

Attitudinal barriers of teachers towards inclusive education in Ecuador

Barreiras de atitude dos professores em relação à educação inclusiva no Equador

Barreras actitudinales de los docentes hacia la educación inclusiva en Ecuador

Ivana Fuentes Moncayo<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6953-2169> 

Graduate researcher, Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM) Ecuador - Special Education Program

e1315356863@live.uleam.edu.ec (correspondence)**Arturo Rodríguez Zambrano**<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7017-9443> 

Professor at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM), Ecuador - Special Education Program

arturo.rodriguez@uleam.edu.ec**Jhonny Villafuerte-Holguín**<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6053-6307> 

Professor at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM), Ecuador - Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages Program

jhonny.villafuerte@uleam.edu.ec**Gloria Alcívar Pincay**<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0302-4297> 

Professor at Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (ULEAM), Ecuador - Special Education Program

gloria.alcivar@uleam.edu.ec**ARTICLE HISTORY****Received:** 29-11-2023**Revised Version:** 10-01-2024**Accepted:** 28-01-2024**Published:** 30-01-2024**Copyright:** © 2024 by the authors**License:** CC BY-NC-ND 4.0**Manuscript type:** Article**ARTICLE INFORMATIONS****Science-Metrix Classification (Domain):**

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Implement interventions to address negative attitudes, provide resources for effective communication with diverse learners, foster collaboration among educators, and prioritize ongoing broader inclusive education in Ecuador.

Originality/value:

Reveals Ecuadorian teachers' attitudes and challenges, providing insights for policy enhancement and advocating for sustainable strategies in inclusive education.

ABSTRACT

This research has two objectives. First, to recognize the position assumed by teachers in the presence of students with specific educational needs in regular classrooms; and second, to determine the state of teaching attitudes required to implement educational inclusion. This work is ascribed to the critical reflective paradigm and uses the quantitative approach of scientific research. The instruments used were the Knowledge Questionnaire on Inclusive Education by Escarbajal et al. (2020) in survey format, and the Battery of Teaching Attitudes towards Educational Inclusion by Lavela & Sánchez (2014) in Likert-type questionnaire formats and contextualized observation sheets. The informants were 961 teachers from district 13D02 of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, who participated in this process in 2022-2024. From the results, it is inferred that teachers prefer that students with specific educational needs attend special schools, but are not opposed to their presence in conventional schools, in coherence with public education policy. In addition, it was determined that teachers require technical advice, tutoring, and permanent motivation from specialists to implement inclusive practices with greater security. It is concluded that the persistence of attitudinal barriers in teachers limits the legitimate positioning and sustainability of specific educational needs in schools despite favorable advances in public policy for education in Ecuador.

Keywords: Teacher attitude, school, continuing education, social inclusion, educational needs.**RESUMO**

Esta pesquisa tem dois objetivos. Primeiro, reconhecer a posição assumida pelos professores perante alunos com necessidades educativas específicas em salas de aula regulares; e a segunda, determinar o estado das atitudes docentes necessárias para a implementação da inclusão educacional. Este trabalho enquadra-se no paradigma crítico-reflexivo e faz uso da abordagem quantitativa da pesquisa científica. Os instrumentos utilizados foram o Questionário de Conhecimento sobre Educação Inclusiva de Escarbajal et al. (2020) em formato de pesquisa, e a Bateria de Atitudes Docentes frente à Inclusão Educacional de Lavela & Sánchez (2014) em formatos de questionário tipo Likert e em fichas de observação contextualizadas. Os informantes foram 961 professores do distrito 13D02 do Ministério da Educação do Equador, que participaram deste processo no período 2022-2024. Dos resultados infere-se que os professores preferem que os alunos com necessidades educativas específicas frequentem escolas especiais, mas não se opõem à sua presença em escolas convencionais em coerência com a política pública de educação. Além disso, foi determinado que os professores necessitam de assessoria técnica, mentoria e motivação permanente de especialistas para implementar práticas inclusivas com mais segurança. Conclui-se que a persistência de barreiras atitudinais nos professores limita o posicionamento legítimo e a sustentabilidade das necessidades educacionais específicas nas escolas, apesar dos avanços favoráveis nas políticas públicas para a educação no Equador.

Palavras-chave: Atitude docente, escola, formação contínua, inclusão social, necessidades educativas.**RESUMEN**

Esta investigación tiene doble objetivo. Primero reconocer la posición asumida por los docentes ante la presencia de estudiantes con necesidades educativas específicas en las aulas regulares; y el segundo, determinar el estado de las actitudes docentes requeridas para la implementación de la inclusión educativa. Este trabajo se adscribe al paradigma crítico reflexivo y hace uso del enfoque cuantitativo de la investigación científica. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron el Cuestionario de Conocimiento sobre Educación Inclusiva de Escarbajal et al. (2020) en formato de encuesta, y la Bateria de Actitudes Docentes hacia la Inclusión Educativa de Lavela & Sánchez (2014) en formatos de cuestionario tipo Likert y en fichas de observación contextualizada. Los informantes fueron 961 docentes del distrito 13D02 del Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, quienes tomaron parte de este proceso en el periodo 2022-2024. De los resultados se infiere que los docentes prefieren que los estudiantes con necesidades educativas específicas asistan a escuelas especiales, pero no se oponen a su presencia en los centros escolarizados convencionales en coherencia con la política pública de la educación. Además, se determinó que los docentes requieren de la asesoría técnica, tutoría y permanente motivación por parte de especialistas para implementar con mayor seguridad las prácticas inclusivas. Se concluye que la persistencia de barreras actitudinales en los docentes limita el posicionamiento legítimo y sostenibilidad de las necesidades educativas específicas en los centros escolares a pesar de los avances favorables en la política pública para la educación de Ecuador.

Palabras clave: Actitud del docente, escuela, formación continua, inclusión social, necesidades educacionales.

INTRODUCTION

Building more equitable and just societies in the 21st century requires teachers who go beyond the activity of knowledge transfer to prioritize personal development, outreach and capacity building of students. Consequently, achieving the goal of inclusive education is possible when the principles of acceptance of diversity and mutual understanding are followed.

In the 20th century, nations around the world adopted a legal framework to promote equal opportunities in the process of professional development and self-determination of individuals. This legal framework is mainly composed of the following documents: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the UN General Assembly; Salamanca Statement; UNESCO: Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action; UNESCO: Education for All: Purpose and Context; UNESCO: World Conference on Education for All; and UNESCO: Dakar Framework for Action.

In such a scenario, the global goal was for inclusive educational centers to give openness and accessibility to all students, regardless of their specific educational needs. Despite this, teachers globally are shown to lack the competencies and lack the confidence to meet the challenges of inclusive education (Chitiyo and Muwana, 2018; Villafuerte et al., 2017). Thus, teachers' attitudinal barriers toward inclusive education may manifest in negative attitudes, lack of the knowledge and legitimate desire to respond to the needs of diversity in the group of students (Saloviita, 2019). At this point, Graham et al. (2023) argue that, genuine inclusion remains the exception rather than the norm despite inclusive education being a fundamental human right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In the case of Ecuador, the signing of the Salamanca Treaty in 1994 together with 93 other nations marked the beginning of actions in favor of Inclusive Education. The constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (2008) made possible the construction of an institutional network that articulated the Inclusion Council to public entities such as the Ministry of Social Welfare (Villafuerte, 2017; Hernández and Samada, 2021). However, the exploration of educational centers in Ecuador before the COVID19 pandemic showed the persistence of attitudinal barriers of teachers towards inclusive education. Problematic that could jeopardize the access of such human groups to educational services despite the favorable legal framework in place (Bravo et al., 2021; Corral Joza, 2019). At this point, Shutaleva et al. (2023) argue that teachers possessing socioemotional skills and professional competencies are the basis for the sustainability of inclusive education globally.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the exploration of teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion in a period following the COVID19 pandemic. It begins with the review of specialized literature on the terms (1) Attitudinal Barriers (AB); (2) Inclusive Education and Teacher Education (TE); and (3) Specific Educational Needs (SEN). The statistical analyses performed addressed the dimensions: (a) expected learning outcomes; (b) children's rights; (c) teacher workload; (d) accountability; (e) classroom implementation; and (f) teacher training. The research questions that drive the present study are:

1. What is the position of teachers in the presence of students with specific educational needs in conventional classrooms?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Ecuador's public education system?
3. What correlations emerge between the indicators of teachers' position and attitudes towards the presence of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms?

The objective of this research is to recognize the position of teachers regarding specific educational needs and their attitudes towards inclusive education in district 13D02 1 of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador.

Literature review

For a better understanding of the theories considered in this research, a review of publications available in specialized databases in the fields of study on human behavior, education and training processes, and sustainable development is presented below.

Attitudinal barriers and sustainability of inclusive education

The term attitudes according to Parasuram cited in Tello (2018), can be understood as that set of beliefs or precepts that teachers have about people with disabilities. These originate from the feelings and perceptions they have towards students in general and specifically, towards those who have a diagnosed physical, sensory or intellectual disability condition. Therefore, teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion are highly relevant in moving towards the implementation of inclusive education (Chitiyo & Muwana, 2018).

For their part, Sharma et al. (2019), state that attitudes are those reactions that people have to the stimuli found in the environment where they work. Thus, teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education can be enhanced through professional development programs. He adds that attitudes towards inclusive education can be identified in teachers'

behaviors, words, phrases, feelings, prejudices and stigmas towards students and their special educational needs, which involve disadvantages and complexities to overcome for learning in comparison to the conditions of the rest of their classmates.

Regarding the term attitudinal barriers in the educational field, López, quoted in Andrade (2020), defines them as the obstacles and impediments that could affect individuals in aspects related to education and daily coexistence, which can lead to exclusion, marginalization and segregation of people. In this sense, Saloviita (2020) argues that the factors that influence the ability of teachers to manage inclusive education are related to their attitudes, but also to the training received and the willingness to respond positively to student diversity. Li et al. (2021) found that the implementation of reflective processes regarding their own professional development positively influences their attitudes.

At this point, Shutaleva et al. (2023) state that teachers' socioemotional skills and professional competencies are the basis for the sustainability of education and student development.

Inclusive education and in-service teacher training

The inclusion policy is consistent with the objectives of sustainable development, since any person in society can participate in the formative processes, regardless of race, religion, culture or health limitations (United Nations, 2015). Its operationalization requires teachers and educational administrators who are available to implement changes at a personal and professional level for the benefit of students (Moriña, 2017).

According to González & Triana (2018), inclusive education implies the fact that being different is legitimate. Thus, the teacher becomes a transforming agent of the educational system, whose objective is to respond to the existing diversity in the classroom. Consequently, it provides multiple educational options to integrate all students equally from the attention to the specific needs and potentialities presented by each student (Pibaque et al., 2018). Faced with this challenge, teachers need to participate in ongoing professional development processes.

The exploration of teachers' experiences of inclusive education shows the case of African special education teachers who did not support inclusive education in regular schools because they assumed that teachers lacked the skills and knowledge to address the special educational needs of students (Chitiyo and Muwana, 2018). According to Kashoti et al. (2018), teachers have more opportunities to reflect on their teaching practices when they participate in collective development programs. The topics frequently discussed by teachers are classroom supervision and organization, instructional strategies, and assessment of content transferred to learners.

In the same vein, Hauge and Wan (2019) ratify that professional development programs foster collaboration and provide opportunities that position teachers for the challenges involved in implementing new strategies. However, Saloviita (2020) argues that teachers lack self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to manage student diversity due to lack of training in special education.

On the other hand, Li et al. (2021) found that Asian teachers value the use of Workshop-Seminar-Demonstration Classes in a relevant way. In addition, mentoring is ratified as a crucial strategy in professional development.

According to Dyachkova et al. (2019), the idea of inclusion arose from the recognition of the value of human diversity. This contributes to the revelation of the potential of individuals, regardless of possible limitations associated with physical health (Yusof et al., 2019; Jakinda, 2019). Here, it is ratified that the empowerment of a student's opportunities involves the evolution of teachers, universities and society as a whole.

Consequently, the practice of inclusive education requires competencies and updated knowledge in areas such as special pedagogy and psychology (Tristani, 2020). However, problems persist in educational communities such as the lack of attention to the limits of inclusion; and the perception that educational inclusion is an imposed model (Hassanein et al., 2021), situations that evidence the lack of knowledge regarding the aspects of public policy in the field of education.

Shutaleva et al. (2023) point out that the links between students and teachers is another relevant aspect in the process of empowering inclusive education. While Ng'andu (2023) emphasize the contribution of educational research from processes of monitoring barriers to educational inclusion.

Specific Educational Needs

Specific educational needs, according to Castillo (2021) are the set of learning difficulties that prevent a person from learning in a similar way as most students do. This representation emphasizes children and adolescents with individual differences, who have an impediment to learn like people of the same age, this difficulty may or may not be associated with a disability.

For Regis and Velasco (2020), specific educational needs are detected when students present emotional, behavioral and learning difficulties. This may occur when students have difficulties in learning, but also when difficulties emerge due to

the high learning abilities of individuals. In such a scenario, new implications arise such as respect and equality of conditions for subjects who do not necessarily present a disability.

Previous studies reviewed in the framework of the present research include Kabila et al. (2018) who measured Zambian teachers' perceptions of their professional practices and training needs regarding inclusive education. Their results showed positive perceptions about inclusive education curriculum and practice. However, they showed the need to enhance teaching processes in inclusive settings and the development of skills to adapt teaching materials to meet the specific needs of learners with disabilities. We add the work of Saloviita and Consegna (2019) that shows the high level of commitment that Italian teachers have to inclusive education. Thus, the responses of 90% of respondents to the Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TAIS) indicated that teachers believe that students with special educational needs should be educated in regular classrooms. They determined that, to improve the quality of inclusive education, teachers require ongoing training, smaller class sizes, and support teachers and therapists in the classroom. Finally, the work of Li et al. (2021) shows that, in order to achieve the willingness of Asian teachers to improve their practices, training with shorter contact hours and longer periods for the execution of reflective processes on what they have experienced is required.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is based on the socio-critical paradigm and uses a quantitative research approach. It is a descriptive non-experimental study. The study is based on an analysis of regular documents in the field of inclusive education in Ecuador and the identification of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

The sample of this research is made up of 961 teachers. This is a captive group where 68% are female and 32% male, and their ages range from 24 to 55 years old.

Following the ethical research guidelines of the APA7th edition and ULEAM (2016), the informants were invited to participate voluntarily in this study without any economic recognition. The information collected will be kept by the research team for 7 years and will be used only for educational purposes; it is not possible to commercialize it.

Table 1. The sample overview

Location	Female	%	Male	%	Total	%
Manta	375	39	202	21	577	60
Montecristi	163	17	58	6	221	23
Jaramijó	115	12	48	5	163	17
Total	653	68	308	32	961	100

Source: own elaboration with the research data

Techniques and instruments

The instruments used in this study are:

Survey. - The purpose of this survey is to gather information on the position of teachers regarding the presence of students with SEN in regular classrooms of conventional schools in district 13DO2 of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador. The instrument used is based on Caballero & Escarbajal's Knowledge Questionnaire on Inclusive Education (2020), which explores the dimensions (1) children's rights, (2) teacher workload, (3) inclusion as a value, (4) teacher work performance, (5) responsibility for children's learning, (6) organization of the educational center, (7) teacher coordination, (8) affirmative action policies in the classroom and training.

The research team opted for the survey instrument because of its flexibility to be self-administered. Thus, the informants carry out dialogues with themselves, relying on the printed or digital form (Feria, 2020). The instrument was evaluated by a panel of specialists with more than 7 years of experience in the fields of Psychology, Special Education and Educational Innovation, all of them affiliated to the *Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí*, Ecuador. The recommendations of the specialists were to reduce the number of questions in the original version to the 10 questions that best fit the socio-labor context of teachers in the province of Manabí. The instrument was distributed by means of a Google form through the inter-institutional network of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador.

Likert scale. - The purpose of this instrument is to collect data on teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion. Guirao's (2013) Battery of Teachers' Attitudes towards Educational Inclusion was used as a basis. The version of the instrument used in this study consists of 20 items that can be answered with five alternatives ranging from -totally agree to

totally disagree. The instrument was validated by a panel of specialists composed of three professionals in the area of Basic and Special Education. All of them from the *Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí* in Ecuador. The recommendations of the specialists were to reduce the number of items from 35 in the original version to 20 items adjusted to the local context. In addition, they suggested that the syntax of the items be revised to be easily understood by the informants.

Contextualized observation. - The goal of this instrument was to collect data regarding teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion. Guirao's (2013) Battery of Teachers' Attitudes towards Educational Inclusion was used as a basis. The version of the instrument used in this study consists of 10 observable aspects in which the frequency with which it is presented in teaching practices is marked. The instrument was validated by a panel of specialists composed of three professionals in the area of Special Education assigned to the *Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí* in Ecuador (ULEAM). The observations were carried out by the teachers of the community outreach area of the education careers at ULEAM.

Procedure

The stages followed in this study are:

Stage 1: Theoretical review of the terms inclusive education, teaching practices and specific educational needs. Hermeneutics is used to enhance the documentary review of regulations regarding Inclusive Education in Ecuador.

Stage 2: Selection of instruments, adjustments and evaluation. Instruments 1, 2 and 3 were selected because the dimensions they originally address are similar to those proposed by the objective of this study. The instruments were evaluated by a panel of specialists. Once the adjustments were made, the instruments were adjusted in Google format to be distributed virtually through the dissemination media of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador.

Stage 3.- Statistical analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sample adequacy measure and Bartlett's test were used using the SPSS program. V24.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented below, following the order of the research questions presented in the introductory section.

a. Position of teachers in the presence of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in regular classrooms in Manabí, Ecuador.

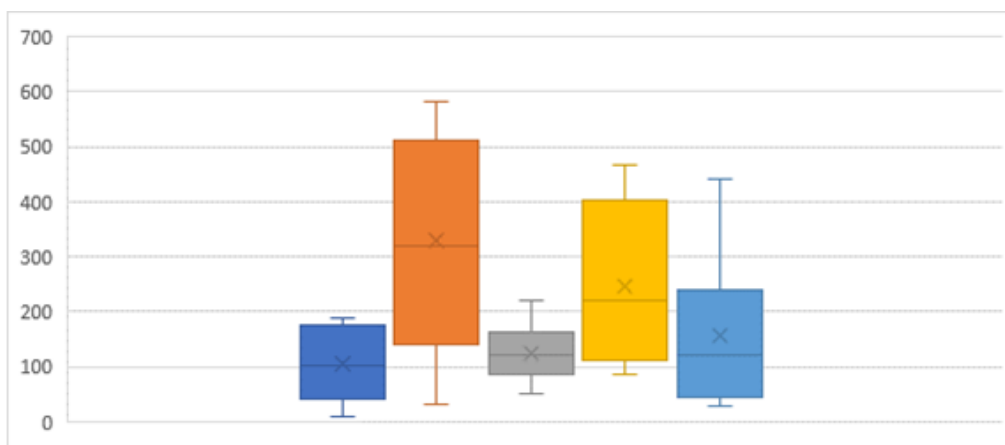
Question 1: What is the position of teachers regarding the presence of students with specific educational needs in regular classrooms?

Table 2 presents the responses given by Ministry of Education teachers to the survey regarding the presence of students with SEN in regular classrooms.

Table 2. Position of teachers in the presence of students with SEN in regular classrooms in Manabí, Ecuador

Questions	Opposite	Little favorable	Indifferent	Favorable	Very favorable	Total
	fr.	fr.	fr.	fr.	fr.	
Does the learning outcome depend on the institution of the student with SEN?	97	276	159	252	177	961
Is the learning of children with SEN in regular schools adequate?	44	124	95	396	302	961
Is the learning of children with SEN in special schools adequate?	109	363	220	187	82	961
Q4	33	146	98	467	217	961
Are the rights of children with SEN violated in special schools?	168	469	156	123	45	961
Does accepting students with SEN increase the teacher's workload?	187	535	124	86	29	961
Did I increase the work in regular institutions with students with SEN?	173	505	116	113	54	961
Do children with emotional and behavioral problems require technical support?	10	32	58	419	442	961
Q9	181	582	50	103	45	961
Q10	43	268	170	321	159	961

Source: own elaboration with the research data

Figure 1. Teachers' position on the presence of students with SEN in regular classrooms

Source: own elaboration with the research data

The teachers' answers to questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 of the survey indicate that the main position of teachers regarding the presence of students with specific educational needs in regular classrooms in the province of Manabí is -slightly favorable-. However, the second and third tendencies correspond to -favorable- and -very favorable- respectively. Thus, the responses allow inferring that teachers prefer that students with disabilities be placed in special schools, but are not opposed to their being received by conventional schools. The latter is possibly due to the fact that national regulations so provide. From this it can be inferred that teachers have a high level of knowledge of Ecuador's regulations for Inclusive Education that guarantee access to quality educational services for students with disabilities.

On the other hand, the answers given by teachers to questions 6 and 7 allow inferring that the presence of students with disabilities does not represent an increase in work during the school day. However, in the observations carried out, teachers have shown that the time they remain in the school is not enough to carry out all the activities required in the curricula.

b. Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

In response to question 2: What are teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education?

The tests (1) Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and (2) Bartlett's test of sphericity are used to determine whether the factor analysis of the data series is feasible. The results obtained using SPSS V24 indicate for the KMO test the p-value = 0.870 and for the Bartlett test the p-value = 0.00. Therefore, the required condition is met. Table 3 presents the frequency and respective percentages of the 20 attitudes for inclusive education explored in the teachers of district 13DO2 of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador.

Table 3. Frequency of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

Scale Items	TED		ED		NAND		TED		TEA	
	fr.	%	fr.	%	fr.	%	fr.	%	fr.	%
I-1	27	2,8	73	7,6	143	14,9	496	51,6	222	23,1
I-2	156	16,2	580	60,4	131	13,6	83	8,6	11	1,1
I-3	86	8,9	413	43,0	184	19,1	215	22,4	63	6,6
I-4	53	5,5	293	30,5	165	17,2	359	37,4	91	9,5
I-5	17	1,8	94	9,8	114	11,9	553	57,5	183	19,0
I-6	83	8,6	515	53,6	188	19,6	147	15,3	28	2,9
I-7	156	16,2	547	56,9	94	9,8	130	13,5	34	3,5
I-8	25	2,6	172	17,9	144	15,0	364	37,9	256	26,6
I-9	12	1,2	59	6,1	102	10,6	543	56,5	245	25,5
I-10	68	7,1	409	42,6	145	15,1	241	25,1	98	10,2
I-11	20	2,1	168	17,5	187	19,5	495	51,5	91	9,5
I-12	83	8,6	411	42,8	199	20,7	226	23,5	42	4,4
I-13	32	3,3	153	15,9	138	14,4	410	42,7	228	23,7
I-14	21	2,2	174	18,1	229	23,8	436	45,4	101	10,5
I-15	315	32,8	529	55,0	69	7,2	38	4,0	10	1,0
I-16	46	4,8	301	31,3	281	29,2	266	27,7	67	7,0
I-17	110	11,4	439	45,7	180	18,7	165	17,2	67	7,0
I-18	23	2,4	129	13,4	134	13,9	505	52,5	170	17,7
I-19	2	0,2	46	4,8	121	12,6	605	63,0	187	19,5
I-20	8	0,8	23	2,4	78	8,1	601	62,5	251	26,1

Note: N=961; Nomenclature: TED: Totally disagree; ED: Disagree; NAND: Neither agree nor disagree; DA: Agree; TEA: Totally agree

Source: own elaboration with the research data

Items I-1 and I-2 explore the impact of the presence of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. The responses collected allow inferring that teachers have a negative impact, since it affects the general level of progress of the group. However, their presence is not a cause of discomfort for teachers.

With respect to question I-3 regarding the certification of high school graduates in secondary education, the teachers are in favor of providing certification.

The responses to items I-4, I-5 and I-6 show that teachers do not accept responsibility for the learning gaps of students with disabilities. They blame the teachers of previous courses, the lack of responsibility of the students themselves or the lack of dedication of the parents.

Responses to item I-7 Teachers disagree with the statement that inclusive education represents a positive challenge in the work of teachers.

The responses to items I8 and I9 referring to the management of inclusive education show that teachers consider that the individual curricular adaptation plans are carried out only to comply with the procedure and ratify the need to increase investment in the implementation of technical aids for inclusive education.

From the teachers' responses to items I-10, I-11 and I-13 that refer to the support from the Student Counseling Departments, a positive contribution is inferred.

The teachers' responses to item I-12 are striking. Do you think that managers should be more involved in the care of students with specific (special) educational needs? The responses show trends in Strongly Disagree (8.6%) and Disagree (42.8%).

The teachers' responses to items I-14, I-15 and I-16 referring to the use of curricular adaptations and adjustments for students with disabilities show dispersion. Thus, teachers affirm that differentiated evaluations are applied according to the levels of disability; and that it is possible to work with large groups of students with intellectual disabilities. While there is a technical tie between teachers who make use of didactic resources adapted to work with students with disabilities and those who do not use them.

Regarding the category: teacher training in inclusive education show the following trends: Item I-17. Do you consider that based on your training you are sufficiently prepared to attend to all students, including those with disabilities or other specific (special) educational needs? 11.4% + 45.7% Tendency to disagree.

Category: Teacher training. - Based on the answers collected for the group of questions I-17, I-18, I-19 and I-20 on teacher training in inclusive education, it can be inferred that undergraduate training did not offer sufficient training on the subject. However, teachers state that they feel prepared to serve students with SEN having completed courses offered by the Ministry of Education and courses taken on their own initiative. These responses are striking because teachers generally state that they are not sufficiently trained to work with students with disabilities.

c. Correlations between indicators of teachers' positions and attitudes towards the presence of students with SEN in regular public education classrooms.

In response to question 3: What correlations emerge between the indicators of teachers' position and attitudes towards the presence of students with SEN in regular classrooms of the public education system? Table 4 shows the correlations found between indicators of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Indicators with a significant correlation greater than 0.4 were selected using Spearman's RHO index of correlations between dimensions.

Table 4. Correlations found

Code	Indicator	Correlations between indicators
P1	Learning outcome depends on the institution of the student with SEN.	P2 (0.473); P3 (0.444); P13(0.548); P23 (0.516)
P2	Learning of children with SEN in regular schools	P1 (0,473); P13 (0, 400).
P3	Learning of children with SEN in special schools	P1 (0.444); P5 (0.456); P6 (0.422); P7 (0.407); P13 (0.420), P16 (0.410).
P5	Rights not violated in special schools for SEN children	P1 (.456), P7 (.511), P14 (.413), P16 (.495), P13 (.420), P16 (.410)
P6	Teacher's workload increases when accepting students with SEN	P3 (.422), P5 (.593), P6 (.483), P7 (.407), P13 (.420), P16 (.410)
P7	Increased work in regular institutions with SEN students	P3 (.407), P5 (.511), P6 (.483), P16 (.418)
P8	Support for children with emotional and behavioral problems	P28 (.401)
I-3	Curricular adaptations for baccalaureate students with SEN	P1 (.548), P2 (.400), P3 (.420), P16 (.437), P23 (.471).
I-4	Responsibility of previous teachers	P5 (.413), P16 (.462)
I-6	Parental responsibility	P3 (.410), P5 (.495), P6 (.443), P7 (.418), P13 (.437), P14 (.462), P23 (.403)
I-13	DECE collaboration	P1 (.516), P13 (.471), P16 (.403)

Source: own elaboration with the research data

The results show that there is a direct relationship between the following indicators:

Indicator (P1) learning outcomes of students with disabilities is related to (P2) regular schools and (P3) special schools; (I-3) curricular adaptations made by teachers; and (I-13) DECE collaboration.

Indicator (P6) teaching work increases when accepting students with SEN is related to indicator (P3) learning achieved in special schools; (P5) rights not violated in special schools for children with SEN; (P6) teaching work increases when accepting students with SEN; (P7) increase of work in regular institutions with students with SEN; (I-3) curricular adaptations for high school students with SEN; (I-6) parental responsibility; (I-6) learning opportunities in special schools for children with SEN; (P-6) learning opportunities in special schools for children with SEN.

Indicator (I-3) Curricular adaptations for baccalaureate students with SEN is related to (P1) Learning outcome depends on the institution of the student with SEN; to indicator (P2) Learning of children with SEN in regular schools; (P3) Learning of children with SEN in special schools; to (I-6) Parental responsibility; and (P23) Collaboration of the DECE.

(I-4) Teacher responsibility above is related to the indicators; Rights not violated in special schools for children with SEN (P5); and Parental responsibility (I-6).

In order to understand teachers' attitudes towards educational inclusion, it is essential to identify existing barriers within the community. Therefore, those who make up this circle must have values of equity and equality when it comes to diversity. This, in order to build an inclusion process that allows adequate learning for students with SEN.

The results show a neutral level in teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. This is possibly due to the lack of training on inclusive education among teachers. Thus, the position of Rosero et al. (2021) who argues that the low attitude of teachers towards inclusive education is due to the lack of training on the subject is ratified. Rosero adds that teachers tend to work with all students in an equal manner and are unaware of strategies aimed at meaningful learning. The tendency is that teachers avoid the use of curricular adaptations for the learning of students with SEN because it represents more work for their days.

Despite the difficulties that may arise in regular classrooms with students with SEN, an important percentage of those surveyed expressed a favorable opinion regarding the presence of students with SEN in the classroom. This coincides with the position of Luna Loya, (2021) who affirms that the presence of students with SEN in regular classrooms contributes favorably to the diversity of the student body. Another element that draws attention is the need for teachers to know in advance the diagnosis and degree of disability of students with SEN who will be in the classroom. This information is possibly used by teachers to make decisions regarding the distribution of students in the classroom, making adjustments and modifications in classes, use of time for each class, among other aspects.

The results show that teachers have negative attitudes towards inclusive education when students with SEN require means of communication different from the conventional ones, a situation that finds harmony with the statements of Andrade Parra (2020) regarding the use of technical aids for communication with students with hearing or visual deficits. It is added that the communication deficit has a negative influence on the academic performance of the students who suffer from it, due to the communication barrier that emerges between the teacher and the student. At this point, it is suggested that teachers be trained in alternative communication systems used by students with disabilities.

The teachers surveyed indicated that the support of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador in the training of teachers in educational inclusion and alternative media, among other topics, is essential.

For his part, Castillo Ayoví (2021) argues that the relevant factors that may affect teachers' treatment of students with SEN are the teacher's patience, age and years of experience. In this sense, the teachers participating in this study report between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience in regular educational institutions, and many of them have had the experience of working with students with disabilities. They have shown more favorable attitudes towards these students, which has led them to take the initiative to educate themselves individually about the needs that students with disabilities generally have.

For Corral Joza, (2019) teachers have a perception of obligation to receive students with SEN in regular schools. Teachers do not feel confident or prepared to work with students with disabilities. They have been forced to comply with the Education Law in Ecuador; and they lacked the legitimate desire to receive these students. In other words, teachers are willing to comply with the norm and comply with the rights approach of the students.

At this point, there is support for Ng'andu's (2023) position that planners of professional development programs should take this into account when planning such training. All teachers are capable of providing inclusive practices effectively in their classrooms. As such, professional development in inclusive education is a crucial phenomenon, as it addresses not only teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with disabilities, but also their confidence, skills, and existing segregative school structures. The traditional type of professional development has not been successful in ensuring positive

change in teachers' attitudes and competence in implementing inclusive education. Therefore, educators, mentors, researchers, and academics must work to develop professional development programs and strategies that meet their training needs.

However, it is important to emphasize the participation of the entity in charge of education in Ecuador, given that little intervention by this body is reflected in the actual practice of inclusion in educational institutions, showing that much learning is still needed by teachers to meet the needs of students at the classroom and institutional level.

On the other hand, we must be aware that there is a long way to go to be able to affirm that regular educational institutions are ready for students with SEN to actively participate and have an education under equal conditions. For this, it is essential to train teachers with a vision towards inclusion, since a first change of perspective can be initiated from the classrooms where future teachers are trained.

Considering the lack of training and information that teachers have on the subject, it is necessary to provide significant advice such as training, courses, workshops, etc. to provide better attention to students. Finally, it is essential for teachers to be innovative, to seek and investigate new methodologies applicable to students, as well as to offer students materials, planning and functional adaptations that contribute to the learning of students with SEN.

CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

Based on the review of the specialized literature and the results obtained in the statistical analysis performed, the authors declare 100% compliance with the objectives proposed for this research. Thus, 472 out of 961 teachers participating in this study consider that the learning achieved in special schools is appropriate because they have the resources and talents required for the care of students with disabilities. However, 698 out of 961 teachers also consider that the learning achieved in regular schools is appropriate in spite of the lack of mastery of strategies for the attention to diversity on the part of the teachers. It is noteworthy that 722 of 961 teachers responded that there is no increase in work when they receive students with diagnosed disabilities, despite the fact that the contextualized observations show that teachers constantly express that they do not manage to complete all the activities planned on a daily basis.

The weakness of the present work is that the instrument was distributed using the formal means of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, which could have caused the responses of the participants to have a public policy bias, without being entirely the thinking of practicing teachers. Nevertheless, the information collected can be used by the directors of educational institutions and decision makers in the educational field in Ecuador to make improvements in the implementation process of inclusive education in the territory. The team of researchers of this work proposes the research line: sustainability of the processes of implementation of inclusive education in Ecuador.

The research also present some possible limitations, that include potential biases in responses due to the distribution method of the survey via formal means of the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, which might have influenced participants to align their responses with public policy rather than reflecting their true opinions as practicing teachers. Additionally, the study could benefit from a more diverse geographical coverage to generalize findings beyond the specific district studied. Future research could focus on exploring the sustainability of inclusive education implementation processes in Ecuador, delving deeper into the factors influencing teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards inclusive education. This could involve longitudinal studies tracking changes in attitudes over time, qualitative research to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences and perspectives, and interventions to test the effectiveness of various training and support programs in improving teachers' readiness and ability to implement inclusive practices. In table 5, a possible research agenda is presented to cover these futures studies in Ecuador.

Table 5. A research agenda for future studies in the SEN context

Dependent Variable	Independent/Explanatory Variable	Methods	Context
Teachers' attitudes	Training on inclusive education	Longitudinal study, surveys, interviews	Ecuadorian educational context
Implementation of inclusive practices	Support from Ministry of Education	Intervention study, qualitative analysis	Educational institutions in Ecuador
Sustainability of inclusive education processes	Teacher experience	Comparative analysis, case studies	Various regions in Ecuador
Effectiveness of professional development programs	Teacher confidence and competence	Experimental study, pre-post assessments	Schools in Ecuador
Impact of alternative communication training	Teacher attitudes and practices	Mixed-methods approach, surveys, observations	Special education settings in Ecuador

Source: own elaboration with the research data

Finally, the scientific community is invited to replicate the present work reaching a wider geographical coverage. It is hoped that this work will contribute to the strengthening of the implementation process of inclusive education and the development of teachers.

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	A1	A2	A3	A4
A. theoretical and conceptual foundations and problematization:	25%	25%	25%	25%
B. data research and statistical analysis:	25%	25%	25%	25%
C. elaboration of figures and tables:	25%	25%	25%	25%
D. drafting, reviewing and writing of the text:	25%	25%	25%	25%
E. selection of bibliographical references	25%	25%	25%	25%
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