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PERCEPTION OF ECUADORIAN TEACHERS ON THE INCLUSION OF DEAF STUDENTS IN REGULAR SCHOOL

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Summary. International educational practice is geared toward the inclusion of deaf students in regular school classrooms. In Ecuador, according to current regulations, deaf people can access special or regular schools. However, the access of deaf students to regular schools can generate conceptual, methodological and evaluative tensions in teachers, which must be considered. Therefore, the present research aims to analyze the perception of Ecuadorian teachers on the inclusion of deaf students in regular school classrooms. For the execution of the research process, the quantitative approach has been selected, with a non-experimental, transectional, exploratory design. The technique used was the survey and the instrument was a 5-question questionnaire, designed by the research team, applied *through Google forms*. The survey was applied to a non-probabilistic sample of 556 Ecuadorian teachers from different levels of education (except higher education); and it was conducted using the snowball technique. Among the main results, 65.8% consider that deaf students should be included in regular schools, but 75.5% confess that they do not feel qualified to do so. It is concluded that, according to the teachers' perception, the inclusion of deaf students in regular school should be accepted, but that teachers do not feel qualified to fulfill this responsibility.

Key words: perception, teachers, inclusion, deaf students, regular school.

PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS DOCENTES ECUATORIANOS SOBRE LA INCLUSIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES SORDOS EN LA ESCUELA REGULAR

Resumen. La práctica educativa internacional se orienta a la inclusión de los estudiantes sordos en las aulas de la escuela regular. En el Ecuador, según la normativa vigente, las personas sordas pueden acceder a escuelas especiales o regulares. No obstante, el acceso de estudiantes sordos a escuelas regulares puede generar tensiones conceptuales, metodológicas y evaluativas en los docentes, que deben ser consideradas. Por ello, la presente investigación se propone analizar la percepción de los docentes ecuatorianos sobre la inclusión de estudiantes sordos en las aulas de la escuela regular. Para la ejecución del proceso investigativo se ha seleccionado el enfoque cuantitativo, con un diseño no experimental, transeccional, de nivel exploratorio. La técnica utilizada es la encuesta y el instrumento un cuestionario de 5 preguntas, diseñado por el equipo de investigación, aplicado por medio de *Google forms*. La encuesta fue aplicada a una muestra no probabilística de 556 docentes ecuatorianos de diversos niveles de educación (excepto educación superior); y se conformó por medio de la técnica de bola de nieve. Entre los principales resultados se destaca que el 65,8% considera que los estudiantes sordos deben ser incluidos en la escuela regular, pero el 75,5% confiesa que no se siente capacitado para ello. Se concluye que, según la percepción de los docentes, se debe aceptar la inclusión de estudiantes sordos en la escuela regular, pero que los docentes no se sienten capacitados para cumplir con esta responsabilidad.

Palabras clave: percepción, docentes, inclusión, estudiantes sordos, escuela regular.

Introduction

A quick review of the history of Western education reveals that the deaf have been described as imperfect beings in ancient times, victims of divine punishment in medieval times, individuals who must be subjected to oral language learning in modern times, or as a person with special educational needs, requiring assistance or integration or inclusion, depending on the theoretical model that supports it, in the current era. An important moment in that history is represented by the opening of special schools for the deaf, whose methodology has oscillated between oralism and bilingualism. At present, those institutions are characterized by the preferential use of the sign language in force in each country, by the transition from a monolingual to a bilingual model and by the progressive incorporation of deaf people to the teaching staff.

The road leading to educational inclusion has gone through several stages that can be summarized as follows: many centuries of exclusion, dozens of years of segregation, several years of integration and few years of inclusion. This last stage is marked by the prominent role of UNESCO, which has been one of the international institutions that has most promoted processes aimed at educational inclusion. Through it, UNESCO aims to remove barriers that prevent equal access for all people to inclusive, equitable and quality education (UNESCO, 2016). Such work, which should start from early childhood (UNESCO, 2021), aims to achieve more equitable societies (UNESCO 2017) and should be guaranteed throughout life (UNESCO, 2016).

In Ecuador, the third section of the *Organic Law on Disabilities* (2012), articles 27 to 41, addresses the issue of education. It establishes that the State must ensure that persons with disabilities can "access, remain in and complete" (p. 11) their studies within the National Education System and the Higher Education System. In the same document, it also provides for the inclusion of students with special educational needs in school education and the parallel existence of special and specific education schools (p. 11) in which intercultural and bilingual-bicultural education models must be implemented. As a complement to the law, the *National Bilingual Bicultural Educational Model for the Hearing Impaired* has been published (Republic of Ecuador, 2019). It distinguishes and contrasts two approaches to the care of deaf people, the clinical and the socio-anthropological. The first conceives deafness from what Aristotle calls "deprivation"

(n/d), and the second as a condition that characterizes a group of people who are part of a community, with their own culture and language (Republic of Ecuador (2019). Unfortunately, although the regulations establish the responsibility of the Ecuadorian state in relation to persons and groups with disabilities, the evaluation of inclusive education programs demonstrates a deficit in the implementation phase of public policies in the country (Villacís, 2019).

Currently, the National Council for the Equality of Disabilities (CONADIS, 2023) registers 66,538 people with hearing impairment. Of the total number of deaf people of school age, only 4,679 are enrolled in the different levels of basic education and high school, 851 in special schools, 3,705 in regular schools and 123 in permanent popular education; and 947 in higher education. The number of deaf students attending regular school is a challenge for teachers because their care requires specific training. In relation to this field, and as a small sample, the curriculum of initial education and basic education of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador has been reviewed, which includes two theoretical subjects that address the problems of inclusive education and special educational needs, but there is not, for the moment, a subject that offers specific training for the care of deaf students. Such training is likely to be found in graduate programs with an emphasis on inclusive education or special education. However, one may ask whether teachers in regular schools that have taken in deaf students are prepared to carry out this activity. Therefore, it is imperative to know the perception of Ecuadorian teachers about the inclusion of deaf students in regular school classrooms.

A review of the recent literature reflects the existence of two distant positions regarding the inclusion of deaf students in the regular school classroom. Most of the current studies point to the existence of a certain favorable disposition of teachers for the inclusion of deaf children in the classroom, although in practice they express a lack of systematic training in this field, lack of commitment and even opposition to this type of actions. On the other hand, there is no lack of studies that underline the existence of processes contrary to inclusion, such as exclusion and simple educational integration, and even a certain underlying tendency that is oriented towards the re-powering or return of special education. The following are some studies that reflect the aforementioned trends.

Salazar, Flórez-Romero and Cuervo-Echeverri (2010) highlight the opposition of parents and teachers in certain traditional schools to educational inclusion processes. Above all, the teachers reflect little confidence in relation to the mechanisms of evaluation and adaptation of the academic program. The same study establishes that, in some cases, deaf students are often treated with negative attitudes such as indifference and pity. Caroca and Yépez (2010) describe the perception of several Chilean teachers during the process of inclusion of deaf students in the classroom. While some focus on the slower pace of learning and the volume of information that deaf students can retain in long-term memory; others mention the existing "integration" problems, due to the lack of openness of members of the educational community or of the deaf students themselves, or the lack of responsibility of the deaf students themselves for the delivery of work. According to Díaz (2011), Amaro (2013), Gamboa (2015), Valencia (2020), Larrazábal, Palacios and Espinoza (2021) and Zamora (2021) teachers confess that they have not received training on sign language and didactic foundations to teach and evaluate deaf students. For his part, Acevedo (2012) considers the labels that deaf people receive based on the opposition between normal and abnormal and the academic difficulties that deaf students may suffer during their university career. Along the same lines, Hernández (2015) states that educational inclusion is reduced to integration processes in the classroom, characterized

by various negative attitudes towards deaf people, which reflect the predominance of a homogenizing, oralist and rehabilitative model. On the contrary, based on the role of a deaf community, as a constructor of meaning, Peluso-Crespi and Vallarino (2014) are in favor of strengthening the four bilingual schools (LSU - Spanish) in the Oriental Republic of Uruguay with a boarding system and the concomitant suppression of inclusion of deaf students in regular schools. Paradoxically, Vulcano (2017) states that, despite the fact that two thirds of the research participants are inspired by the socio-linguistic model, which considers deaf people as part of a specific community with its own culture and language; one third of them still value them from the medical model, which insists on the components of lack and disability. The research of Perdomo, Velásquez and Bravo (2019) reflects the tensions of an educational community in which most teachers pronounce themselves in favor of inclusion, but in practice oppose it through words and actions that have generated two communities within the same school, the deaf and the hearing. Similar results are found Maldonado, Ríos and Araujo (2019) who conclude that the majority of students and teachers accept the inclusion of deaf students in the classroom, a figure that contrasts with the high percentage of discrimination that deaf students have suffered in daily life, and with the scarce attention offered to them by teachers. On the contrary, after the application of the Educational Inclusion Questionnaire to a sample composed of fourteen teachers, Hernández, Loaiza and Salazar (2020) determine that the majority of teachers in an educational institution are in favor of the inclusion of deaf students in regular school. A similar conclusion is found in the research of Zamora (2021). In summary, there is some tension between the theoretical and practical components of educational inclusion of deaf students in the classroom, which require analysis and reflection.

The following paragraphs explain some fundamental concepts that facilitate the understanding of the subject. In education, segregation or exclusion is the artificial separation or isolation of students for various reasons. In some cases, segregation occurs for religious, ideological, social, economic, political, cultural, physical, and other reasons (Matossian, 2020). Segregation produces deep wounds among members of the educational community and undermines the principles of democratic education and human rights (UNESCO, 2012). On the contrary, integration is a step forward that seeks to overcome the mechanisms of segregation, although in essence it only establishes the need to incorporate previously excluded individuals into a community that had previously excluded them (RAE, 2001). Currently, most authors are in favor of educational inclusion, which implies overcoming segregation and integration, to the point of approaching the constitution of ideal spaces, in regular schools, in which all types of students should be included, including people with special educational needs (UNESCO, 2020; 2021). However, most regular school teachers have not received specific training to serve all students who enroll in their classrooms, because that would imply attending numerous training courses. Until a few years ago, most national states allocated resources to support special schools in which education was provided for students with specific disabilities, for example, blind, deaf, Down syndrome, among others (Sánchez-Manzano, 1992). As a counterpart, at present, state public policies lean towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs in regular school (Serrano and Camargo, 2011; Vásquez-Orjuela, 2015; Paz-Maldonado and Silva-Peña, 2021). In it, students with special educational needs should receive the same training and have the same opportunities as other students.

As a starting point for the research, the team asks what is the perception of Ecuadorian teachers about the possible inclusion of deaf students in regular schools? In

response to this question, we propose to analyze the perception of Ecuadorian teachers on the inclusion of deaf students in regular school classrooms.

Method

For the execution of the research process, the quantitative approach was selected, with a non-experimental transectional design, at an exploratory level (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2014). The selected technique is the survey and the instrument is a 5-question questionnaire, designed by the research team, applied through *Google forms*.

The population consisted of 556 Ecuadorian teachers, direct and indirect beneficiaries of two sensitization workshops held in 27 training centers, located in different cities and provinces of the country, which were attended by 46 second level students of cohorts II and III of the Master's Program in Education, Mention in Socio-Critical Pedagogies of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, during the execution of a community service project. The planning of the project was carried out in accordance with the guidelines of the University's Virtual Education Center for virtual master's degrees. The *project to raise awareness about the communication needs of the deaf community in Ecuador* aims to generate spaces for raising awareness among the Ecuadorian population about the communication needs of deaf people. The procedure was developed according to the following phases: 1) project design, 2) workshop preparation, 3) training of master's program students, 4) project implementation, 5) survey application.

During the design phase, the project was prepared in accordance with the guidelines of the Virtual Education Center of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador. Once the project was approved, the planning of the awareness-raising workshops included the selection of the subject matter, the formulation of objectives, the selection of specific content, and the definition of the time and resources required. The workshops dealt with 1) the communication needs of the deaf people in our country, 2) the lines of action to address the communication needs of the deaf people in our country. The objective was to analyze the communication needs of deaf people in our country and to define possible lines of action to address the communication needs of deaf people in our country. The workshops were organized according to the following structure: welcome, integration activities, projection of a previously selected video, questions for reflection and evaluation. The recipients were teachers from elementary and high school institutions, high school students, parents of the educational institutions and members of the community. The training of the 46 students of cohorts II and III of the Master's program in Education with a specialization in Socio-Critical Pedagogies was carried out virtually. It consisted of an explanation of the purpose of the project, the structure, the contents, the selection of resources, the collection of evidence and the way in which the online questionnaire was applied to a group of practicing teachers.

The survey was applied to a non-probabilistic sample of 556 Ecuadorian teachers from different levels of education (except higher education); and it was formed by means of the snowball technique, who were invited by the students who participated in the master's program linkage project. All participants are over 18 years of age and agreed to fill out the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. The *Google forms* were available in two different periods, for the participants of the second cohort, from October 24 to November 30, 2022; and, for the participants of the third cohort, from January 6 to February 18,

2023. The questionnaire did not ask for the identification of the participants and is preceded by two items related to the length of teaching experience and the level of education at which the teachers work. The five questions in the questionnaire address 1) the relationship between deafness and disability, 2) the need for deaf people to attend a special school, 3) or a regular or "normal" school, 4) the learning ability of deaf people, and 5) whether teachers feel able to receive deaf students in their own classrooms. The data analysis was based on the graphs and percentages extracted from *Google forms*, from which the tables summarizing the results were constructed.

Results

The results obtained are detailed below.

Table 1

Years of experience of participants

Years of teaching experience	0-5	6-10	11-20	+ of 21
Percentage	21%	23,2%	29,9%	25,9%
Quantity	117	129	166	144

Table 2

Scope of work of the participants

Scope of work	Initial education	Basic elementary	Middle school	Higher basic	Baccalaureate
Percentage	9,4%	16,5%	22,5%	18,7%	32,9%
Quantity	52	92	125	104	183

Table 3

Questionnaire results

Ask	% yes	number	% no	Number
1. I consider deaf students to be disabled	61,9	344	38,1	212
2. I believe that deaf students should attend a special school	59,2	329	40,8	227
3. I believe that deaf students should be included in regular school	65,8	366	34,2	190
4. I believe that deaf students are less able to learn than hearing students	9,2	51	90,8	505
5. I feel qualified to receive deaf students in my classroom	24,5	136	75,5	420

The first analysis of the results shows that the respondents come from the four predefined categories of experience. In relation to the work environment, there is a greater participation of teachers in general basic education and high school than in pre-school education. On the other hand, the results of the questionnaire yield the following results that deserve the researchers' attention. While 61.9% consider deaf students to be disabled, 38.1% indicate the opposite. A priori, the team defined the dependence of questions 2 and

3 of the questionnaire, since a distinction is made between a special school and a regular school. So the results of both questions had to confirm each other. Therefore, it is contradictory that 59.2% affirm that deaf students should attend a special school and a higher percentage, that is 65.8%, a regular school, which could reveal a misunderstanding of the terminology used in the questionnaire. 90.8% recognize that deaf students have the same learning ability as hearing students. Finally, 75.5% of the teachers surveyed confess that they do not feel qualified to receive deaf students in their classrooms, which is interesting information for the development of further research.

Discussion and conclusions

At the beginning of the research we asked about teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of deaf students in regular schools. A first answer to this question can be obtained from the results of the present research, since the questionnaire applied inquires about the perception that teachers have about the relationship between deafness and disability, the attendance of deaf students in special or regular schools, the learning ability of deaf students, and the professional competencies that teachers have to admit deaf students in regular school classrooms.

The results indicate that 61.9% establish a connection between deafness and disability, which can be explained in light of two opposing anthropological paradigms, the clinical and the socio-anthropological (Republic of Ecuador, 2019). While the clinical model evaluates deafness in light of deprivation or lack, the socio-anthropological model does so based on the consideration of deaf people as part of a culture and with their own language and identity (Republic of Ecuador, 2019). Regarding the first model, some current research gathers evidence of teachers who still value deaf people based on impairment and abnormality (Hernández, 2015); while, at the opposite pole they are recognized as people who should receive equal and respectful treatment (Divito, Pahud & Barale, 2003).

The need for deaf students to attend a special school is supported by 59.2%. At present, most special education institutions for deaf people are inspired by bicultural and bilingual models, although some of them may retain certain conceptual and operational shortcomings, such as the management of attitudes that would reveal a clinical conception of the deaf person, as pointed out by Carranco, Martínez, Márquez and Realpe (2021), based on an in situ observation. Other research conducted in the field of special schools emphasizes the importance of sign language and the mastery of teaching and assessment strategies that consider the specific characteristics of deaf students (Díaz, Nieto, & Hincapié, 2018; Morales-Acosta, 2019; Valencia, 2020). Although there are cases in which the existence of special schools is radicalized to the extreme in which the strengthening of this type of special schools for the deaf and the elimination of inclusion processes in regular schools is requested, due to underlying theoretical considerations, related to the real levels of inclusion that are currently achieved (Peluso-Crespi and Vallarino, 2014).

The intention expressed by 65.8% of teachers for the acceptance of deaf students in regular schools must be translated into concrete actions that allow for the true inclusion of this population in their classrooms and implies the adjustment of national regulations and current university curricula. Along these lines, the Pedagogical Guidelines for the Educational Care of Students with Hearing Limitations (2006), the *Organic Law on Disabilities* (2012), the Guidelines for the Educational Care of Students with Hearing

Disabilities (2013) and the National Bilingual Bicultural Educational Model for Persons with Hearing Disabilities (2019) should be interpreted; and the statements of authors such as Serna (2015), who advocates for the modification of the Institutional Educational Project so that the inclusion of deaf students can be achieved; Rodríguez-Hernández, Muñoz, Sánchez-Bravo and Sastre (2019) point out the importance of interdisciplinary studies that allow to deepen the own characteristics that occur during the communicative and cognitive processes with deaf people; Pereira (2020) is convinced that deaf students can learn historical contents in regular school with the support of visual elements and the interpreter; Trejo-Muñoz and Martínez-Pérez (2020) highlight the role of digital resources during the teaching of deaf people. On the contrary, authors such as Salazar, Flórez-Romero, and Cuervo-Echeverri (2010) state that one of the main obstacles to inclusion is the rejection that teachers express in front of disabled students; Hernández (2015) consider that inclusion has remained an empty statement, which does not coincide with the homogenizing reality experienced by deaf people; Vulcano (2017) mentions that at least one third of the teachers consulted still conceive deaf people from disability, an attitude that negatively conditions the valuation of long-term memory; Perdomo, Velásquez and Bravo (2019) denounce the existence of two communities or schools within the same institution, one for deaf and one for hearing; Maldonado, Ríos and Araujo (2019) conclude that many deaf students feel discriminated against by teachers; Larrazabal, Palacios and Espinoza (2021) state that deaf students who are admitted to regular schools oscillate between integration and inclusion and that they do not always achieve the minimum learning objectives; Perea (2022) advocate the incorporation of curricular adjustments in education majors who receive deaf students.

In view of the fact that 90.8% of the teachers surveyed consider that deaf students have the same learning capacity as hearing students, this should be reflected both in the teaching methodology in the classroom and in the learning outcomes achieved. This general statement coincides with the conclusion of Ortiz-Guzmán (2022) that deaf and hearing students possess similar learning abilities, although nuanced by the visual predominance of deaf people. In relation to the teaching-learning processes of deaf people, Ortiz-Flores (2006) has established a relationship between the representations that the teacher has and the process of teaching written language to deaf students; Larrinaga and Peluso (2007) suggest that undergraduate teachers should develop a methodology that focuses on the teaching of language and scientific vocabulary; Caroca and Yépez (2010) mention the importance of visual materials, limited vocabulary and the slower pace of learning of deaf students; Herrera, Esquea, Serje, De la Cruz and Barros (2021) highlight the use of the blog as a resource that can stimulate the reading skills of deaf students; Prieto and Torres (2023) state that physical materials and resources should be offered that enable learning for both deaf and hearing students.

Likewise, a high percentage of participants (75.5%) state that they do not feel prepared to receive deaf students in regular school classrooms, which is an important indicator that points to the academic preparation that current teachers have received during their undergraduate training, i.e. the curriculum. Along the same lines, different authors agree in pointing out the inexistence of systematic training that adequately prepares future teachers of the deaf (Domínguez, 2009; Díaz, 2011; Amaro, 2013; Córdova, Gómez, & Zúñiga, 2013; Gamboa, 2015; Torres, 2015; Flores, 2019; Morales, 2019; Trejo-Muñoz & Martínez-Pérez, 2020; Rodríguez-Marín, 2021; Zamora-Jiménez, 2021; Ortiz-Guzmán, 2022).

From the results of the research it is established that a high percentage of respondents consider deaf people to be disabled, have the same learning capacity as hearing people, accept their inclusion in regular school and have stated that they do not feel qualified to develop teaching-learning processes with them. Therefore, it is concluded that teachers reflect a favorable attitude towards the inclusion of deaf students in regular school, although, contradictorily, at the same time a similar percentage considers that they should attend a special school. In addition, in light of the results of the last research question, it is concluded that a comprehensive curriculum reform is required, which allows for the adequate training of future teachers, accompanied by systematic training of practicing teachers for the care of students with disabilities.

On the other hand, further research should be conducted on the actual pedagogical and didactic difficulties experienced by regular school teachers with deaf students during the educational process.

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is there a relationship between learning strategies and critical reading?

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