

# Inclusive Policies and the Permanence of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education 2024

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## Abstract

The situations of disability of students in public and private universities in Ecuador and the use of inclusive policies represent a point of analysis and institutional application worthy of research. Through the implementation and evaluation of these policies, it is intended to guarantee equitable access to education, while promoting an inclusive academic environment. The research aimed to determine the relationship between inclusive policies and the permanence of students with disabilities at the University of Guayaquil during the fiscal period 2023, through a quantitative approach, non-experimental design, correlational scope, and cross-sectional section. The adaptation of perception instruments on inclusive policies and student permanence was used, which were validated by experts in addition to establishing adequate reliability indices, for a total sample of 113 students. Among its results, it evidenced a medium perception of inclusive policies with 56.64% by students, about their application in higher education institutions; in relation to the perception of student permanence, a mean perception of 62.83% by students corresponded. Likewise, a positive and significant relationship was denoted between both inclusive policies and the permanence of students with disabilities in the university. In conclusion, as the application of inclusive policies is perceived, the permanence of students with disabilities is guaranteed.

**Keywords:** inclusive policy, student permanence, inclusion, disability, higher education.

## 1. Introduction

Higher education is a fundamental pillar in the development of individuals and societies, as it not only provides knowledge and skills, but also promotes equal opportunities and social progress. In the Ecuadorian context, the inclusion of all sectors of the population in higher education is a major challenge, especially with regard to the care and support of students with disabilities.

In Ecuador, although the laws governing the inclusion process are complied with and various policies and programs have been implemented to promote educational inclusion, there are still significant barriers that hinder the access and permanence of students with disabilities in higher education institutions. These barriers may be related to the lack of an inclusive model, adequate infrastructure, the scarcity of specialized resources, discrimination, lack of awareness and training of academic staff, among other aspects.

Currently it is a challenge to establish a research work from the search for explanations about inclusive policies and the permanence of students in the university, in this context, the present study focused on analyzing the existing relationships between public policies with special attention to their application to improve this experience of inclusion; as well as identify existing challenges, the good practices implemented, and propose recommendations to strengthen inclusion and guarantee quality education for all students, regardless of their abilities.

In recent decades, the promotion of inclusive policies in higher education has gained relevance in the international education agenda. Inclusion has become a fundamental principle in the pursuit of equitable and quality education for all students, regardless of their social, cultural, economic background, or disability status.

In this sense, Mendieta "et al" (2023) details that inclusive policies in higher education not only focus on guaranteeing equal access opportunities, but also on the creation of welcoming educational environments that promote diversity, equity, and participation of all students. Pointing out the importance of promoting the social and academic integration of students through support, advice and accompaniment strategies during their university career.

In an ever-changing global context, inclusive policies in higher education face new challenges and opportunities, especially in relation to cultural diversity, educational technology, and attention to functional diversity. Correa and Restrepo (2018) have advocated for innovative and holistic approaches that integrate inclusion as a cross-cutting principle in the planning, execution and evaluation of educational policies at the university level, based on a model that articulates the processes related to teaching methodology, communication, research, seeing the student integrated from knowledge in its entirety, that is, from the cultural, linguistic, religious identity and their capacities.

The term inclusive policies represents ensuring the participation and equitable access of all groups in society in public policy decisions and benefits. These policies seek to eliminate barriers and discriminate against marginalized or excluded groups, such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, gender or sexuality, the objective is to generate a more just, equitable and diverse society.

UNESCO (2008), in a conference, establishes that inclusive policies in education are those that promote equity, equal opportunities, non-discrimination and the active participation of all students in school life and in the community. Conceptualization that serves as an umbrella for the organization of all higher education institutions in the inclusion process, based on a legal theoretical framework based on the rights of people to non-discrimination and equal opportunity.

Benet (2020), through a study focused on inquiring about inclusive and normative policies, says that the University of Jaume I, in order to guarantee access, permanence and student participation, must develop an inclusive policy that encompasses all services and regulations based on the intercultural approach.

Clavijo and Bautista (2020) detail the variable Inclusive Policies and its dimensions, inferring that at the international level and specifically in Ecuador it has been governed by the laws that protect the entire process of educational inclusion; despite this, it denotes that transforming the policies, culture and practice of a university is a challenge for which it needs the commitment and participation of all actors with the creation of an inclusive model that is based on planning from the entry to graduation of students.

In relation to the theoretical development of the permanence variable, according to Rodríguez, (2020) in his study he noted that Chilean universities do not have the same criteria regarding the admission processes for students with disabilities, becoming a barrier in this context. Likewise, these results confirm that there are no clear objectives in institutional planning to ensure that students maintain and complete their higher education process successfully. These findings denoted a significant correlation between inclusive policies and permanence, that is, if there is no planning of all the elements that intervene, such as teaching methodology, infrastructure, environment, resources, and awareness of disability, the process cannot be guaranteed.

According to Vásquez (2020), it states that the educational needs of students included in higher education are linked to the right to understand, receive, and disseminate information of all kinds without restrictions or barriers, whether oral or written, as well as to adaptation to teaching methodologies and an inclusive environment.

In the same sense, Fajardo (2017) mentions that universities have evolved with respect to inclusive education for people with disabilities, revealing diverse and multiple realities from the conception of public policies to regulations, practices, culture and the recognition of this population as subjects of law, expressing the lack of guarantee that each institution must conceive to attend to diversity and provide educational quality.

## **2. Methodology**

According to Torres, (2016), quantitative research, quantitative approach, correlational scope, non-experimental design and cross-sectional research, quantitative research allows identifying and formulating a scientific problem.

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between inclusive policies and the permanence of students with disabilities in a higher education institute in the city of Guayaquil.

A probabilistic sample was used corresponding to 113 students from a total of 17 faculties, in a situation of disability, among which the physical, visual, auditory are denoted.

### Instruments applied

The theoretical and categorical instrumentalization of information allows data to be collected objectively, through instructions and strategies that allow the researcher to obtain useful information to answer the research question. They serve to obtain relevant and necessary information in the study (Tamayo, 2020).

In this study, a Likert scale questionnaire was designed and applied to instrumentalize the perception of inclusive policies, as well as a questionnaire to measure the perception of the permanence of students with disabilities; the same one that went through a validation process with five experts on the subject.

The questionnaire is an instrument used to collect and obtain in-depth and accurate information on a chosen topic. This was used for this study in order to be applied directly to students. In its entirety, the information collected is presented by means of numerical data (Arias González, 2020).

Inclusive Policies Questionnaire, the 18 items were structured under differentiating the three dimensions of the independent variable inclusive policy, which corresponded to the normative dimension, culture dimension and inclusive practice dimension, under a Likert scale score from 1 to 5, obtaining a Cronbach's alpha of 0.977

For the design, an instrument called Index was taken as a reference, an instrument used for evaluations in educational institutions, which allows establishing a posteriori the identification of factors that promote the participatory identification of an inclusion proposal, allowing changes to be carried out jointly in the context. (Ganuza, 2014).

The permanence questionnaire for students with disabilities was structured through 18 items, under three dimensions, such as the dimension of action and participation, dimension of academic progress and support, dimension of resource and inclusive environment, with an alpha of Combrach is 0.948.

Statistical treatment : the statistical processor, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 for Windows, was used.

### Procedure

The development of the research in stages is described below, as indicated in Table (1).

**Board 1 Protocol for the development of the research by phases.**

stages	Category	Related activities
stage 1	Revision documentary	Theoretical and conceptual definition of the investigated variables, in scientific articles based on Scopus, Ebscot, Dialnet, Redalyc, through digital platforms. Finally, it concluded with the selection and documentary analysis of the two variables: Inclusive policies and Permanence of students with disabilities.

Step 2	Linking to the sample	A publicly funded higher education institute in the city of Guayaquil was targeted. Subsequently, the participants who made up the sample (students) were located.
Step 3	Instrumentalization	It began with the validation of 5 experts, by both instruments. The questionnaire Inclusive Policies and Permanence of students with disabilities was applied. To students linked to research.
Phase 4	Analysis of results	The respective analysis of results was established through the application of the SPSS statistical programme. In addition to the respective factor analysis for each of the variables and dimensions evaluated.
Phase 5	Return	The respective return of results, conclusions and recommendations was carried out with the authorities, teachers and students of the institution. Subsequently, it was disseminated to the scientific community, through the publication of a scientific product.

Source: own elaboration 2024

### 3. Results

In relation to the results of the study variable Inclusive Policies, 56.64% of the students denoted an average perception of their compliance and application within the higher education institution.

According to the dimensions of the inclusive policies variable, the inclusive culture dimension is established with a mean perception interval of 50.44%, being the highest scored in the analysis of the variable; the second inclusive normative dimension with an average perception interval of 45.13% and in relation to the inclusive practical dimension, 48.67% of average perception by students.

The interval results obtained with the sample of students, in relation to the permanence variable, corresponded to the average interval with 62.83%, which establishes an average perception by the students, in relation to the permanence of those students with disabilities in the higher education institution.

In relation to the results of intervals by dimension obtained from the dependent variable permanence, the academic progress dimension is scored in first place with an average perception interval of 62.83%, in second place the acceptance and participation dimension with 59.29%, followed by the support, resource and inclusive environment dimension, with 44.25%.

The result obtained in relation to inclusive policies and the permanence of students with disabilities evidenced, according to Rho Spearman's analysis, a positive and significant correlation of 0.688, between both variables, the bilateral significance of 0.01 for this correlation is highly significant; that is, as the perception of inclusive policies is perceived, increases the permanence of students with disabilities, consequently we can rule out the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) inclusive policies are not related to the permanence of students with disabilities in university. and admitting the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>) inclusive policies are related to the permanence of students with disabilities in university, see table (2).

Board 2 Correlation between inclusive political variables and permanence			
Permanence P. Inclusive			
Inclusive policies	Spearman's Rho Correlation	1	,688**
	Sig. (bilateral)		0,000
	N	113	113
Permanence	Spearman's Rho Correlation	,688**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	0,000	
	N	113	113

Source: own elaboration 2024

#### 4. Discussion

Based on the results, the research hypothesis is ratified, indicating that the application or practice of inclusive policies in the university context guarantees the permanence of students with disabilities, findings similar to those obtained by Yunga (2022), referring to the absence of real guarantees that require compliance with the regulations that determine the link between institutional inclusive policies and their relationship with the student's admission and permanence.

Similarly, Benet-Gil (2020) highlights the importance of compliance with university policies and their relationship in guaranteeing access and permanence for students, as well as denouncing the absence of a higher-order policy that reaffirms this compliance, since services are fragmented. In short, the criterion of joint actions and demands to the state reaffirm in a positive sense the relationship between policies and permanence, of the students, a central point of the findings of this research.

Morejón, et al (2019), refers in their study that young people with disabilities were discriminated against and rejected for decades, welcomed by private institutions with a view to welfare, that since 2007 with the implementation of laws that guarantee the rights of educational inclusion, the university develops inclusive policy programs to support access, permanence and graduation of this population, finally mentions that even so, the admission of students to university is deficient and they have low levels of education.

Along the same lines, inclusive policies are a reality in higher education, with aspirations to eliminate the barriers that arise in this context, such as the teaching methodology that has to do

with the knowledge or preparation of teachers, according to the study by Hernández and Samada (2021), denoting how important the support of teachers is in the inclusion process.

Similarly, Arizabaleta and Ochoa (2016) offer a conceptual analysis of inclusive higher education and the challenges that universities have to appropriate in the characterization of the learning barriers of included students and the reflection on the organization of strategies that guarantee access, permanence, and academic graduation.

In relation to the result obtained from the inclusive practice dimension, corresponding to the independent variable, the finding of a perception through compliance with 48.67% in the student population, are in agreement with a study carried out by Zárate, et al (2017), the emphasized that the pedagogical strategies used by teachers in the teaching process with students with disabilities in university classrooms, establish conditions for a generalization of inclusive practices, in the same way he connoted the strengthening of institutional regulations that pronounce the active and participatory commitment of the entire educational community in pedagogical actions.

Educational inclusion is a complete challenge for universities and even more so for teachers to allow curricular adaptations, they establish adequate conditions to respond to needs. According to Martínez (2019), it is necessary to implement teaching strategies for the learning process of students and therefore to see academic progress through quality learning, findings that coincide with the significant relationship between inclusive policies and students' academic progress.

As for the dependent variable permanence in the higher education system, a medium perception by students was also denoted with 62.83%. This reaffirms a study carried out by Rodríguez (2020), on the access and permanence of students with disabilities in Chilean universities, revealed that an existing barrier to inclusion is the absence of planning in the admission process at the university level, concluding in the responsibility of the state to manage or not a centralized model of special admission system for people with disabilities with institutional indicators such as infrastructure, resources, methodology and others. Clearly showing that inclusive policies are once again the ones that guarantee the permanence of students.

The inclusive support and resource dimension corresponding to the dependent variable permanence with a mean perception of compliance by students, coincides with the contributions of Aguilar, et al (2024), in their study identified the need for support and help from teachers towards integrated students, being a limitation for academic progress within the institution; likewise, in the results it identified that the conception of the authorities on the student, is the adaptation of the same to the educational system, not the other way around, reaffirming the supremacy of the institution without considering the reading and accomplishments of its population.

Educational inclusion is a complete challenge for universities and even more so for teachers, by being able to make curricular adaptations, they could provide responses closer to the needs. According to Martínez (2019), what entails a reorganization of classes, that is, implementing teaching strategies for the learning process of students and consequently their academic improvements through quality learning, arguments that theoretically reaffirm the dimension explored on academic progress.

Mora (2022), through his research, contributes and reaffirms the duty of universities to comprehensively manage policies, as well as their understanding explicitly in relation to access, progress, graduation, use of infrastructure, curriculum, accompaniment, training, and others. This strengthens the findings of this research both in the existing relationship of the declared variables and in the dimension of support, resource and inclusive environment belonging to the dependent variable Permanence.

According to Bartolomé (2021), in his research he establishes as a result that within the inclusive policy, elements such as access to technology, the physical environment and learning methodologies must be considered, using curricular adaptations, pedagogical materials, as well as the figure of a tutor or pedagogical facilitator to guarantee the permanence of students.

Unlike Castillo (2020), his study reveals that there is an unfavorable perception on the part of the university community due to the lack of knowledge of inclusive services, causing a low perception of related policies, consequently a lack of commitment to an educational culture and practice. Data that denotes an extreme reality that warns us about the consequences of ignorance. This situation does not coincide with the results of this research since the predominance of the university community was a medium perception of the variables studied. However, it is not ruled out that a generalized situation of medium perception warns of an unfavorable future for the situations of people with disabilities.

On the other hand, an individual analysis allows us to establish that disability is a condition of the individual subject, which is implicit in several aspects related to their development process during their childhood, adolescence and adulthood, as indicated by Jean Piaget's theory, for the cognitive process to occur, four stages of development of the human being must be passed. sensory-motor, operational, concrete and formal period.

It was also considered important to relate the issue of students with disabilities with the theory of Albert Bandura who says that children learn in social contexts through observation and imitation, consequently, the child or young person is affected by the influence of others. Current inclusive education must be related to these theories, considering in its programs the cognitive development of the student and promoting activities for individual and group work. Through these social interactions, they will be able to access knowledge, in addition to developing communication skills and learning the different perspectives that are presented in university classrooms.

Ramos et al (2021) also mentions that teachers are inclined to get involved in processes related to student diversity, in the same way it denotes that the authorities must place greater emphasis on the institutional commitment to prepare students for the diversity of society, through consensual planning with the entire educational community.

According to Castro (2022), in his research on educational justification, in relation to equal opportunities, both in the professional training of teachers and in the awareness of disability, he proposes the instrumentalization of curricula, which guarantee the permanence of students. As can be denoted in a general way, the research points to and highlights the same binarity of the process that corresponds to inclusion policies and their effect on permanence, variables that have



been widely corroborated and that strengthen the awareness-raising actions internalized in teachers, their andragogical actions and their attitudinal actions (Viteri, 2021)

## 5. Conclusions

Relationship between inclusive policies and student permanence, the research confirmed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the perception of inclusive policies and the permanence of students with disabilities in the university. This implies that, as students perceive that inclusive policies are effective and correctly applied, their permanence in higher education is favored.

Average perception of inclusive policies, students expressed a medium perception (56.64%) about compliance with and application of inclusive policies. This indicates that, although there are efforts in the implementation of these policies, there are still areas that need to be improved to achieve a more positive perception among students.

Dimensions of inclusive policies, the dimensions of inclusive culture (50.44%), inclusive regulations (45.13%) and inclusive practice (48.67%) show an average perception by students. This highlights the need to strengthen each of these areas to ensure a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

Permanence of students with disabilities, the permanence of students with disabilities was also perceived in an average way (62.83%). This reflects that, although there is progress, it is crucial to continue improving the conditions and support offered to these students.

Importance of institutional support, the study reaffirms that institutional support, including adequate resources, accessible infrastructure and awareness of academic staff, is essential to guarantee the permanence and academic success of students with disabilities.

## 6. Recommendations

Strengthening inclusive policies, it is necessary to strengthen and expand inclusive policies, ensuring that they are known and understood by all members of the university community. This includes updating and disseminating regulations, as well as implementing more effective inclusive practices.

Training and awareness-raising, implementing training and sensitization programs for academic and administrative staff on the importance of inclusion and the specific needs of students with disabilities. This can improve the perception and effectiveness of inclusive policies.

Improving infrastructure and resources, ensuring that university infrastructure is fully accessible and that the necessary resources are available to support students with disabilities. This includes adapting educational materials, assistive technologies, and physical spaces.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation, establishing mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of inclusive policies to identify areas for improvement and ensure that the objectives of inclusion and student permanence are being met.

Student participation, encouraging the active participation of students with disabilities in decision-making related to inclusive policies. This can provide valuable insights and ensure that policies are truly responsive to their needs.

Collaboration and good practices, promote collaboration between educational institutions to share good practices and successful strategies in the inclusion of students with disabilities. This can help strengthen inclusive policies and practices at the national and international levels.

Ongoing research, encourage ongoing research on the effectiveness of inclusive policies and their impact on the retention of students with disabilities. Future studies may explore new strategies and approaches to improve inclusion in higher education.

Finally, this research hopes to generate a new look at study variables for both the scientific community and educational policymakers and university administrators, in order to improve inclusion and guarantee quality education for all students, regardless of their abilities.

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