachers to continue to deepen inclusive pedagogical practices with students from vulnerable groups and at risk of social exclusion. Understanding that this type of practice allows for innovating, undertaking, deepening, and transforming the learning process in the classroom, based on flexible, diverse, collaborative, responsible, participatory, equitable, and accessible processes. In such a way that inclusive pedagogical practices will have an important positive effect on the learning process of the student body.

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