

Experiences and Challenges of Inclusive Education in Higher Education

Mayra Solanye Galindo Huertas¹, Sandra Lorena Herrera Giraldo², Flor Deisy Arenas Castro³, Deisy Marcela Martínez Sánchez¹

¹Observatorio de Géneros y Derechos Humanos. Grupo de Investigación GERCUS-UPTC, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia

²Grupo de Investigación GERCUS-UPTC, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia

³Grupo de Estudios en Feminismos, Géneros y Derechos Humanos-GIEPEG- UPTC, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia

Abstract

This study explores the experiences and challenges of students with hearing impairment in a Colombian university within the framework of inclusive education. Through a qualitative approach, the perceptions of students and their caregivers regarding admission policies, academic participation, and institutional and curricular environments were analyzed. The findings indicate that, although inclusion policies exist, they are not fully effective, presenting significant barriers to the access and participation of deaf students, such as insufficient availability of qualified interpreters, lack of curricular adjustments, and lack of adequate infrastructure. In addition, participants pointed to attitudes of exclusion on the part of peers and university staff, as well as an institutional culture that does not fully promote diversity. The study suggests the need to strengthen inclusive strategies to guarantee the right to education in conditions of equality and respect for diversity in higher education.

Keywords: People with disabilities, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

1. Introduction

The objective of this research was to identify, from the voices of students with hearing impairment and their main caregivers, the actions that a Colombian University has carried out within the framework of inclusive education.

Inclusive education seeks to ensure access to education for all people, by removing barriers to learning and implementing reasonable accommodations. At the national and international level, there is a legal framework that protects and promotes inclusive education as a right. However, reaching this point has not been an easy process, as both the understanding of the differences encompassed by the term "all" and the ways of interacting with those differences have changed over time (UNESCO, 2020).

Throughout history, different models have been adopted to understand "the different", especially in relation to disability, which has led to the creation of labels and practices based on these understandings. Educational settings have been fundamental in the discussion and practice on the meaning of differences. In the Ancient Age, an imaginary of disability predominated that sought to eliminate difference, associating it with weakness or malformation. In the Middle Ages, religious influence reinforced this idea, considering the different as manifestations of divine punishment, which resulted in their isolation. With the arrival of the Modern Age, the perception changed towards a rehabilitative-medical model, where difference was seen as a disease that could be treated, although these people were still considered abnormal. (García, 2020)

At the end of the twentieth century, driven by social movements, the social model emerged, which proposes that the difference does not lie in the subject, but in the prejudices of society. Throughout these models, different terms have emerged to refer to what is different: from religious terms to terms such as "person with a disability" in the current social model. Today, diverse perceptions of difference coexist and permeate social and cultural contexts. In the educational field, these perceptions imposed by society emerge, which has led to different models of relationship with what is different. (García, 2020)

The "World Declaration on Education for All" (UNESCO, 1990) was one of the first documents that began to address the issue of inclusive education. This and other documents issued by international organizations have profoundly influenced the legal frameworks of the countries that adopted them. Thus, inclusive education is legally supported as a right, in the hope that it will become the means to address inequality and inequity.

In this context, higher education plays a crucial role in the development of inclusive and equitable societies. However, in order to achieve true equality of opportunity, it is essential to address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in this area. Public policies play a fundamental role in establishing the foundations for a more inclusive and accessible education system. Within the framework of the creation of the inclusion and non-discrimination policy in a Colombian University, Agreement 015 of 2021, it is important to reveal the obstacles, systemic discrimination or the denial of reasonable accommodations that affect the recognition of non-discrimination and all human rights in higher education spaces. (UPTC, 2021)

For the year 2022, the bulletin of the Inclusive and Diverse Education Program (PESID) of the University, indicated that it served "Population with visual, physical and/or hearing disabilities; diverse population with a gender perspective and sexual orientation; women in vulnerable conditions; veterans of the public force; ethnic populations: indigenous, Afro-Colombians, palenqueros, raizales, members of the black communities and the Rrom people; victims of the armed conflict in Colombia; demobilized persons in the process of reintegration; border dwellers and areas of difficult access. The University's inclusion and non-discrimination policy ensured that for the 2021-2 semester, 824 students characterized by some condition of vulnerability were enrolled, of which 100 with disabilities. (Bulletin 2022, PESID)

Although it is true, the policy of the University proposes as lines of action: characterization, strengthening of the institutional culture; the dialogue of knowledge; physical and technological

accessibility; resource management; evaluation and qualification, it goes without saying that in order to guarantee a university community that recognizes difference and diversity, and promotes the development of skills, other types of actions must be incorporated, as established by national guidelines, including: inclusion and accessibility, reasonable adjustments and specific support, teacher training and awareness, access to financial resources; continuous monitoring and evaluation and inter-institutional collaboration.

The promotion of equality and diversity is a fundamental pillar in the construction of fairer and more equitable societies. By aligning the University's policies with the standards and recommendations of the National Inclusive Education Index, an environment that respects and values the diversity of all members of the educational community is actively promoted, including, but not limited to, differences in abilities.

Likewise, the implementation of inclusive education policies has a direct impact on the quality of education, which is why it is necessary that they comply with the possibility of adequate follow-up and promote an environment of respect and a higher rate of student satisfaction, as it is an essential step towards the creation of an equitable educational environment. innovative and high quality. (Saldarriaga Concha Foundation, 2017)

2. METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative paradigm, with a content analysis method.

Content analysis does not offer a strict methodological route due to the diversity of intentions. Systematization is the most recognized characteristic; whatever the intention, for this reason, a deductive perspective was used for this study (Díaz, 2018), based on the dimensions of the Inclusion Index in Higher Education - INES - to recognize the capacity for harmonization that the experiences of people with hearing disabilities have had, given the existence of the inclusive and diverse education policy of the University.

The selection of the participants (14 people) took place in two ways, the first thanks to the collaboration of PESID professionals, who provided the email addresses of the people characterized as the population with disabilities. After the initial contact and acceptance of some students, we sought to contact them by snowball, among classmates and through interpreters. The caregivers were contacted through the students who participated.

The collection techniques were focus groups and semi-structured interviews. For both techniques, there was a plan or course of questions based on the dimensions considered in the INES, which sought to inquire about the experiences of the students and their caregivers, for each meeting there was a Colombian sign language interpreter. Three focus groups were conducted: one with students with hearing impairment (5 students) and two with caregivers (2 caregivers in each gf), a caregiver was also a fellow student of a deaf person. And five interviews with students.

Table 1. Characterization of the participants

Role	Type of meeting
Student (1) Male	Focus Group
Student (2) Male	Focus Group
Student (3) Male	Focus Group
Student (4) Male	Focus Group
Student (5) Male	Focus Group
Student (1) Female	Interview
Student (2) Female	Interview
Family (1) Female	Focus Group
Family (2) Female	Focus Group
Student (6) Male	Interview
Student (7) Male	Interview
Student (8) Male	Interview
Family (3) Female	Focus Group
Family (4) Female	Focus Group
* The number in parentheses indicates the sequence of participants in GF and in Interview, denoting that it corresponds to different people.	

The documents were systematized based on the phases proposed by Arbeláez & Onrubia (2014) for the content analysis:

1. Pre-analysis phase, in which the transcription of each meeting was made, each document was configured in a sampling unit, for a total of 8 documents. Likewise, the structuring and conceptualization of the dimensions and categories considered a priori, guided by the provisions of the INES.

Table 2. Dimensions and categories of the INES for content analysis

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	CONCEPTUALIZATION
ACCESS	Admissions Policies	Review how admissions policies promote the inclusion of students with disabilities, including reasonable accommodations and flexibility in access criteria. Opening of the possibility of entry to different population groups and, if not, the presence of technical documents or guidelines that amply justify the reasons why certain population groups are

		privileged.
	Support Mechanisms	Evaluation of support systems to facilitate the admission of students with disabilities, including guidance, scholarships and specific financial aid, flexibility in entrance tests, presence of professional personnel to accompany the admission process, reasonable accommodation, as access to information in a timely manner, presence of sign language interpreters, among others.
	Demographics:	Analysis of the representation of students with disabilities in the university, disaggregated by gender, type of disability and other relevant factors, as territory of origin, among others.
PARTICIPATION	Inclusive Learning Environment	Evaluate whether the physical and virtual spaces of the university are accessible and promote the full participation of students with disabilities, review web accessibility according to W3C.
	Interaction and Participation in University Life	Measuring the active participation of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities, university committees, and student-led projects.

	Adjustments to Academic Participation	Evaluation of the measures adopted to guarantee equitable participation in the teaching-learning process, such as curricular flexibility and adjustment of evaluation methods. Presence in the methodological plan of teachers from the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the creation of enriched pedagogical environments.
CURRICULUM	Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	Evaluation of how the academic curriculum adapts to the diverse learning styles and rhythms of students, implementing UDL to eliminate barriers in learning, inclusion of enriched learning environments, flexible assessments.
	Teacher Training	Review of continuing education programs for academic staff on issues of inclusion, diversity, accessibility, UDL, curriculum and evaluation flexibility, design of enriched pedagogical learning environments and attention to differences.
	Learning Assessment	Analysis of evaluation strategies to ensure that they are inclusive and non-discriminatory, considering the particularities of the students, that is, the criteria for flexibility of the evaluation, and also the structural adjustments to the curriculum.
INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS	Accessible Infrastructure	Analysis of the physical accessibility of academic, administrative and recreational spaces, including the existence of ramps, elevators, signage, etc.

	Technology Resources	Availability of and access to assistive technologies, such as screen-reading software, materials in accessible formats and adapted digital platforms.
	Inclusion, Diversity and Difference Policies	Review of the existence and updating of institutional policies that promote the participation of students with disabilities and how these are effectively implemented.
	Individualized Support Plans	Existence of personalized plans that contemplate the specific needs of students with disabilities, ensuring that they receive the necessary reasonable accommodations, these must be specific in technical and specialized support personnel, aspects of technological and curricular support.
RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY	Linkage with External Actors:	Evaluation of alliances with civil society organizations, educational institutions and government entities to promote the development of programs and projects according to the particularities of the population groups and the university itself, which allows the exchange of experiences, attracts investment of resources or leverages projects.
	Student Collaboration	Review of how collaboration between students with and without disabilities is encouraged, promoting a culture of inclusion and mutual respect.
	Support Network	Presence of support networks for students with disabilities, including tutors,

		mentors, and other community resources that facilitate their active participation in university life.
INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE	Promoting an Inclusive Culture	Evaluate how the university promotes a culture of respect and recognition of diversity, including awareness campaigns and disability awareness programs.
	Transparency in Inclusive Management	Review of institutional communication, inclusive policies and practices, including accountability and participation of students with disabilities in decision-making processes.
	Staff Awareness and Engagement	Evaluation of the active participation of all university staff in the creation of an inclusive environment, from teachers to administrative and service staff.
EVALUATION AND MONITORING	Institutional Evaluation Systems	Analysis of how the university monitors and evaluates its inclusive policies and programs, including the collection of relevant data on access, participation and academic success of students with disabilities.
	Academic and Personal Progress	Monitoring the academic and personal progress of students with disabilities, identifying barriers and areas that require adjustment.
	Feedback Systems	Existence of mechanisms for students with disabilities to provide feedback on their academic experience and the support received.

2. Descriptive phase: in this phase, the documents were read exhaustively in order to have clarity about the data and to select units of context or significant sections, for each of the categories. For each context unit, a code was generated: E Interview, No Interview Number, R role, (E student, C caregiver)Initial in capital letters of first name and first surname. And if the unit belonged to a Focus Group: GF Focus Group, Focus Group No, R role, (E student, C caregiver) and initial in capital letters of first name and first surname.

Ejemplo: E1-E-RB.

3. Analytical phase: For this phase, a deductive thematic content analysis was used based on the categories previously established by the INES reference (Arbeláez & Onrubia, 2014). The aim was to describe how each of the dimensions and categories is understood from the participants' narratives (Miles & Huberman, 2000).

ETHICAL ASPECTS

The ethical approval was granted by the University's Ethics Committee. The procedures complied with Resolution 8430 of 1993. The work was based on the fundamental ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and respect. Ethical management was guaranteed under the precepts of: Law 1581 that speaks of the processing of personal data, taking into account the principle of confidentiality; the Declaration of Helsinki; information to participants about the risk and benefits of participation, the use of free and informed consent and the possibility of dissent during any time during the study. Annex 1. Informed consent for focus group and interview. People with hearing disabilities were guaranteed the accompaniment of an interpreter during each meeting. To guarantee voluntary participation, the invitation and recruitment was made directly by the researchers, although the contact details were provided by the directors of the academic programs and the inclusive and diverse education program of the University, with the assurance that the non-acceptance of participation and/or withdrawal will not affect the relationship of the participants with the University.

The study was classified as risk-free research. The following criteria were taken into account to determine methodological rigor, taking into account Morse's proposal cited by Arias and Giraldo (2011).

Credibility (internal validity) and Transferability (external validity): The triangulation of information among the researchers was achieved through the detailed description of the methodological route. In addition, as a way of ensuring the credibility of the information, the process of collection, systematization, analysis and interpretation was carried out by the researchers in permanent dialogue in order to control the appearance of beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon.

Confirmability or reflexivity: these were guaranteed given the processes of systematization of the information through the unified matrix and the evaluation of the concordance of the results with other studies.

This document does not present any conflicts of interest on the part of any of the researchers.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION

The nature of this research work, which is focused on the investigation of the experience to know the reality of the implementation of the inclusive education policy of a Colombian University explicitly linked and coordinated with the Index of Inclusion in Higher Education (INES) understanding it as a fundamental guide to reflect on and improve inclusive educational practices in the educational institution and not only that, but also considers that it must provide a framework to build an accessible and fair educational space, taking into account the diversity of all people who become students, recognizing that difference is a constituent part of human beings, especially those who face difficulties and obstacles to their participation.

ACCESS DIMENSION

The analysis of the experiences of deaf students and their caregivers made it possible to understand that access as a problem, the experiences of the participants show that the fact of entering the University is recognized as a difficult process and poorly adapted to the needs of deaf people. Despite the fact that the policy exists, none of the people revealed that they knew it in depth, they linked it only to the possibilities that people with disabilities have in the fact of entering a career with a quota. They consider that the admission policies do not consider reasonable accommodations, since it is difficult to obtain information, they do not consider that their first language is Colombian Sign Language (LSC), that ICFES is in a process of reading and writing that generates disadvantages for them, and finally, they describe entering the University as a competition with other types of disabilities.

"For the deaf population, the ICFES is different because their first language is Colombian sign language, that is clear and it is not written Spanish" (GF2-C-YS)

"And then, they did some tests, I remember well, in the Colosseum, some physical tests. The first time they did some physical tests, but there was no one to explain it to me, because I didn't know if that was an exam, there were only hearing people and I was the only deaf person." (E3-E-RB)

"However, what I found the saddest, and which I think we have discussed on many occasions, is the issue that we have to compete with other disabilities, for example physical. And as you know, our second language is written Spanish and that is a disadvantage for us, as for English, it is not always going to go well and obviously the other disabilities have that advantage that their first language is written Spanish." (E2-E-AP)

"Here the disabilities, for example, the visual impairment, competed to enter, they still compete, and I think that should be corrected because we should not compete with that disability. Because blind people listen, they have a better understanding. The deaf don't, the deaf don't. Some of us, those of us who are profound, our Spanish is almost non-existent. Then the visuals automatically pass." (E3-E-RB)

In relation to admission policies, some students mention multiple attempts to enter before being accepted, with the impression of a systematic rejection or little interest in facilitating inclusion, even so, their persistence in entering the University even allows them to call it a "stroke of luck".

"... my son was singled out, believe me that there were six attempts to enter the U... It was so obvious that I didn't want to accept it." (GF2-C-YS)

"But here, the U, I feel that deaf people are not prioritized much. I think that those who have been able to enter have entered by luck." (GF1-E-CI)

And regarding support mechanisms, it is found that it is more difficult for people with disabilities to access information such as scholarships, housing, food or others, or that even people who could be a support mechanism for the admission of students are limited or reduced by limiting or reducing the possibility of admission.

"Well, when we went for the first time, it was the only time they said (Scholarships and grants), when we went to see the university. But when he enrolled and they admitted him, no one else spoke to us about it again." (GF2-C-MC)

"... although I tried to apply for several scholarships, but communication was difficult, that is, it was impossible for me to access any scholarship. Several times I went to the system there, to see if they could accompany me or someone to see if I could get a scholarship, but no, it was never possible." (E3-E-RB)

An element that is important to highlight is that during the meetings and the linking of participants it was not possible to clearly recognize detailed data (demographic) on how many and the disintegration due to hearing impairment (profound deafness, or hearing loss: profound, severe, moderate, or mild) which is essential for the participants because according to their narratives the experiences are different and therefore the needs.

"That teachers understand that deaf people, well I went, I became a hearing person in my childhood, so I have reading comprehension because I managed to learn to read, write and speak, before becoming completely deaf, while a profoundly deaf person does not have that reading comprehension because he does not know the Spanish language." (E1-E-LQ)

The perceptions about access to the University seem to generate an experience of discrimination and an exclusionary environment from the entrance, given that students have the same right to access academic opportunities under equal conditions, these situations indicate that it is necessary to review admission policies to guarantee the right to education. equality and accessibility to higher education.

PARTICIPATION DIMENSION

Faced with this dimension, the participants point out a lack of support in university life, especially in interaction and participation for an inclusive environment, given that students require the accompaniment of interpreters in other spaces of the University outside the classroom, such as cafeterias, administrative spaces, health services, etc. among others. Similarly, although they have the support of interpreters during their classes, it is pointed out that this resource is not sufficient to ensure full participation, since interpreters often lack specialized training in technical subjects, and even in sign language, noting that some interpreters have a basic level.

"But we see other deaf people who come here to the cafeteria or come to any here context of the university, they are always alone. Alone, they don't have any listeners to collaborate with them or to be there with them, ever." (GF3-C-AG)

At the same time, participation in the university environment is fully affected, because students with hearing impairment perceive attitudes of exclusion or rejection, both from students and from teachers and staff, a situation that is described with feelings of feeling ignored, therefore, interaction and participation in university life, beyond the classrooms is reduced. Students report feeling "invisible" in the university environment, which limits their integration and the opportunity to participate in non-academic activities.

"The truth is that honestly, uh, sometimes I feel embarrassed to talk like that, because listeners make fun of me when I vocalize, so I can't do it perfectly. I may have small words that are difficult for me, but I really make an effort, I make an effort. (E2-E-AP)

"I am the first deaf student of the Bachelor of Plastic Arts and really, as my classmates say, I am being ignored in classes. It's ugly to say. Well, since you have a basic level of written Spanish, then look how you defend yourself, you can do it yourself." (GF1-E-JC)

"Although yes, let's say, for isolated events, let's say, you feel the rejection of some professors, some administrators, some students, especially of the students. And I feel that the administrative staff is more due to ignorance, but I can't say that it is a 100% welcome." (E1-E-LQ)

In the same way, learning platforms lack adjustments to facilitate the learning of deaf students, they have learned to navigate by force of habit in the virtuality and reality of the University, making it difficult to guarantee an inclusive learning environment:

"You get to know the platform over time. Well, really, well, there is nothing like inclusion on the platform, but, well, well, as I got used to it, then it kind of feels like the platform is already familiar." (E5-E-CG)

"For example, on the pages of the university, where is the interpretation, right? I mean, no, I don't understand. It would be like generating an impact that the importance of sign language is necessary and that there are not only hearing people but also other disabilities." (E2-E-AP)

In summary, the learning environment has not yet been adjusted to allow the full participation of deaf students in university, language barriers and lack of knowledge about disability are obstacles to overcome.

CURRICULUM DIMENSION

There is criticism of the curriculum for the lack of flexibility to adapt, on the part of teachers, to the needs of students with hearing disabilities, the main barriers are that sometimes teachers are not informed that they will have a student with disabilities, although the student is not recognized in the classroom and nothing is known about them; and that, especially in courses that require a high level of written comprehension in Spanish, it is not known or understood that this is a secondary language for most of them, without understanding how difficult written Spanish is for deaf students.

"But it is important sometimes if you have a person with a disability in your classrooms, recognize it very well. If they think it's just projecting slides and that's it, I already understood [...] So I think that there is a lack of awareness, a lot of flexibility as such in these processes, the truth." (GF1-E-CA)

"I want to tell you. There is a case that I am looking at. In an accounting subject, that professor shows a video. Listen and see what you do. And the video? Ta ta ta ta ta ta. And the interpreter, obviously, is going to be the interpreting service. But I don't understand. I don't understand that. For me it is not a learning method. And they asked us maybe. So, to be honest, I left the class looking for another math subject." (GF1-E-SM)

"For example, I know that here the university requires English as a second language and obviously we do not see English because we do not understand Spanish, much less English. So they have made the adaptation so that our second language is not English but Spanish, and they require the same six levels of Spanish. But the truth is that now those levels of Spanish are not very good. We don't, that is, we don't have a basic understanding of Spanish and we have insisted and insisted that they improve that, the levels of Spanish." (E3-E-RB)

"As for a professor, he has taught me at some time in the second semester, later we meet in a hallway of the university and he tells me, are you still here? Other teachers felt very uncomfortable with the presence of interpreters and others said to me, "if you speak, that is, why do you speak if you are a deaf person?" (E1-E-LQ)

In the same way, teachers do not seem to be prepared or trained to have a student with hearing impairment in the classroom, this lack of training and awareness includes experiences where discomfort is expressed with the presence of the interpreter or it is believed that by being in the classroom the interpreter corrects the processes of adaptation for learning and evaluation. Participants feel that the evaluation is not adapted to their specific needs and abilities, especially in written exams, in the submission of essays or other assignments in which written Spanish is privileged, sometimes generating situations of academic stress and perception of discrimination in the classroom.

"No, that the interpreter was there. It's not the solution, it's the solution. How is he going to tell me - there is the interpreter, If he has doubts, he should ask him. And especially in geometry, which is such a complex subject for a deaf person. If it's for a listener who's watching, they're listening to everything they're saying, what they're saying in the explanation, well, for a deaf person... an interpreter does not know geometry to teach deaf mathematics." (GF3-C-AG)

"Personally, it has happened to me since the beginning when I entered university, is that we are always ignored in all kinds of contexts. [...] The issue in virtuality was like the same process, ignoring deaf people and we have the support of the interpreter, but the interpreter will always be a means of communication. He is not the one who gives us tutorials, he is not the one who will always guide us, but it is the teacher who is responsible for transmitting them in teaching" (GF1-E-CA)

"We deaf people can't do that kind of thing, what is a trial, we can't do a trial, we don't have the skills or a Spanish language to create a trial. So those levels of Spanish should be strengthened" (E3-E-RB)

Thus, it can be pointed out that the University has shortcomings in the universal design of learning and therefore, the lack of specific adjustments and understanding of linguistic needs has led to situations of academic disadvantage and frustration, as observed in testimonies that indicate difficulties in exams, consultancies, and in general in the entire learning process. leading them even to make more of an effort, to resort to their own strategies, that is, to be the ones who make their own adjustments. This dimension of the curriculum invites us to recognize that the right to equal opportunities and to receive reasonable accommodations for learning are limited in the university, which results in a learning environment that is not very inclusive and perceived as hostile

"The first semester passed, the second semester had problems with a subject, but there the teacher mmm well passed. But already in the third semester, C began to get sick, stress, anxiety, because there is a subject that I did not understand" (GF2-C-MC)

INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS DIMENSION

In the institutional environment, the infrastructure is not fully accessible to guarantee the autonomy of students, there are few spaces that have adapted signage or specific technological resources for deaf people, which makes it difficult for students to access autonomously, who report depending on the interpreter, who is not a constant or accessible support at any time.

"No. There are some parts that don't. In my case, for example, places that do not have signage. I enter and oh God! where they are, where they are. It always touches me, that is, it is very difficult to guide oneself in college." (E3-E-RB)

Even though there is an inclusive and diverse education policy in the University, the participants indicate a lack of clarity and updating of it, so that it is effective and applicable throughout the university. A point that stands out is given by recognizing that the policy barely accounts for the quotas that are granted to vulnerable populations, but that it does not clearly define the possibilities or guarantees of entry, they affirm that competition with other disabilities, for example, is something that seems tacit; Similarly, that the policy does not seek to favor permanence, since it should contemplate strategies such as a "0" level for students with disabilities and also facilitate the learning of sign language and written Spanish, since not all students enter at the same level.

"Because, for example, when I entered, I entered the normal semester in one place, but I would like to say that it would have been a zero level. Well, I know there isn't one here, but it would be very good. If they make that level zero so that it can be decided if yes or no and that the competencies of that are seen, it would be a change that could be made here" (E4-E-DM)

Likewise, they reveal that awareness of inclusion among university staff is low, since administrative, surveillance and general services personnel do not have the necessary training to attend to deaf students, and other disabilities, a situation that should be of permanent training if a truly inclusive environment is sought.

Very difficult, really. I think they don't pay attention to us, especially the surveillance, that sometimes they scold us because we didn't bring the card and you start to say Oh, my God!, and now how do we get in? But well, I try to organize -Good morning. So, the surveillance guy kind of didn't understand. As I was saying, it's difficult for me to express myself verbally, but hey, I try sometimes. There are some who are kind, others who try to express themselves or something. So the truth is, he used a strategy. He said "Mmm", - and what does that mean, like the person - ah, she is deaf! Yes. Then the guard kind of takes the initiative and says, "Wait, I'll write and read." (E2-E-AP)

On the other hand, and this being the most reiterated issue by the participants, the support of the institution leaves a bad taste, on the one hand, students with hearing disabilities mention that the support is provided irregularly. In addition, the staff is not sufficiently trained in deaf culture, so requesting support is demanding, exhausting and they have even given up because they feel little understood and frustrated.

"In other cases, on the part of the administrators, accessibility is very difficult, for example, there are admissions that are in a large cubicle, much lower, where one only sees their eyes and other deaf people told them that if we do not have eye contact, there is no communication; or they don't raise their faces to speak, they are writing, or they have things in their mouths, the pen, a colombina, all those things, that's why I tell them out of ignorance, and when you tell them again to please repeat they get angry and yell at you, I may not hear you yelling at me, but her facial expression tells me, she shows me her discomfort and at that moment I already feel violated." (E1-E-LQ)

Similarly, the inconsistency in interpreting services is another reiterative element in the students' speeches, the limitation in constant access to qualified interpreters and the lack of personnel who can mediate in specialized contexts (it is mentioned that the university uses interpreters without experience in technical signs, which prevents effective access to the contents of the subjects) is a recurring theme of dissatisfaction.

"He started very happy, but then the first week, unfortunately, he didn't have the support of the interpreters because in college it was a date that they had entered and they hadn't been hired." (GF2-C-MC)

This is coupled with the fact that the interpreter's dependence on other spaces (cafeteria, health services) makes them less likely to access university life, since relationships of trust, empathy and professionalism are elements that are mentioned as of little interest to interpreters, and of great importance to students, as a guarantee of their right to full participation.

"Another aspect that I would like to mention is that I feel that sometimes we are disrespected by the same team of interpreters, they disrespect us. There are no ethics, there are no rules, for example, as you know we interpreters have to wear black clothes, because we have to interpret it in our hands and our hands have to be visible and not with chains, or necklaces. So that is part of the code of ethics. Respect for deaf culture. And one by suggesting a problem is formed and then he takes it out on one." (E2-E-AP)

DIMENSION RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY

Students and their families perceive a lack of collaboration and real support between deaf and hearing students. The wider community lacks initiatives that foster a support network, leaving deaf students in an environment where they often feel they must manage their challenges individually, without sufficient support from the university.

In my case, for example, I chose reading, I looked at it. For example, in the matter of an exercise, I don't understand anything about those readings and I would start reading some words that I don't understand and they would Google the meaning of that word, ah ya! so that word was related to something else. That's a huge effort and we spend too much time on one reading, too much. So, I don't know, there you kind of lose your ideas in the readings." (E3-E-RB)

Participants value the effort that some hearing students make to communicate, however interaction is limited, and they resort to writing or WhatsApp groups as a mediator.

"Because although my fellow hearing people and I am deaf, yes, sometimes I don't understand what they sometimes want to share and those things, but sometimes the interpreter is not with me all the time, yes, then sometimes it's fine, but there are things that suddenly they don't interpret me, so I'm like lost. Even I myself give it how to say, look for such a thing they have to say and they themselves practice and that has been a positive process. Sometimes they are very sleepy, but well, nothing, with help the process always goes, there it goes." (E5-E-CG)

Likewise, when external organizations are mentioned, caregivers do so, and it is done as strategic instruments for the demand for rights for students, and in no case as part of the University's alliances to facilitate an inclusive learning environment.

"I communicate with INSOR, in fact my complaint, my PQR is in force with INSOR, because I wanted to know if to demand from the university that they will provide you with good accompaniment and good information on interpretation and all that." (GF2-C-MC)

Thus, the support network of deaf students turns out to be mainly their family, even despite the distance, the group of deaf classmates and they highlight one or two interpreters who, contrary to the recommendation not to "be buddies" (not to establish friendships or closeness) show solidarity with them and support them more constantly. Moreover, the testimonies reflect experiences of social exclusion and rejection, which are far from favoring inclusion and the right to education in diversity.

"Really. Thank you very much, to be honest. It is very difficult for us to express ourselves. What I'm telling you is how we feel, how limited. Yes, it's hard. Well, but we are still here as a group, as deaf people. That there is also from time to time an interpreter neutrally tries to accompany us, that she does this to us whatever it takes to collaborate, but that I really do consider that I wish the whole team were like that, not only the inclusion team, but also other professional people. Here we are talking about training, we are talking about the academic part and that is what we are talking about as future professionals." (E2-E-AP)

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE DIMENSION

Despite the existence of an Agreement that establishes the policy, the testimonies collected in this research highlight a lack in the promotion of a truly inclusive culture. Students perceive that inclusion is limited to the presence of people with disabilities without effective adaptations.

"They believe that inclusion is mixing with the listeners, yes, so sometimes I myself have to make my own efforts to be able to understand all those kinds of things or processes" (E5-E-CG)

This is reflected in the feeling that there are no awareness campaigns about the diversity and inclusion of people with hearing disabilities, and that when these are carried out, their opinions and participation are not taken into account, so they consider that these efforts to promote an inclusive culture are scarce or ineffective.

"That is going to be on September 26, 27 more or less. The truth has not been done very well publicly when it is done, I tried, as I told you, to make proposals, when not, the truth is that they are not taken into account. For example, I would like to take advantage of that day, the International Day of the Deaf, to make us recognize that it is communication, that it is the profile, that it is that, like going to visit different places here at the university. But as I say, it is not taken into account, so we are always depending on Welfare." (E2-E-AP)

DIMENSION EVALUATION AND MONITORING

The evaluation and monitoring processes do not appear in the testimonies of the participants, on the contrary, for example, the caregivers state that they are the ones who have had to search through calls or messages to the administrative staff (heads), teachers or interpreters to find out how their son or daughter is doing or doing.

"The rector also told him in the meeting that we should trust the university, that is better said. Well, it turns out that in the second semester I have a problem, [...]but they never called me. We agreed to schedule a call and they never called me. When I approached him this year for the topic of C, I saw him for the second time, [...] I told him, you are supposed to be the coordinator, the director of disability, and what happens? You found out about the inconvenience we had with the teacher and all the gossip that was put together, I told you, because that was gossip; I told him so; and you weren't able to call me. So, what is the support I have from you? (GF2-C-MC)

Likewise, students and their caregivers feel that there is no way to recognize academic and personal progress at the University, since they only realize that their children needed support when, due to difficulties, they are informed that it is better for them to change careers or drop out of the University. Nor is there any mention of clear or institutionalized mechanisms by which students can provide feedback on their experiences and the support received, rather than seeking out those in charge when they see it necessary to do so given that their own efforts are limited.

"We have tried since last year to start fighting there with our coordinator interpreter of University Welfare, but there is no solution so far." (GF1-E-SM)

"The profile of the interpreter coordinator has to be 100% trained and focused on the deaf population and not on all disabilities, because it must be taken into account that there are many disabilities that require special attention" (GF1-E-CI)

"We have tried to fight. In fact, before the beginning of the semester we met as a family between different parents of deaf children because we wanted to express these situations with the Head of University Welfare [...] I know that he is already a professional and that he has I don't know how many postgraduate degrees, but I think that sometimes it is important that he soaks up a lot of deaf culture" (E2-E-AP)

3. DISCUSSION

As Hurtado Ledezma (2022) points out, this study shows that access and inclusive admission policies in educational institutions in Colombia lack ideal tools and conditions that facilitate the educational inclusion of people with hearing disabilities.

Students with hearing impairment at the University face significant difficulties in admission, since admission policies, in many cases, do not contemplate reasonable accommodations, given this it is important to highlight the experiences of other higher education institutions in Colombia that after years of learning affirm that "consolidating the accompaniment processes requires a differential approach and strategies that recognize the different academic trajectories through which a university student can pass" (Ríos, 2024), including the same moment of initiative, motivation or prospect of entering university, otherwise the lack of institutional support and limited adaptations will continue to reinforce barriers to inclusion.

This implies that the University must first recognize the "deaf culture", language and diversity, levels of written Spanish or sociolinguistic profile as has already been done in other universities (Mora, Sanbria, 2023), which would lead to a better understanding and adaptation of the University to receive students and facilitate their process in pedagogical practice and in interaction and participation in university life (Rodríguez, 2022).

Undoubtedly, academic and social support should not be limited to the existence of pedagogical supports or communicative mediators such as interpreters, given that even educational institutions have a large gap between the number of qualified interpreters and enrolled students with hearing impairment (Mollo, Rodino, 2024), and also as Farfola and Araneda refer to the inconveniences between interpreters and teachers in planning students' learning always they will be a possibility (Farfola & Araneda, 2023). This is also manifested in this study where the qualification of interpreters and low communication with teachers turns out to be more of an obstacle to learning than a support mechanism.

Likewise, faced with the opportunity to have autonomy in the university environment, the study by Farfola and Aranda warn that the relationships of dependence of students with their interpreter can lead them to exercise "non-prescribed functions that go beyond their work, assuming the role of teacher even when they do not have pedagogical training". This is aggravated in this study, in which deaf students point out that interpreters lack specialized training in certain subjects, affecting the quality of teaching and access to technical content.

Another aspect has to do with the institutional culture, students with hearing disabilities recognize that it is not only allowing their presence at the University, since this view gives continuity to discrimination in interactions with teachers and in the social dynamics with hearing colleagues, reinforcing feelings of exclusion and vulnerability, therefore, adjustments are required at the cultural level in which the University still has shortcomings, aspects that Martin Barletta suggests as key strategies to achieve an inclusive culture

"It is necessary to overcome social and cultural obstacles through the training of teaching, non-teaching and administrative staff on inclusion issues, the universal design of learning environments that adapt to the diverse needs of students, the implementation of support and counselling programmes for students with disabilities, and the promotion of an inclusive institutional culture. Likewise, the active participation of students with disabilities in decision-making" (Martín, 2023).

The lack of curricular adaptation is another important concern, since courses that require a high understanding of written Spanish present an added difficulty for deaf students. The need for curricular adjustments, such as establishing a "zero level" or an introductory program in written Spanish, is mentioned as a possible solution that would allow these students to level up before starting their career. This approach is supported by the literature, which suggests curricular adaptation and leveling programs in written and listening communication skills to facilitate learning in inclusive higher education (Neira, Bermúdez, 2024).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The testimonies of students with hearing impairment and their caregivers highlight a series of structural and cultural challenges that universities must address to ensure an inclusive and accessible environment. Likewise, what was expressed by the participants reflects a reality in which inclusion is perceived as limited and based on a model of "integration" that does not address the specific needs of the deaf community.

This analysis reveals several situations that challenge the ideals of inclusive education policy and instead points out areas where the University must strengthen to offer an equitable and accessible educational experience, while guaranteeing the fundamental rights of people with hearing disabilities. Thus, the participation of all the actors involved (teachers, administrators and support staff) is necessary to ensure respect and compliance with rights, especially that of living in an environment of non-discrimination, respect and dignity for true inclusion.

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