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The Teaching–Learning Process of University Students with Disabilities

El proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del alumnado universitario con discapacidad

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Abstract

Higher education has made significant progress in addressing the needs of students with disabilities and/or specific educational support requirements, driven by recent regulatory and social developments, although significant challenges remain. The aim of this study is to examine university lecturers' perceptions of the educational response provided to these students throughout the teaching–learning process. A qualitative research design was adopted, drawing on semi-structured interviews, as the primary data collection method. The study involved twenty lecturers from the Faculties of Education at the three universities located in the Autonomous Community of Galicia. Findings reveal a strong commitment among lecturers to adapt instructional materials, classroom activities, and assessment practices to the characteristics and needs of these students, as well as a positive disposition towards improving their pedagogical response. However, the results also highlight persistent shortcomings in teacher training that hinder the implementation of more comprehensive and systemic adaptations. The discussion underscores the need to advance towards practices informed by Universal Design for Learning and to strengthen professional development initiatives so as to ensure educational responses that are coherently aligned with the diversity of students.

Keywords: students; disability; teaching–learning process; university

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Resumen

La educación universitaria ha avanzado en la inclusión del alumnado con discapacidad y/o necesidades específicas de apoyo educativo, impulsada por los avances normativos y sociales, aunque todavía persisten retos importantes. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar la percepción del profesorado universitario sobre la respuesta educativa que ofrece a este alumnado durante el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Para ello se utilizó un enfoque metodológico cualitativo y la entrevista semiestructurada como técnica de recogida de información. Participaron en el estudio 20 docentes de las Facultades de Educación de las tres universidades de la Comunidad Autónoma de Galicia. Los resultados muestran la implicación del profesorado en la adaptación de los materiales, las actividades de aula y el proceso de evaluación a las características y necesidades de este alumnado, así como su buena disposición por mejorar esta respuesta educativa, aunque persisten limitaciones formativas que dificultan implementar ajustes más profundos. La discusión subraya la necesidad de avanzar hacia prácticas basadas en el diseño universal para el aprendizaje y reforzar la formación docente, de cara a garantizar respuestas educativas más coherentes con la diversidad del alumnado.

Palabras clave: alumnado; discapacidad; proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje; universidad.

Introduction

The development of inclusive teaching and learning processes in higher education is underpinned by an international framework that recognises education as a fundamental right for people with disabilities. Various documents, strategies and guidelines (European Commission, 2022; UN, 2006, 2015; UNESCO, 2025) have legitimised the transformation of teaching practices, curricula and university organisation towards more accessible and equitable models. However, to achieve this, it is necessary to review traditional ways of teaching and learning, including the systematic incorporation of principles of universal accessibility and design for all, the use of accessible technologies and resources, and the provision of reasonable accommodation and support to ensure the full participation of students with disabilities. In line with this idea, the report 'Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in Europe' (European Commission, 2022) recognises that:

To make progress in terms of inclusion and diversity in higher education, we need to take a different approach. Nominal or formal equality in higher education – that is, everyone having the same rights and obligations – does not always guarantee real equality or equality in practice (p. 15).

At national level, Organic Law 2/2023 of 22 March on the University System endorses these principles and introduces significant advances in the area of inclusion by explicitly incorporating references to the teaching and learning process and its necessary adaptation for students with disabilities. In this regard, Article 37 mentions key aspects

such as curricular and methodological adjustments, the adaptation of teaching materials and the modification of assessment systems.

However, inclusion is not merely a matter of regulatory adjustments; it also depends on the role played by the educational community in this process, and particularly by teaching staff, whose involvement is crucial to its effective implementation (CERMI, 2020; López-Gavira et al., 2019; Moriña and Carballo, 2025; Perera et al., 2025). In this regard, teachers' attitudes play a fundamental role (Black, 2014; Fu and Lin, 2026; Li et al., 2024; Moriña and Carballo, 2025; Nunes and Calvo, 2025; Sandoval et al., 2020; Solís and Arroyo, 2022), and can act both as an opportunity for inclusion and as a barrier limiting its development. As revealed by the study by López-Gavira et al. (2025), the response provided by teachers does not depend solely on the existence of formal accessibility measures, but on a genuine willingness to understand and support pupils and to adapt their teaching practices when necessary. It therefore seems necessary for teachers to make an active commitment to inclusive education, adopting a sensitive approach and an open attitude towards diversity. In this regard, Orozco and Cotán (2025) highlight the need to embrace differences as an opportunity, rather than as a challenge or an obstacle.

Various studies have identified barriers that hinder the inclusion of pupils, notably those directly linked to the role of teachers, such as communication barriers, pedagogical difficulties arising from a lack of appropriate curricular adjustments, and insufficient teacher training (Perera et al., 2022; Sandoval et al., 2019; Solís and Arroyo, 2022). On many occasions, it is the teachers themselves who state that they lack the necessary skills to support these pupils adequately, which hinders their ability to carry out their work in the classroom (Gerpe and Porto, 2024; Mayo et al., 2020; Moriña and Carballo, 2018; Osuna-Juárez and González-Castellano, 2024; Sandoval et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2025; Villhena et al., 2018). In the words of CERMI (2020), this translates as:

University lecturers' lack of knowledge and training regarding disability constitutes a significant obstacle to identifying the specific needs of students with disabilities and prevents them from developing psycho-pedagogical strategies that would help them to raise awareness, gain experience and make the necessary adjustments for the inclusion of these students in the classroom (p. 47).

Overcoming these barriers and strengthening teacher training is essential to moving towards a more inclusive university education committed to social justice (Paz-Maldonado et al., 2025). Whilst recent years have seen notable progress in adapting and improving teaching and learning processes designed to respond more effectively to the needs of students with disabilities, in many cases this has placed the burden on the students themselves to request, argue for and justify the support or adaptations they require (Pérez-Conde, 2026). For this reason, numerous studies highlight Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a particularly valuable pedagogical approach, as it incorporates accessibility and flexibility into the planning process itself, thereby taking a proactive stance (Barrera et al., 2025; CAST, 2024; Díez and Sánchez, 2015; Pérez-Conde,

2026). Similarly, ensuring that the teaching and learning process is inclusive will enable all students, regardless of their disability, to access higher education and receive the necessary support to achieve their academic goals, whereby it is essential to guarantee accessibility at all levels and provide the necessary individualised support.

The fact that higher education institutions are committed to these methodological principles and incorporate them into their staff training programmes, creating opportunities for reflection and professional development, will enable progress towards more inclusive teaching practices. However, as recent research indicates (Beck Wells, 2025; Harpur et al., 2025; Márquez-González et al., 2025; Römhild and Holleder, 2024), a sustained and coordinated institutional commitment is required, whereby the improvement of teaching and learning processes does not depend exclusively on individual actions, but rather on policies, structures and collaborative practices that guarantee a fair and effective educational response. Assessing and understanding this reality will enable us to drive transformations that go beyond one-off interventions or those that depend solely on the goodwill of teaching staff. In this regard, Márquez et al. (2021) highlight the importance of assessing the conditions under which university teaching and learning processes take place and the need to investigate 'the suitability of materials, methodologies, tutorial support and curricular practices from a broad and systemic perspective of diversity' (p. 46).

This study contributes to expanding research on this topic by focusing its analysis on lecturers in Faculties of Education, a key group in the initial training of future teachers and education professionals, with strategic relevance for the consolidation of more inclusive and diversity-sensitive education systems.

It is within this analytical context that the present study is situated; its main objective is to analyse university lecturers' perceptions of their educational response in the process of adapting the teaching-learning process to students with disabilities and/or specific educational support needs. More specifically, the following specific objectives were formulated:

- 1) To analyse the adaptations made by lecturers, focusing on key issues such as teaching strategies, materials and the assessment process.
- 2) To identify the main difficulties and achievements perceived by lecturers in this process.
- 3) To examine the extent to which guidelines and adjustments for students with disabilities and/or SEN have been incorporated into course syllabuses.

Methodology

Method

This study is qualitative in nature and adopts an interpretative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), using interviews as the technique for data collection. This approach is in line with the exploratory nature of the objectives, which seek to gain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions based on their experiences and the interpretations and meanings they attribute to them. For this reason, the discourse of the teachers enables us to gain insight into a reality as complex as the support provided to pupils with disabilities and/or SEN, as their experiences and the reflections they offer on the role they play are fundamental, given that they are active agents within the field under study (Flick, 2015).

Participants

In accordance with the research project framework under which this study is funded, the population under analysis consists of teaching staff from the Faculties of Education within the Galician University System. The selection of informants was purposeful, based on the following criteria, with a view to ensuring a diversity of profiles: 1) to include lecturers from both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes; 2) to include lecturers with varying levels of teaching experience and professional status; 3) to include the perspectives of those who currently hold or have previously held roles coordinating courses and/or degree programmes. In line with this aim, and on the basis that the heterogeneity of the participants contributes to greater analytical depth (Flick, 2015; Patton, 2002; Flick, 2015), a sample was selected that allows the phenomenon to be examined from diverse perspectives.

A total of 20 lecturers took part: eleven from the University of Santiago de Compostela, five from the University of A Coruña and four from the University of Vigo. Twelve are women and eight are men. They also have a diverse range of teaching experience, ranging from 3 to 38 years (see Table 1). In order to guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of the information, a coding system was used to identify each of the interviewees (E1, E2, E3...).

Table 1

Profile of the informants

Informant	Professional category	Teaching experience	Degree programmes in which they teach
E1	CD	5 years	Undergraduate and Master’s
E2	CD	26 years	Undergraduate and Master’s
E3	TU	26 years	Undergraduate and Master’s
E4	TU	30 years	Bachelor’s degree

E5	TU	24 years	Undergraduate and Master's
E6	AD	2 years	Bachelor's and Master's degrees
E7	CD	7 years	Undergraduate and Master's
E8	CD	10 years	Undergraduate and Master's
E9	CD	18 years	Undergraduate
E10	CD	17 years	Undergraduate and Master's
E11	TU	38 years	Undergraduate and Master's
E12	CEU	36 years	Bachelor's degree
E13	PCS	5 years	Master's
E14	CD	24 years	Bachelor's and Master's
E15	PCS	3 years	Bachelor's and Master's
E16	CU	34 years	Undergraduate
E17	PCS	4 years	Master's
E18	A	17 years	Year
E19	TU	17 years	Undergraduate and Master's
E20	TU	35 years	Undergraduate and Master's

All participating teaching staff report having experience in teaching students with disabilities and/or specific educational support needs, although this experience is more extensive amongst those with longer professional careers. Among the cases most frequently cited by teaching staff are mobility impairments, visual impairment and hearing impairment; as well as specific educational support needs, such as dyslexia and attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity.

Strategies

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, based on a flexible script covering eight dimensions: (1) personal and professional details of the interviewee; (2) accessibility; (3) regulations; (4) participation; (5) training and awareness-raising; (6) the teaching-learning process; (7) entry and progression; (8) curricular placements. This article analyses one of these dimensions—that relating to the teaching-learning process—in which questions were posed regarding the need to introduce adaptations or changes to teaching methodology, the assessment process for students with disabilities and/or SEN, and the incorporation of these issues into subject syllabuses.

Procedure

The process of collecting and analysing the information is structured around different stages, following the guidelines on qualitative analysis procedures (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Miles et al., 2014). We highlight the following steps: (1) initial contact with the informants, requesting their participation; (2) conducting the interview, either in person

and/or online, depending on the interviewee’s availability; (3) audio recording, subject to the participants’ informed consent; (4) verbatim transcription of the information obtained and its storage, resulting in a textual-narrative body of material.

The research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Santiago de Compostela (Approval Identification Code: USC 30/2024).

Analysis of the data

With the support of the MAXQDA 24 programme, a deductive-inductive content analysis was carried out. In the first phase, initial categories were established based on the research objectives, the questions posed and the theoretical framework. These were subsequently reviewed and adjusted based on the analysis of the interview content, allowing for the incorporation of new categories as well as the definition of subcategories. To enhance the consistency and rigour of the analysis, a triangulation process was carried out amongst the researchers, which included a joint review of the category system and the completion of a partial qualitative co-coding exercise. The entire process was organised within a coding system (Table 2).

Table 2

Categories, subcategories and analysis codes

Category	Subcategories	Codes
Adaptation of the teaching-learning process		A
	Adaptation of materials and resources	Amr
	Adaptation of teaching methodology	Amd
	Adaptation of the assessment process	Aev
Process evaluation		VP
	Difficulties	VPd
	Achievements	VPI
Course syllabus		P
	Incorporation of specific elements	Pi
	Motifs	Pm

Results

The results obtained are presented below, in line with the objectives set out and the categories that emerged from the content analysis carried out. The word cloud summarises the most relevant concepts relating to the teaching and learning process for university students with disabilities (see Figure 1, generated using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA 24). This visual aid helps to identify the central ideas emerging from the

research, highlighting terms such as adaptation, assessment, activities, support and training, and invites us to reflect on some of the cornerstones of an inclusive university education.

Figure 1. Word cloud generated using MAXQDA (version 2024)



Adapting the teaching and learning process

One of the key points highlighted by teaching staff when supporting pupils with disabilities and/or specific educational support needs is the need for teaching resources and materials tailored to each pupil's specific requirements. For example, in cases of visual impairment, they emphasise the importance of ensuring that all resources are accessible and of providing materials in advance of their use in the classroom.

...I've had pupils with low vision, low vision, practically blind... so I was able to provide them with documents in a format that worked best for their screen readers and text-to-speech software (...) or, for example, there's a subject that involves a practical exercise using a video, but I've now switched to a video and a podcast to include those who cannot see. (E1)

For example, years ago there was a student with visual impairments who needed her lecture notes in a larger font size. The truth is that she was a student who had received excellent support from the ONCE and had hardly needed any help at all. She just needed the materials a few days in advance, and they were sent to her – that was it. (E8)

In other cases, such as hearing impairment, it is also important to have support resources such as sign language interpreters. In this regard, one of the interviewees

highlights the importance of allowing the time this professional needs to interpret what the teacher is saying in the classroom, as well as when a pupil speaks.

On the subject of deafness, well, he did come with his interpreter (...) so, well (...) the boy would sit in the front row (...) which wasn't really much of a bother, but we had to give the interpreter enough space to pick up on the various points raised by his classmates as well; communication was flowing in all directions... so, the real effort was on the part of the sign language interpreter... a huge effort to take everything in. (E4)

Similarly, another category of analysis emerging from the interviews is the adaptation of teaching methodology, in terms of the type and design of the activities proposed, although they emphasise that this is an issue that is difficult to predict until they actually start teaching each group. Along these lines, one respondent highlights the following:

It also makes me think... that this year, discussing it with the person I co-teach the subject with, I realised that in the design we need to be a bit more moderate, especially when designing activities – not because sometimes, when they involve technology, they can be a bit, as I might put it, excessive, so to speak, or if you like, they require constant attention from the pupils; when you have pupils with specific needs – whether visual, cognitive or whatever – you have to be more restrained, and then it becomes very difficult, because ultimately the curriculum is designed for everyone, isn't it? (E3)

Linked to this issue, communication in the classroom plays a crucial role, both in the way activities are presented and in managing interactions with pupils. In this regard, some speakers highlight the need to adapt explanations and adjust the pace of communication to aid understanding.

For example, explaining certain activities (...) having to explain the instructions for certain activities so they're better understood, adapting group work when there might be pupils on the autism spectrum, as you might need to pay more attention to the team's relationships and interactions... (E7)

...often, of course... I had... to slow down... I tend to speak very quickly... regarding the speed at which I convey ideas, I would constantly look to... the interpreter; she would tell me if I was going too fast or not... but it worked very well. (E4)

Assessment was another category that was discussed at length. Most of the teachers interviewed acknowledged having made adjustments, notably extending the time allowed for tests or changing the assessment format. They recognise that implementing more complex modifications would require them to have more training: "... for some kind of need or attention deficit, the time allowed for tests, exams or the submission of assignments has been extended" (E5).

Also, two years ago, I had a pupil with... well, I don't know what problem with her wrist that prevented her from writing... well, at the same speed as the rest of her classmates. Well, in that case too, I simply had to make an adjustment to the assessment, giving her more time, and that was that. (E9)

Almost all the interviewees emphasise the importance of maintaining frequent contact with these pupils, taking an interest in understanding what they need and what they, as teachers, can do to facilitate the teaching-learning process, whilst pointing out that adjustments depend both on the specific case and on the subject:

I usually approach them to see what they need and what we can do (E1)

In my field, it is difficult to be specific about this, as it is much broader than in other subjects; depending on the disability, we would have to adapt sheet music, instruments, listening exercises, etc. Therefore, I usually state that adaptations will be made on a case-by-case basis. (E19)

Challenges and achievements

Most of those surveyed consider it essential to incorporate adjustments into their subjects in order to cater adequately for the diversity of the student body and to provide an educational response that is as tailored as possible to students with specific educational support needs. When asked to rate this on a scale of 1 to 10, they stated: “10. Essential, given the slightest understanding of the current climate in Galician educational institutions” (E15); “10. We have an increasingly diverse student body, and we must consider all possible situations and adapt to their needs, to ensure an education on an equal footing for everyone” (E19).

Among the difficulties they mention, they highlight that, on occasions, students do not inform either the university's disability support service or the teaching staff of their specific situation or the support they require. In these cases, they explain that it is more difficult to provide the appropriate support: “There are other cases that aren't visible; if they don't tell you and you don't have the information, you can't help them in any way. I'm talking about psychological issues; lately we've had a lot of cases involving anxiety” (E10).

Another difficulty they mention is that, on occasions, information from the support services reaches the lecturer too late – when they have already had to make the necessary adjustments – or, in some cases, without them realising that there are students in the classroom who would require specific educational support. Even so, the teachers interviewed generally praise the work of these services, as it enables them to make more tailored adjustments, taking into account the specific information and guidelines provided by the professionals in these units: “... but as the report from the service arrives after the school year has started and they send you the report, it's sometimes delayed...” (E2); “but it's just as I'm saying, by the time I found out there was a problem, quite a bit of time had already passed since I'd started teaching, but well... there's usually a slight lag between

knowing something and being able to put it into practice” (E8); “yes, based on the information passed on to me by the unit, I make all the adjustments possible for the person who needs them” (E14).

Furthermore, the lack of specific training is also mentioned repeatedly when they reflect on how they approach this teaching-learning process, stating that in many cases they consider themselves ‘self-taught’, combining the guidance provided by the service with the learning that emerges from their own practice.

That’s why I say I feel there’s a shortfall; I really do feel there’s a shortfall... I don’t consider myself a champion of people’s needs, or of adaptation – far from it – it’s just that I don’t have the time... but the thing is, I’d like more training so that this could come naturally. (E7)

... I admit, for example, that perhaps I’m unaware of a whole host of assistive technologies or programmes, aren’t there?... and with artificial intelligence, there’ll be many more... IT resources, which could be programmes, for example – I don’t know – to aid reading... or interactive ones, relating to the field of communication, which could make their lives easier... (E4)

Despite these limitations, there are some experiences in this process that they find enriching and which have enabled them to make progress in supporting pupils with disabilities and/or specific educational support needs. They indicate that this previous experience has helped them to learn new ways of organising their teaching to adapt it to situations that are diverse and new to them. Furthermore, they express an interest in continuing to learn and incorporate new methodologies or resources.

... in a service-learning project, we adapted all the materials to easy-to-read format, but the thing is, we were learning how to produce materials in easy-to-read format (...) we prepared them by searching online for documents from organisations such as Inclusión Plena, which is an organisation that had manuals on how to produce materials in easy-to-read format. (E2)

... there’ll be loads of things I’m missing... that I’ve no idea about (...) but now I’ve learnt things... that you can do within the space itself, or by adapting the space, or how to behave... or well... I mean... basic rules, like, probably, how to communicate... or where to stand... (E4)

Incorporation into the course syllabus of specific elements relating to the support of pupils with disabilities and/or SEN

Most of the teachers interviewed do not include any specific reference to supporting pupils with SEN and/or disabilities in their syllabuses, but they point out that they do make the necessary adjustments in their teaching practice, based on the guidance provided by the support service or unit for these pupils.

I haven't included specific elements on supporting pupils in my syllabuses, as if I were to have a pupil with any kind of disability or special educational needs, I would adapt my teaching to their needs based on the guidance from the support service. (E17)

I do not include specific elements; I simply follow the service's recommendations when I have students who have requested them. (E20)

Some teachers justify this decision by citing the diversity of students who may enrol on the course and the difficulty of making specific references to the different situations within the classroom. For this reason, they consider that the important thing is to respond once these needs have been notified to them by the relevant support service, or when they are informed by the students themselves or identified in class.

Well, the truth is, no (...) I find it really difficult to do that. I'll say it again, because ultimately you don't know which of these cases you're going to face (...) But I don't know how you'd refer to them, beyond saying that you'll try to adapt as best you can, but it's difficult to cover everything. (E10)

In my experience, statistically speaking, I don't see the need to consider each and every possible scenario that might arise in advance. I'm open to adapting to specific cases. (E11)

Those teachers who do state that they include a reference in the syllabus do so in general terms, in some cases following the guidance provided by the Faculty or the support service for these students: "What we always include, in fact, is a standard phrase stating that any student with special needs should seek an assessment from the service..." (E1); "The Faculty ensures that the issue of any specific educational support needs a student may have is addressed, and this is set out in the syllabuses" (E7).

Some interviewees questioned during the interview why they do not include this reference in their syllabuses and noted that it might well be worthwhile doing so. On the other hand, some interviewees emphasised the need for such references to be incorporated into other types of documents produced by the institution or university itself, going beyond the scope of the individual module.

Well, I have to say no, I have to say that I don't include any of that in my syllabuses, but perhaps it should be included. Perhaps it isn't included because one assumes it's included by default, or rather, that it's implicit (...) But anyway, perhaps from now on it should, at the very least, include a line addressing this issue as a matter of sensitivity for the students themselves, so that they can see it. (E5)

In that case, perhaps it should be included in a higher-level document, one that takes precedence over... one issued by the faculty itself, which takes precedence over the course syllabuses, and which we, just as we do with attendance or gender equality or... ensures that these are issues governed by overarching regulations, which we know we're all obliged to comply with, and how. (E10)

Discussion

The examination of teaching and learning processes and their adaptation to students with disabilities and/or SEN takes on a central role, as these processes constitute the space in which inclusive policies are translated into teaching practices capable of providing responses tailored to diversity. Analysis of teachers' discourses highlights their commitment to adapting their teaching to the specific characteristics and needs of these pupils, although they also identify difficulties that limit the effectiveness of their actions. In any case, they clearly support the need to make reasonable adjustments that promote meaningful learning and full participation, findings consistent with various recent studies (Lomellini et al., 2025; Márquez-González et al., 2025; Römhild and Holleder, 2024; Thompson and Francis, 2025).

Teachers put forward a variety of arguments, as well as identifying aspects they consider essential for making progress in improving their teaching practice. Among these, the need to ensure the accessibility of materials and resources stands out, distinguishing between adaptations they can make themselves (font size, provision of materials in advance, etc.) and others that go beyond their actual capacity to intervene and require external resources (sign language interpreters, specific software, etc.). Authors such as Gerpe Pérez (2020) and Moriña and Carballo (2018) point out that, in many cases, the absence of changes and adaptations is not due to a lack of willingness on the part of teachers, but to external constraints that prevent them from being implemented immediately and effectively.

Teachers also refer to adaptations linked to teaching methodology, focusing primarily on the design and type of activities, but also on the communicative process that takes place during class sessions, in line with the findings of similar research (Gerpe and Porto, 2024). Indeed, it highlights interaction with pupils and the communication process as elements that must be carefully managed and adjusted to ensure everyone's understanding and participation, taking into account the clarity of instructions as well as the monitoring of interactions that take place during class sessions.

The results also show that teachers do make changes to the assessment process, although these take the form of minor adjustments and respond to specific requests, such as extending the time allowed or making simple changes to the exam format. Conversely, when students' needs require more substantial adaptations, teachers emphasise that they lack sufficient training, in line with findings from previous studies (Aranda et al., 2015; Márquez and Melero, 2020; Perera et al., 2022). Therefore, moving towards more inclusive assessment practices requires providing alternative forms of assessment that enable students to demonstrate the learning and skills they have acquired, in line with the guidelines set out by the universal design for learning, an approach that has demonstrated positive results in various contexts by offering students a greater sense of control over their own learning process (Black, 2014; Lomellini et al., 2025; Moriña and Carballo, 2025).

To make progress in this endeavour, training is essential, as highlighted by the

participants in this study and as has also been widely advocated in the scientific literature on the subject (Bunbury, 2018; CERMI, 2020; Collins et al., 2018; Márquez-González et al., 2025; Mayo et al., 2020; Osuna-Juárez and González-Castellano, 2024; Paz-Maldonado et al., 2025; Sandoval et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2025). For all these reasons, a fundamental challenge arises, one to which both the European guidelines (European Commission, 2022) and the Universities Act (Organic Law 2/2023) refer: the need to strengthen the training of university teaching staff in order to guarantee high-quality teaching for all students and to respond appropriately to diversity. Only in this way will we make progress towards the fourth goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: 'Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UN, 2015).

On the other hand, despite the commitment shown by the teachers interviewed, they also highlight difficulties, such as a lack of information about students' needs or a communication gap on the part of support services for students with disabilities and/or specific educational support needs. It therefore seems necessary to strengthen communication with support services, although it is true that there are occasions when students do not disclose their situation, which limits teachers' ability to take preventive action. Various studies have examined the role of these services in depth, highlighting both their mediating role and the part they play in promoting inclusive universities (Barrera et al., 2024; Gómez-Puerta et al., 2023; Moliner et al., 2019).

The study also shows that inclusion does not depend exclusively on resources, but is closely linked to the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of the various stakeholders involved in the educational process (Fu and Lin, 2026; Li et al., 2024; Moriña and Carballo, 2025; Nunes and Calvo, 2025; Solís and Arroyo, 2022). Indeed, teachers indicate that commitment and an empathetic attitude on the part of teaching staff are essential to this process of inclusion, particularly when the training they have received to deal appropriately with different situations is limited. Frequent interaction with pupils and an interest in the effectiveness of the adaptations implemented are key factors; this is evident both from the results of this study and from other research (Aranda et al., 2015; Gerpe and Porto, 2024; Moriña and Carballo, 2018). Indeed, almost all informants emphasise the importance of taking an interest in understanding what pupils need and what they, as teachers, can do to facilitate the teaching-learning process. Studies such as those by Perera et al. (2022) emphasise that a positive attitude on the part of teaching staff is just as important as training when it comes to addressing diversity. Whilst this is a fundamental element, we agree with the point made by CERMI (2020) that the inclusion in the university setting cannot depend solely on the individual willingness of teaching staff, but must be a shared and structural responsibility.

In any case, the effort to promote positive attitudes towards addressing student diversity and to view the university as a more inclusive space does not depend solely on the role of teaching staff; rather, it is also necessary to raise awareness amongst students

through content related to disability, the development of accessible and functional materials, and the creation of direct experiences that increase knowledge and the information available. There is therefore a clear need to establish training and awareness-raising programmes as strategic tools to reduce negative attitudes and strengthen inclusion within the university context (Núñez et al., 2025), bearing in mind that, as Perera et al. (2022), inclusive teaching practices not only benefit students with disabilities but also enrich

the teaching-learning process as a whole, contributing to the creation of more equitable, diverse and democratic university environments.

Among the main limitations, we highlight that the study focuses exclusively on the perceptions of teaching staff in the Faculties of Education, which may introduce a potential bias, as this group is particularly aware of these issues and has greater prior knowledge regarding support for diversity. Extending the study to other institutions and degree programmes would enable the results obtained to be cross-checked and supplemented, identifying similarities and differences in inclusion strategies, as well as good teaching practices in addressing student diversity. Similarly, it is considered relevant, with a view to future studies, to incorporate the perspective of students with disabilities, giving a voice to their personal experiences and enabling the identification of effective strategies and barriers in the inclusion process.

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Traducido con  DeepL

Date received: 2 February 2026

Review date: 4 March 2026

Date of acceptance: 21 May 2026