CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROCESS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED POPULATION IN THE B.ED. IN ENGLISH AT UNIVERSIDAD LA GRAN COLOMBIA

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**The following article attempts to cope with the lack of inclusive teaching
practices at La Universidad La Gran Colombia, notably in the B. Ed. in
English Program. I construct my main points around two perspectives:**

inclusive education as a requirement in colleges within mainstream classrooms, and social responsibility of universities to further the inclusion programs within the Colombian education and labor system. The analysis is based on supporting documents provided by Instituto Nacional para Ciegos (National Institute for the Blind INCI), article 14 of Decree 2082/ 1993, and a research paper called "The attention University Professors Give to Students with Special Educational Needs" (2015) among others.

From my point of view, the B.Ed. in English Program barely integrates the inclusion policies with the type of strategies needed to prepare the pre-service teachers with the required knowledge to face inclusive classrooms, nor does it provide sufficient support, particularly to students with low vision through the necessary accommodations and modifications.

Considerations about inclusive education process for visually impaired population in the B.Ed. in English at Universidad La Gran Colombia

Consideraciones sobre el proceso de educación inclusiva para personas en condición de discapacidad visual en el programa de Licenciatura en Ingles de la Universidad La Gran Colombia

David Alejandro Orozco Ortiz

Abstract

The following article attempts to cope with the lack of inclusive teaching practices at La Universidad La Gran Colombia, notably in the B. Ed. in English Program. I construct my main points around two perspectives: inclusive education as a requirement in colleges within mainstream classrooms, and social responsibility of universities to further the inclusion programs within the Colombian education and labor system. The analysis is based on supporting documents provided by Instituto Nacional para Ciegos (National Institute for the Blind INCI), article 14 of Decree 2082/ 1993, and a research paper called "The attention University Professors Give to Students with Special Educational Needs" (2015) among others.

From my point of view, the B.Ed. in English Program barely integrates the inclusion policies with the type of strategies needed to prepare the pre-service teachers with the required knowledge to face inclusive classrooms, nor does it provide sufficient support, particularly to students with low vision through the necessary accommodations and modifications. As a result, teachers have to neglect their teaching role to adapt an assistant-

related methodology in the class development. Therefore, it is necessary to foster proper training, protocols, and resources to improve inclusive teaching practices in the B.Ed. in English Program. The information showed in this paper is part of a reflective process which also gathers experiences from a student of the English program with visual impairment.

Resumen

El presente artículo expone la falta de prácticas de enseñanza inclusivas en la Universidad La Gran Colombia, especialmente en el programa de licenciatura en inglés. Planteo mis argumentos bajo dos perspectivas: la educación inclusiva en la educación superior, la responsabilidad social de las universidades con el fin de promover programas de inclusión dentro del sistema educativo y laboral. Este análisis tiene como base los documentos de apoyo elaborados por el Instituto Nacional para ciegos (INCI), articulo 14 del decreto 2082/1993, y un trabajo de investigación llamado *The attention University Professors Give to Students with Special Educational Needs* (2015) (La atención que le dan los profesores universitarios a estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales 2015), entre otros.

Desde mi punto de vista, el programa de Licenciatura en Inglés difícilmente integra las políticas de inclusión con el tipo de estrategias requeridas para la preparación de los docentes en formación con el fin de liderar procesos de inclusión, y particularmente no provee apoyo suficiente a estudiantes con baja visión a través de las modificaciones y adaptaciones[1] requeridas. Como resultado, los profesores tienen que relegar su rol docente para adoptar una metodología asistencialista en el desarrollo de las clases. Por consiguiente, es necesario promover una formación docente adecuada, manejo de protocolos y recursos

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[1] De acuerdo con la Guía de Educación adaptaciones y modificaciones especiales se refieren a dos tipos separados de adaptaciones curriculares. Por un lado, las adaptaciones tienen que ver con la posibilidad de hacer algunos cambios en el plan de estudios, mientras que las modificaciones tienen por objeto hacer ajustes significativos tanto el contenido como las metodologías en el programa académico.

para enfrentar la educación inclusiva dentro de la Licenciatura en Inglés. La información que se muestra en este documento es parte de un proceso reflexivo el cual también compila experiencias de un estudiante del programa de Ingles con discapacidad visual.

Palabras clave: *educación inclusiva, educación universitaria, prácticas pedagógicas, discapacidad visual y aulas regulares.*

Introduction

Inclusive education is the type of ideology that reflects a social tendency to accept diversity as one of the main features in any community. It has been spread in many countries to ensure, through national and international policies, the right to receive proper opportunities for personal development, life quality, and active participation in the society itself, of people with special educational needs. Inclusion programs in Colombia are relatively young, and even more when it refers to higher education. Therefore, the education policy aimed at promoting inclusion is in their testing stage. Regarding this matter, the universities play a fundamental role in the adaptation and transmission of these policies aimed at transforming the social communities. However; this position has been tracked down to prepare people to face a particular working situation in a target field, which transforms the universities into a path to succeed in any professional role.

Universidad La Gran Colombia has been recognized, among other things, for its bachelor in education programs such as Mathematics, Philosophy, Social Science, Linguistics and Literature (Spanish), and English, where the statistics show that there is an average of 4416 graduated people since the foundation of each program[2]. According to DANE[3] by the year 2014, there were 882.396 professional teachers in Colombia, from which 35.629 were located in Bogota.

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[2] Information provided by the Faculty of Education
[3] (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas (DANE), 2014)

Considering these figures, it is possible to say that Universidad La Gran Colombia may have contributed in a 1.23% of teaching labor force just in Bogota city. This, somehow, leads us to think about the social projection of this university as well as its impact on the education system and the new learning-teaching tendencies, including the perspectives about social interaction within educational institutions, which are framed within the principles of equality, respect, and inclusion. Therefore, it is important to understand that with this new vision, the university acquires another major function in the society with the objective to materialize inclusion as a social movement. In these contexts, it is acceptable to state the following questions: How does the B.Ed. in English program integrate the inclusion policies for physically challenged students? And what type of strategies may the B.Ed. in English program use to integrate inclusion policies with students with vision impairment?

To answer these questions, I develop three main points. First, this paper addresses inclusive education as a requirement in higher education by presenting a variety of definitions and the historical context for inclusive education, and a characterization of the visually impaired population. Secondly, the article concentrates on a reflection about the social responsibilities of the universities based on a contrast between the theory and the context at Universidad La Gran Colombia. Finally, it includes some proposals to improve mainstreaming teaching methodologies and practices within the B.Ed. in English at Universidad La Gran Colombia, so future students with or without visual impairment benefit and get better prepared to face inclusive classroom.

Considerations of inclusion as requirement in education

The conception about disability has been changing as a consequence of different social reflections and studies that have transpired throughout history; considering this, education has been a touchstone that has gradually built the acceptance of inclusion as a priority within any community. According to Aguilar (2004), the evolution of the concept of inclusion in education has been constructed within three models: traditional, rehabilitation, and personal autonomy, which explain how physically challenged population have been incorporated in education systems based on social requirements related to the season in which they appeared.

The traditional model was focused on religious grounds which handicaps or impairments were considered as products of God's punishments. So, the population with these kinds of conditions were sentenced to death or used to be condemned to survive in wetting wild territories (customs usually practiced by Greek culture especially in Sparta). When Christian religion came along, extermination practices continued by Church; however, charity was the main feature, which allowed physically challenged people to receive appropriate assistance in hospitals, hospices, asylums, that belonged to the government. Later, rehabilitation was born as a product of special education as a model to enhance the life conditions of physically challenged people, especially those who were victims of the armed conflicts faced in that time due to the Second World War. Finally, personal autonomy emerged from different movements between the 60s and 70s, which

were against the traditional and rehabilitation models. In this case, physically challenged people are recognized as subjects having rights and their disabilities are considered as additional characteristics that enable them to become independent.

In Colombia, Ministerio de Educación Nacional (National Ministry of Education, MEN) (2013) establishes inclusive education as a strategy to face social exclusion's phenomenon, characterized by several facts related to economic, social and cultural aspects. Changes in inclusive education model around the world implicate variations in the culture, way of thinking, education policies, teaching practices, and education coverage policies. In short, this new educational tendency requires the transformation of the cross principles of organization and management of the educative systems.

As part of a legal framework, law 115/1994 consolidates in the article 48, parameters to perform inclusive education attention for the population with impairment conditions. Local governments such as mayors and secretaries of Education are authorized to include pedagogical supporting programs for inclusive education with the resources required in the development programs. Within the available resources, it is possible to find the supporting rooms which according to article 14, Decree 2082/ 1993, are defined as a conjoint of services, techniques, resources and strategies to offer pedagogical aids to physically challenged students. Besides, article 4 of resolution 2565/ 2003 establishes the type of personnel needed to enhance the program itself like professional teachers in special education, psychology, phono-audiology, and Colombian sign language interpreters, among others.

Inclusive education in Colombia is relatively young, and even more when it refers to higher education. Therefore, the educational policies aimed at promoting inclusion are in their testing stage. However, the core axes that must lead the entire process are based on the principles of equality and inclusion. (Eckes & Ochoa; Blanco; Infante; Ocampo as quoted in Álvarez & López, 2015) in their research paper called "The attention University Professors Give to Students with Special Educational Needs" state that inclusion is framed within the concepts of equality and opportunity which is at the same time, established in the Convention of Human Rights of 1948. According to students' conditions, the authors consider that universities should foster inclusion strategies in the curriculum as a requirement, as it has been done in the schools.

Arnaiz (cited in Álvarez & López, 2015) proposes accessibility as a primary fact in the academic students' life, and the process itself requires the involvement of all stakeholders in the educational community with the aim of building comprehensive teaching-learning scenarios inside any institution. According to UNESCO (2005) inclusive education refers to "a process of outreach and response to the diversity and needs of all students through the growing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and the reduction of the exclusion within and out of the education" (p.13). In short, the concept of Inclusion has experienced meaningful variations concerning the socio-cultural tensions of the epoch which has been reflected in the establishment of educational policies.

Type of impairment conditions

Considering the information above mentioned, it is necessary to describe, in general terms, the kinds of components and contexts that are recognized by International classification of functionality, disability and health (ICF) of World Health Organization (WHO), (2001). Body functions, related to physiological functions of body systems; Body structures, which are the anatomical parts of the body (organs, limbs, and their components); impairment, which points to problems in body function or structure belong to the category of disability and health. Since this article attempts to problematize a particular issue based on the author´s personal experience who is a person with low vision, it is important to expand the information related to visual impairment.

Based on article 2 of law 1680/2013 "Blindness" is the absence of light perception in both eyes. The law also identifies two types of disabilities within the same condition: Blindness and low vision. Based on a human diversity perspective, MEN, (2006), in its handbook (Pedagogical Guidelines for Educative Help for Students with Visual Impairments) argues that within the educational field, it is not possible to refer to the visual impairment as a barrier but as an opportunity or additional characteristic that must be taken into account in teaching-learning process. The handbook also points out a number of possibilities regarding communicative competences which are quite similar to the ones observed in mainstream students. Thereby, it is feasible to state that the professional profiles development of this population may be linked to programs such as Bachelor in

Education, Law, Languages, Social communication, among others. In the Colombian context, it is necessary to mention the creation of a national entity that responds to the needs of visually impaired people. INCI is aligned with the objectives of MEN within the educational framework whose objective is to provide technical assistance or orientation to any institution or company that wants to steer inclusion programs regarding adaptations or modifications required for such purpose.

Theory vs. context

Considering the theory and the different policies that frame the inclusive education in Colombia, it is important to talk about the context that surrounds the higher education as one of the last steps in the educational cycle to access to working environments. Colombian higher education represents the opportunity to acquire the specific knowledge to work in a target field. Besides, within a cultural connotation, it symbolizes a high social status, more working opportunities, social recognition and a chance to improve life quality conditions.

Social responsibility of universities

According to Castells (cited in Brennan, King, & Lebeau, 2004), there are four major functions of universities. Firstly, the universities have historically been considered as a mechanism that reflects the different ideological issues present in all societies. Secondly, they have always been used as instruments to settle down the dominant elites. Thirdly, the generation of knowledge based on research outputs. Fourthly, the training of skilled labor

force. Taking into account the previous information, it is possible to say that universities or

higher education institutions, highly respond to social systems with well-defined structures,

framed within economic requirements and some social needs.

Vallaeis, (2008) and Katz and Danel, (2011) claim that social responsibility has

gained strength in universities ideologies as a product of institutions' consciousness

between their relationship with the environment and social changes. This new vision

emerges from the society itself, as a need to recognize people´s diversity, where the

university is understood as an instrument to materialize that ideological perspective.

Therefore, policies of inclusion show the willingness of the stakeholders in the educational

field to foster a social transformation. In this case, Universidad La Gran Colombia has

played a prominent role in the Colombian social change based on its Christian ideology and

Socio-critical pedagogical model. However; the impact of this university lies in all the

programs of the education faculty which are aimed to educate people to be teachers who

somehow become subjects with a multiplier effect.

Within the B. Ed. in English, It is significant to mention the high amount of

possibilities connected to the occupational employment projections that are described in the

educational project of the program (EPP). The graduate student may have access to

different professional roles such as translator, teacher of English and other areas, tourist

guide, etc. This undoubtedly demonstrates the possibility of achieving a better articulation

among the social needs, in this case, inclusive education, and the professional development

field. This multidisciplinary characteristic of the program in English extends the action

range in the labor field. Besides, the Faculty of Education has designed and implemented different cross projects aimed to strengthen its multidisciplinary traits through the research processes.

All in all, the B. Ed in English, framed within the Faculty of Education, holds significant features that potentialize the recognition of the diversity based on its multicultural and multidisciplinary components which somewhat become the fundamental axes of any inclusion program. It means that inclusion does not start with the design of pedagogical interventions or adaptations, it starts from the recognition of the othering, their rights, and singularity. Taking into account the information mentioned above, it will be paramount to state that Universidad La Gran Colombia has had meaningful advances, since the enrollment of physically challenged students. This expresses a clear willingness to foster inclusive education until the design of educational improvement plans with the objective to fulfill the necessary requirements to steer its inclusion program successfully.

What sort of pedagogical strategies, physical resources, and institutional policies does Universidad La Gran Colombia require to enhance its inclusion program?

As it was mentioned before, Universidad La Gran Colombia, in its B. Ed in English has the basic requirements to enhance its inclusion program. It is also evident that it counts with a broad range of theoretical and legislative inputs as well as a well-prepared personnel who are capable of designing suitable proposals aligned with the college context and the

national inclusion policies. To expand the information previously mentioned, it will be mandatory to start with the analysis of the current educative variables the university has and that may contribute to the development of an inclusion program. Firstly, the university fosters a curricular development based on the Socio-critical approach that according to the Educative Institutional Program (EIP) has to do with the type of stimulus that promote educational experiences based on the social interaction through dialogue, analysis, and comparison between the reality and theory. The university approach provides flexibility to cover contents taking into account different perspectives, what will benefit the inclusion program.

On the other hand, the Faculty of Education has a distinctive feature called Consultorio Pedagógico which is aimed to provide personal assistance to those students who struggle with contents or activities of any subject in their schools. Related to this matter, the University could connect this strategy within its context as a supporting service for physically challenged students. Finally, another highlighted characteristic is the comprehensive perspective that Universidad La Gran Colombia has about values which is transmitted through subjects such as "Cultura Solidaria" and "Grancolombianidad". These subjects, based on my experience, integrate the principles aimed to contribute to the understanding of the diversity and inclusion education, especially in the B.Ed. in English. In short, it is possible to say that Universidad La Gran Colombia may further a suitable inclusion program, due to its compliance with pedagogical strategies reflected in its institutional policies. Nevertheless, the insights taken from theory and law for the design of

the inclusion program may substantially be enriched by the contributions of a visually impaired student who from a personal point of view may discuss issues related to his condition. Related to this matter, and considering all the features inherent to Universidad La Gran Colombia it is possible to state that the university should review the aspects described below to enhance its inclusion program.

First of all, the university requires the establishment of the Office of Student Disability Resources and Service which may be part of the University Welfare office whose first task will be the design of organizational strategies through databases for characterization, to visualize the physically challenged population in the university. Concerning this, the office will have to capture information about the type of impairment (physical, sensorial, cognitive or emotional), strengths and weaknesses related to teaching-learning process and social interaction. It will also be in charge of describing the type of adaptation and modifications required (Infrastructure, methodology, assessment and evaluation tools, etc), and medical record with the corresponding restrictions. Resources like these help institutions to construct diagnostics for researchers, and create, improve, and promote services. In general terms, these kinds of characterizations permit this university to identify barriers and generate suitable action plans according to its college population needs. However, and taking into account the social responsibility expressed in the programs of the Faculty of Education, it will be paramount to set enrollment protocols with the objective to determine professional profiles and how those will fit into the profiles needed for each program.

Besides, the Office of Student Disability Resources and Service should steer training process in which the community of Universidad La Gran Colombia conceived from the characteristics and necessities of each program and not from a general perspective mediated only by the social inclusion. That is to say, the information provided in the pieces of training must fulfill specific requirements that will support teaching practices by showing successful experiences in inclusive classrooms through pedagogical adaptations or modifications. This type of training may light the materialization of inclusion policies in the college. Within these adaptations, it is also required to use Typhlological[4] material, like braille printing, internet browsing with screen reading or magnifying software, library consults with book reader devices, relief adaptation for graphical material, digitalization with optical character recognition (OCR), etc.

Finally, infrastructures in the university should be accessible to all kind of people. In the case of visually impaired population, infrastructures should be signposted in braille system, big letters and hard color contrast. Additionally, there should be railing steps with sufficient size for two or more people circulation, and all accessible zones from physically challenged population should have a disability symbol.

To conclude, it is important to state that every change that fosters the inclusive education will not only benefit the physically challenged college population, but it also makes a significant contribution to the educational community where the university will be

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[4] It refers to the type of adapted material to support the teaching and learning of people with visual impairments such as Braille, macro type, topography and QR.

recognized by its innovative proposals in the inclusion field. It is also advisable to lead

research processes that strengthen the possible strategies to develop programs regarding

bilingual education in English as a foreign language where the university promotes field

trials to identify insights that may enhance teaching practices in EFL inclusive classrooms.

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