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Improving the academic experience of students with disabilities in higher education: faculty members of Social Sciences and Law speak out

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This article describes the key elements to develop an inclusive pedagogy in the university through the testimonies of Social Sciences and Law faculty members. A total of 25 faculty members from seven different Spanish universities participated in the study, who were recommended by their students with disabilities based on their good practices. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted individually. The data were progressively analysed using a system of categories and codes. The results show three key elements to improve the academic experience of students with disabilities: disability-specific training for faculty members, a good faculty–student relationship and the willingness to make reasonable adjustments. This article proposes a well-trained faculty, who develop a flexible teaching with a positive and close relationships toward their students, as the ideal profile to serve as an example to other colleagues and universities in order to improve the quality of academic and social experiences for students with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive pedagogy; higher education; students with disability; faculty members; qualitative methodology

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, educational institutions around the world have made great efforts to improve the academic lives of students with disabilities. However, finding suitable solutions to respond to student diversity still requires thorough research, as it is necessary to know their real needs, the difficulties they encounter and especially the practices that guarantee their learning and participation. Although the needs and difficulties of students with disabilities at the University have been widely explored, further knowledge is needed about teaching practices and effective processes to achieve the real inclusion of these students.

Organisations such as UN (2015) and the UNESCO (2017) recognise the culture of inclusion as one of the quality indicators of education. Among the actions in favour of educational inclusion, there is a significant legislative development that regulates the rights of people with disabilities. In the scope of Higher Education (HE), after the implementation of

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the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European universities became more democratic for people with disabilities (Martins, Borges, and Gonçalves 2018).

The above-mentioned legislative actions contributed to the increase of the number of students with disabilities that access university (Kendall 2017). In Spain, specific regulations have been created to protect the rights of this social group, such as the General Law of Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion published in 2013, and the university legislation (e.g. the University Student Statute) that regulates the implementation of reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities. However, apart from facilitating their access to HE, it is necessary to create and implement policies and actions that guarantee the continuation and academic success of these students (Mayhew 2003; Thomas 2016).

Numerous authors have focused on identifying the barriers that students encounter throughout their academic studies (Biggeri, Di Masi, and Bellacicco 2019). Among these difficulties, students highlight architectural barriers, the lack of accessible teaching resources and methods, and social barriers (Weis, Dean, and Osborne 2016). Among these barriers, faculty members are often pointed out as the main challenge by students with disabilities (Moriña and Perera 2018).

Students often highlight negative attitude faculty members toward disability as a big problem (Elbeheri et al. 2018). These attitudes have direct influence on the relationships between the faculty and the students. The latter, and not only those with disabilities, consider their relationship with their faculty members as a determining factor in their academic success. A close relationship with a positive attitude toward disability and the willingness to make the necessary adjustments improve the chances of success of the students (Gorard et al. 2006). However, students usually mention that their relationships with their faculty members are distant; they even state that some faculty members show negative attitudes and often behave strangely when they are told that a student has a disability (Moriña, Molina, and Cortes-Vega 2018).

In other cases, negative attitudes translate into a lack of empathy toward disability when faculty members do not make the reasonable adjustments that students require; for example, when the necessary materials are not provided in advance, no accessible materials are used and the teaching and evaluation methods are not adjusted to ensure the participation of all students (Claiborne et al. 2011; Mahtab and Ahmad 2011; Vickerman and Blundell 2010; Yssel, Pak, and Beilke 2016). Sometimes, this is due to the fact that faculty members consider that making reasonable adjustments would privilege students with disabilities (Moriña, Molina, and Cortes-Vega 2018). Other authors state that faculty members are willing to make adjustments that require little effort (such as recording a lecture), and that they are more reluctant to those changes that involve greater time and effort (Burgstahler and Doe 2006; Elbeheri et al. 2018). However, this is a personal matter, since other studies have pointed out that a large number of faculty members usually show a high degree of willingness to make all the necessary adjustments (Yssel, Pak, and Beilke 2016).

Negative attitudes of faculty members toward adjusting methods and resources, as well as their lack of communication strategies, are mostly due to the lack of knowledge and training regarding disability. A considerable number of faculty members do not know that making certain adjustments is a legal obligation in Spain (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2019), as is the case in other neighbouring countries such as Portugal (Martins, Borges, and Gonçalves 2018).

The above-mentioned General Law of Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion (2013) states that reasonable adjustments should be provided for those who need them at all stages of education in Spain. Failure to provide reasonable

accommodation can be sanctioned. At the institutional level, each university indicates in its legislation the obligation to make these adjustments for students with disabilities, as well as other rights such as the choice of groups and schedules or free tuition. The adjustments that the legislation regulates are not very specific. Some of these adjustments consist of giving more time to carry out evaluation exams or making work deadlines more flexible. However, the legislation is not clear and the willingness of faculty members to make adjustments plays a key role.

The lack of information about the obligation to make adjustments is a widespread difficulty for students, which faculty members admit (Wray and Houghton 2018). As in other countries, such as the United States (Gunersel and Etienne 2014), the pedagogical training of faculty members in Spain is not compulsory. Moreover, there are few disability-specific courses available, and faculty members usually do not request information from alternative sources, such as the support services for students with disabilities (Hanafin et al. 2007). As reported by Collins, Azmat, and Rentschler (2018), it is imperative to improve the processes of faculty training in inclusive pedagogical practices and disability.

There are few studies focused on analysing the processes of faculty training in disability and inclusive education (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2019; Cunningham 2013; Sowers and Smith 2004). The experiences carried out to date show that training has multiple benefits, such as the improvement of attitudes and sensitivity toward disability, an increased commitment to the inclusion of all students and the acquisition of knowledge about teaching methods and accessible materials design (Sowers and Smith 2004).

In the field of students with disabilities in HE, most studies have focused on analysing the perspectives of students. On the other hand, the testimonies of faculty members reveal their perspectives about the difficulties they encounter when working with students with disabilities and allow understanding their attitudes toward this social group (Martins, Borges, and Gonçalves 2018).

In this study, we present the opinions of a group of faculty members of Social Sciences and Law known for developing inclusive practices. We show the opinions of experienced faculty members about the key elements to achieve a real inclusion of students with disabilities in the university context, with the aim that they may serve as an example to other colleagues and institutions of HE. We present the profile of the ideal faculty member considering three previously analysed aspects: faculty training in disability, the importance of their relationship with their students, and the realisation of reasonable adjustments in their teaching and evaluation methods.

2. Method

The results of this study are part of a larger research project entitled '*Title omitted for the blind review*' (2017–2020), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. The aim of this project is to study what faculty members do to carry out inclusive pedagogy, and why and how they do it. The present article is focused on analysing the opinions and experiences of the participants about three key aspects in the development of an inclusive pedagogy. To this end, three research questions guided this analysis:

- How important is faculty training for the teaching and learning process regarding students with disabilities?
- How does the relationship with the students influence the teaching and learning process?

- Which are the reasonable adjustments that faculty members make to ensure the participation of students with disabilities?

2.1. Participants

A total of 119 faculty members from all fields of knowledge from 10 Spanish universities participated in this study. Of the total sample, 25 participants were from Social Sciences and Law, who carried out their teaching activities in seven different universities.

To access the sample, two strategies were applied. On the one hand, students with disabilities were contacted through the disability support services of the participating universities. They were asked to collaborate in the study by recommending faculty members who had fostered their social and educational inclusion through inclusive practices. To that end, they were given a list of characteristics that these faculty members should have: they facilitate the learning process; promote an active learning; use a variety of methods; care about the learning of all students; they are flexible and help when a student is in need; motivate their students; promote group participation and learning; and make every student feel important.

In addition, we used the ‘snowball’ technique (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000). The collaboration request was directly sent to students with disabilities who participated in previous projects conducted by the research team, and also to colleagues who knew students with disabilities in different Spanish universities. The students who replied to the request sent the information about faculty members to the research team, explaining the reasons for their choices.

Then, we contacted the proposed faculty members via e-mail or phone. Apart from receiving information about the objectives and methodology of the research, they were also informed that they had been recommended by their own students for being inclusive faculty members. We initially contacted 35 faculty members of Social Sciences and Law, of whom 10 decided not to participate in the study, stating that they either did not have enough time to conduct the interviews or were unavailable due to health issues.

Regarding the profile of the participants, 15 of them taught in Faculties of Economics and Business, 5 in Faculties of Law, 3 in the field of Journalism and 2 in Social Work. With respect to gender, the sample was composed of 14 men and 11 women. Regarding age, 3 of them were under 40 years, 10 ranged between 41 and 50 years, and 12 were 51 or older. With respect to experience, only one participant had less than 5 years of university teaching experience, 6 of them had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 8 had between 11 and 20 years of experience and 10 had more than 20 years of experience. Regarding their experience with students with disabilities, all participants had had at least one student with a disability in their classrooms during some academic year.

2.2. Research instruments

A qualitative research methodology was employed, using individual semi-structured interview as data gathering instrument. Two individual interviews were conducted with each participant (one focused on beliefs and knowledge about disability, and the other one focused on educational designs and actions).

The average duration of the interviews was 90 min. Some of the questions that guided the interviews were the following: Do you believe it is necessary for faculty members to be trained in order to improve the learning of the students?; Do you think that the relationship

between the faculty member and the students is important?; How do you think this relationship influences the learning of the students?; What strategies do you carry out to foster the relationship with your students?; What do you think about the need to make adjustments in your subject for students with disabilities?; What kind of adjustments do you usually make for students with disabilities?

The interviews were conducted individually by the members of the research team. Most of them were carried out face-to-face. In those cases, in which a participant was not available, the interview was performed via Skype or phone call. Of the 25 participants, 18 were interviewed face-to-face, 4 via phone call and 3 using Skype. All interviews were recorded in audio and transcribed verbatim for later analysis.

2.3. Data analysis

A progressive structural analysis was conducted using a system of categories and codes that was generated inductively, following the proposal of Miles and Huberman (1994). This was carried out with the MaxQDA12 data analysis software.

After categorising all the information, which was performed by work groups, the entire research team conducted a second categorisation. This joint analysis allowed organising the doubtful information.

Table 1 shows the categories and codes used for the analysis of the information presented in the results section of this article.

2.4. Ethical issues

Regarding the ethical matters of this study, the participants signed an informed consent report. This document contained information about how the information provided in the interviews would be treated. It also ensured the anonymity of their data, in compliance with Organic Law 3/2018 of Personal Data Protection, and guaranteed their digital rights. Through this informed consent document, we committed to removing and deleting the information of those participants who decided to terminate their participation in the project whenever they wanted.

Table 1. Categories and codes system.

Categories	Codes
Training in disability	Importance
	Training opportunities
	Difficulties for training
	Training courses and programmes
	Collaborative work with colleagues
	Disability support services
Faculty-students relationship	Influence on the students
	Motivation for learning
	Communication skills
	Strategies to improve the relationship
Reasonable adjustments	Need
	Obligatory nature
	Resources
	Methodologies
	Evaluation

The research team gave a copy of the results report to each participant and allowed them to edit or delete any piece of information at their discretion.

3. Results

The results are presented in three sections, which correspond to three key elements that the participants considered fundamental to attend to the diversity of their classrooms: pedagogical and disability training, faculty-students relationship, and reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

3.1. *Training in disability: is it an essential key for inclusion?*

An important aspect is the training that the participants had in disability issues. Although they were faculty members characterised by developing good inclusive practices, only 4 of the participants stated that they had received specific training. They had received this training from the universities where they worked. These were short courses on attendance to students with disabilities whose participation was always voluntary. Other faculty members commented that there was a lack of training opportunities, and that the lack of training was made up by goodwill, empathy and the help offered by the disability support services.

The participants mentioned the fact that faculty training in Spain is not compulsory. They acknowledged that initial and on-site faculty training was essential, although they considered the university system as a barrier to the participation of faculty members in training courses.

I think all training is fundamental. The problem is that the system does not favour our training. It is up to us to train in certain teaching areas. If we do not choose, or if our circumstances do not allow that, we do not get any training (faculty 23).

A large number of the participants stated that pedagogical training is necessary, although it is neither required nor recognised as it should be in the professional access and promotion processes in the university context. In addition to the knowledge in their professional field, which they acquired through doctorate studies and research activity, they also confirmed that they had to train in order to know how to teach students. Therefore, they considered on-site training to be fundamental, even though it is not compulsory.

With respect to training in attention to diversity, most participants commented that courses about this topic are very beneficial, although they are not very common among the courses offered by universities. Specifically, regarding attention to students with disabilities, they recommended that all faculty members should learn about the different types of disabilities, their educational needs and how to respond to them.

It is very important for faculty members to be taught, at least at a basic level, about each type of disability. The aim is for faculty members to know how to attend to students with different disabilities, as there are considerable differences between these. For instance, a physical disability is totally different from a mental disability (faculty 4).

The participants stated that, through these courses, they had acquired knowledge and strategies to attend to students with disabilities from an inclusive perspective. Moreover, they considered these experiences as spaces for group reflection and teamwork with other colleagues, from whom they also learned. Therefore, they valued the learning derived from

sharing experiences with other faculty members, as they learned about their situations and what strategies they used to respond to the requests of the students.

I realised that, in the courses I took here at the university, I learned much more from what other colleagues tell, the problems they encounter and how they solve them (faculty 5).

However, most participants did not have specific training in disability and they recognised the lack of such kind of training. They also agreed in recommending this training for those faculty members who do not have it, as they had to face unknown situations without the necessary knowledge. Although they were able to overcome the barriers through their interest and goodwill, talking to the students and seeking resources independently, they stated that these situations would be easier with the appropriate training and they could have acted with more confidence. In fact, although they learned to develop more inclusive methods and practices, they recognised that they must receive more training to do so even better.

Although most participants had not participated in training courses, they also commented on different training alternatives other than courses and programmes. In this sense, collaborative learning with other faculty members was another training option positively valued by the participants.

Another alternative mentioned was to request and receive counselling from the disability support services of each university whenever necessary. These services offered counselling on what to do to adjust methods, materials and evaluations to the characteristics of each student with disability.

In the university, we have a specific service devoted to the attention to students with disabilities. It is a service that provides closeness, which makes things much easier for both students and the faculty. We can ask them anything we want; they are always available to discuss any situation (faculty 20).

Lastly, the participants pointed out that they could ask external professionals for counselling when they did not know how to approach a situation. This was another source of information and counselling about teaching and communication strategies. One of the participants shared his experience in this regard, commenting on how helpful it was for him to receive professional counselling from an external expert.

I think it is very important to work with other professionals, such as psychologists, pedagogues and even psychiatrists. In my case, the disabilities I attended to were more psychological and psychiatric than physical, and it helped a lot. I visited a psychologist to learn from him how to approach the situation. We talked many times about how to deal with the student's episodes of crisis and euphoria (faculty 8).

Although training and information about attending to students with disabilities was very important to all the faculty members, the ways to obtain these knowledge and strategies were varied, despite the common objective: the educational and social inclusion of students in the classroom, and their academic success.

3.2. *What to do to achieve a good faculty-students relationship?*

The faculty-students relationship has a considerable impact on the teaching and learning process. The participants considered good attitude and accessibility as fundamental

characteristics, since these have a direct influence on the learning of the students. They considered that the relationship with students had to be based on closeness, respect and empathy. Even with a large number of students, the participants tried to learn all their names in order to address them more closely. In the specific case of students with disabilities, the participants knew that it was essential to offer them their support and be open to make all necessary changes and adjustments.

I think that students benefit from faculty members who have a close attitude. I am always willing to support my students with whatever they need, as long as I obtain a positive response from them (faculty 8).

Communication skills were another aspect pointed out by the participants, since they determine the perception of students toward faculty member. The participants considered that the way in which they communicate with their students has a direct impact on their levels of motivation for the subject. They stated that tensionless, peer-to-peer and friendly communication can make the students get more involved in their own learning.

I think that motivation for a topic is strongly related to the communication skills of the faculty member. It is not only about verbal language, but also the way in which one talks. Communication is everything, and it has to be effective in order for the students to get involved in the subject (faculty 13).

Regarding the methodology, with the aim of maintaining a constant bidirectional communication, the participants used strategies that allowed the participation of the students and granted them the leading role. These strategies included debates and cooperative work. In opposition to traditional master lectures carried out in university classrooms, these faculty members preferred to work in a practical and participatory manner. In addition to giving the students the chance to participate, they wanted the contents of the subject to be connected to professional reality. Thus, the students could see the utility of their learning, which greatly improved both their motivation and their perception toward the faculty member.

When a faculty member is really interested in a subject, he/she makes sure that the knowledge reaches the students, who must acquire it and work with it. I try to get my students to participate actively in the generation of such knowledge, which must be useful to them. We have to go beyond the theoretical content and introduce practical content (faculty 1).

Furthermore, the planning of the course, the methods, the activities and the evaluation systems were discussed and agreed upon with the students. Through these strategies, the students felt that their opinions were important, and they participated in the design of their own learning process.

I think it is always important to take the opinion of the students into account when tackling the different topics. Exchanging points of view and making agreements with the students can shed light on certain aspects that may have not been considered (faculty 12).

Lastly, in order to achieve a continuous communication and show themselves available to students outside of the classroom, the participants stated that they used different tools, such as tutorials. In this way, if a student needed something from the faculty member, he/she did not have to wait until the next lecture in order to speak with him/her. In the case of students

with disabilities, who could frequently miss lectures, the participants highlighted the importance of keeping in touch with them in order to monitor and ensure their learning.

3.3. Adjustments for students with disabilities

All the participants in the study had had one or more students with disabilities in their classrooms. They reported that they often had a high number of students, with up to 100 students enrolled in a subject. Therefore, the chances of having a student with a disability in the classroom were higher. The types of disabilities of these students were diverse. Mental disabilities were the most frequent (11 students), followed by physical disabilities (10 students), sensory disabilities (visual and auditory) (9 students), learning difficulties (8 students) and organic disorders (3 students). In these cases, participants pointed out three ways in which they realised they had a student with a disability in the course: through own observation by the faculty member as a visible disability; direct communication by the student to the faculty; or through the disability support services, which provided this information and some guidance on what the student needed.

The methodological strategies, learning resources and evaluation methods used by the faculty members in question were based on flexibility and variety of options. Their aim was to allow the participation of all students. However, whenever a student with a disability encountered a difficulty, the participants were willing to make the necessary adjustments.

The faculty members mentioned that, in order to adjust to the characteristics of all students, a syllabus must be flexible and open to the necessary modifications.

Faculty members must consider that their teaching project has to allow these people to act, since we do not know the specific needs of each of them (faculty 2).

However, the participants were convinced that ensuring participation and equal opportunities does not involve changing the learning objectives or the contents, since these must be reached by all students. According to them, adjusting some elements did not consist in giving students with disabilities a privileged position, but providing them with the necessary means to learn the same contents as the rest of the students.

I think it is good, although I do not want to be politically correct about positive discrimination. Everything has different degrees. No more privileges. More adaptability; that is, we must be more flexible so that they can reach the final objective, which is the same for all (faculty 11).

The participants also commented on the need to make these adjustments. They stated that universities usually do not have very specific protocols of attention to diversity beyond the regulation of some adjustments to the evaluation tests. Therefore, the participants considered that these actions depended on the goodwill of the faculty, and that they should rather be compulsory.

I think there should be some mechanism regulated by the university itself, and that we should not leave it up to the faculty. Otherwise, each faculty member will do what they think is right (faculty 3).

The participants stated that, due to the flexibility of their programmes, they did not have to make a lot of specific adjustments, since they considered the opinions of the students to decide how they wanted to work. Designing a flexible programme which was open to different options allowed faculty members to arrange with students at the beginning of

the course the activities and resources that were most appropriate for them. By including different ways of participation and different types of resources each student could choose the most appropriate one, without the need to make further adjustments during the course. However, sometimes some participants had to make an adjustment for a student with a disability. These adjustments were not very significant, as they were mostly related to resources, participation in activities and evaluation.

Adjustments related to resources were mainly made for students with visual disability. When the participants worked with written and visual material, such as presentations or texts, they offered the same material in different formats (printed and digital), some of which were more accessible, with a larger font to facilitate reading.

I adapted the PowerPoint presentation. I also give them the printed version, with a larger font, so that they can follow it better from their seats (faculty 1).

However, some faculty members tried to use virtual materials that were already accessible, such as websites with accessibility option and editable digital materials compatible with assistive technology.

I try to use resources that are accessible enough to anybody: bibliographic sources, websites, official websites of the ministry or the European Union ... (faculty 2).

The participants agreed on the importance of offering materials and contents to all of their students in advance, since they knew that planning was an essential element for student with disabilities.

Another area in which the faculty members made some adjustments was student participation, especially regarding students with a type of disability that influenced their social capacity, such as Asperger's syndrome. When carrying out group activities, the participants allowed these students to work individually until they decided on their own to work with the group.

When carrying out the assessments, I thought that it would be a difficult situation if he worked in a group. So, I gave him the chance to do the assessments on his own (faculty 9).

Likewise, participants respected the decision of those students who were not comfortable participating in the classroom in front of their classmates. One of the faculty members mentioned a case in which a student could not speak in front of his classmates, thus he was allowed to skip that activity until he felt confident enough.

This person never participated, and I never dared to insist, because I knew that I could put him in an uncomfortable situation. But then, after speaking with him in the individual tutorials, I told him that, if he was afraid or scared, he did not have to participate. At the end of the academic year, he was the one who volunteered to stand in front of his classmates, because he eventually felt integrated in the group. However, that took a long time and continuous follow-up on my part: 'how do you feel? In the next session, do you want me to ask you or would you rather be left alone?' It was a very personal approach (faculty 8).

Finally, evaluation was the area in which students needed most adjustments. Although the predominant evaluation model was procedural, some of the participants also held exams at the end of their subjects. To carry out these tests, they gave their students the chance to choose. Based on what each student required, they offered different exam modes: oral,

multiple-choice, written, computer test and even individually outside of the classroom. Moreover, they gave more time to those students with writing, comprehension or expression difficulties.

I have my subject planned in a way that it allows carrying out different types of exams: written, oral, multiple-choice, etc. The exams, when we had them, were done using a computer, with extra time, up to 30 or 40% more time. We always talked to the students to see what their best interest is (faculty 2).

One last common aspect among the participants was that they did not make distinctions between students with and without disabilities. They offered options to any student that needed a change, even if they did not have any needs derived from disabilities, such as foreign Erasmus students.

When I have Erasmus students and there is a long text to read, I give them extra time. In some cases, I just give them a summarised version of the text (faculty 7).

All the faculty members showed a good predisposition to make this type of adjustments, and considered that, far from being a privilege treatment, the changes could have a positive impact on all students, and not only on those with disabilities.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Discovering the perspective of faculty members toward their pedagogical training and disability training, the relationship they have with their students and the adjustments they make in their subjects allows to advance the research about the faculty in higher education and their attention to diversity. Most authors have focused their work about disability and HE on analysing the influence of making or not making reasonable adjustments on the quality of the learning process and the difficulties encountered by students with disabilities (Vickerman and Blundell 2010; Yssel, Pak, and Beilke 2016), and many of these authors have reported on the lack of faculty training in this respect (Moriña and Orozco 2020; Wray and Houghton 2018). Furthermore, other studies have highlighted the importance of analysing the faculty-students relationship in higher education, since there is data in the rest of educational stages, and not many studies have explored the university context (Asikainen, Blomster, and Virtanen 2018).

Inclusive educational actions, as well as positive attitudes toward disabilities, are often considered as characteristic of Educational Science faculty members (Vasek 2005). University teaching has been characterised by a traditional teaching methodology, where faculty members use expository strategies. It is a widespread idea that these educational approaches are commonly used in areas of Experimental Sciences, Health Sciences, and Social Sciences such as economics, business or law (Moriña, Lopez-gavira, and Molina 2014; Frank, McLinden, and Douglas 2020; Moriña and Perera 2018). Other studies have shown that there are faculty members who do not comply with this statement of traditional teaching methodologies and develop innovative practices and active and inclusive methods in this type of degree (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2019; Savvidou 2011). Despite the small number of studies focused on disability and the area of Social Sciences and Law (Kim and Sellmaier 2019), the present study shows that faculty members of this area also carry out inclusive practices, driven by their personal motivation and their experience with students with disabilities.

Firstly, some participants of this study usually enrol in training programmes following their own motivation to improve the academic experience of their students. This type of training depends on the faculty member's interest in improving their teaching practice, regardless of the area of knowledge in which they work. As in many other countries, pedagogical training of faculty members in Spain is voluntary, and such training is not required to enter the professional university teaching career. Therefore, it is neither required nor sufficiently recognised in the faculty access and promotion processes. However, in Norway, United Kingdom and Sweden, for example, pedagogical training is compulsory for all faculty members (Gunersel and Etienne 2014).

The main requirement to become a faculty member at a Spanish university is to study for a doctorate. Obtaining a doctoral degree is based on the preparation of a doctoral thesis, a scientific investigation. These studies prepare for future work as a researcher by acquiring the necessary research skills. However, no pedagogical training is required to teach. Therefore, the novice faculty has extensive training in research and in the subject he or she teaches, but has not received training in how to teach. On the other hand, in the processes of faculty members promotion, research is given greater importance than teaching experience. As a result, faculty members often spend more time and effort on research than on participation in training programmes to improve their teaching skills. Although all universities have such programmes for faculty training, participation is voluntary. If we focus specifically on the area of disability and inclusive education, the number of training courses on this topic offered in Spanish universities is significantly lower than the number of those focused on areas such as general education, technology, languages or data analysis strategies (Carballo 2016). Thus, university policies should promote actions in order to improve training systems, since faculty training has a direct impact on the learning of all students.

Despite the small number of disability training programmes offered and limitations such as lack of time for training, the participants in this study perceive it as an important element, since it helps them to properly attend to all their students (Kendall 2017). This gives evidence that faculty members in areas other than Educational Sciences are also interested in and strive to improve the learning of their students, including those with disabilities. In this sense, it has been demonstrated that training experiences provide faculty members with knowledge, skills, methodological strategies and greater sensitivity to attend to diversity (Sowers and Smith 2004). In this context, the learning of students with disabilities, and the quality of their academic experience, continues to depend on the goodwill of each faculty member, as training is not mandatory. In this case, the participants who do not have any training have learned through other ways than training courses, which shows that there are other types of training and professional development that can contribute to the acquisition of knowledge. However, faculty members value these courses and programmes. Those with training value them because of what they learned in them and because they helped them to build a more inclusive teaching repertoire, and those without training recognise the limitations that they had on some occasions because they did not have training, recommending other faculty members to participate in this kind of experiences. In view of the results obtained in our study, it can be concluded that pedagogical faculty training is an important aspect for the inclusion of all students, although it is still a pending task in Spain (Carballo, Morgado, and Cortés-Vega 2019).

Apart from participating in courses, the participants of this study value other types of professional development positively, such as collaboration between faculty members. Working with other faculty members allows them to learn from other experiences and face difficulties as a group. Moreover, the disability support services of universities,

considered by students as helpful tools for academic improvement (Hanafin et al. 2007), are another fundamental source of information and support for faculty members to attend to students with disabilities.

Another key factor for the success of university students is their relationship with the faculty. A common characteristic of the participants of our study is that they establish a close relationship with their students, showing respect, empathy and, especially, availability, with a good attitude toward their needs. Taking the opinions of the students into account and negotiating with them how the subject will be taught is fundamental to maintain their motivation and involvement (Beynon and Dossa 2003). For instance, Stein (2014) identified greater academic success in students with faculty members who cared about their well-being and showed good attitudes toward them.

At the methodological level, choosing an active methodology fosters the communication and participation of the student in the classroom, thus achieving a better relationship both with the faculty member and among the students (Dwyer 2017). We must highlight the value of the effort that the participants made to use active and participatory teaching methods and to establish a good relationship with the students, considering that many of the faculty members had a large number of students in their classrooms.

Research on faculty-students relationship in higher education is still relatively scarce (Asikainen, Blomster, and Virtanen 2018). However, it can be asserted that the faculty-students relationship influences the quality of the university experience, and it can also serve as an indicator of student integration (Snijders et al. 2018). Better interactions reduce the probability that students drop out of university, since they generate a sense of belonging (Dwyer 2017; Moriña 2019). Regarding students with disabilities, Thomas (2016) pointed out that those students who feel that they do not have a good relationship with their faculty members are more likely to abandon their university studies.

Finally, we conclude that inclusive pedagogy comprises all students. The key aspects of inclusive teaching, such as faculty training, good student-faculty relationship and participatory teaching methods are beneficial for everyone. Offering multiple options to ensure the participation of every student minimises the need to design different work strategies for a specific student (Kumar and Wideman 2014). Despite all this, in some cases it is necessary to make reasonable adjustments for some students in a specific manner. However, faculty members highlight that offering reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities can benefit all students (Gorard et al. 2006).

Although a large number of studies point out the lack of training of faculty members and their poor willingness to make adjustments for students with disabilities (Elbeheri et al. 2018; Weis, Dean, and Osborne 2016), our study demonstrates that, in the area of Social Sciences and Law, there are faculty members who carry out an inclusive pedagogy based on offering each student what they need. The adjustments that the participants of this study make consist in adapting methods and resources to offer alternatives to the students, in order for these to achieve greater participation and academic success (Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011). Offering different alternatives to transmit the information and to allow students to express themselves ensures the participation of everyone (Palmer and Caputo 2003). Similarly, designing flexible programmes is a fundamental premise in approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The use of this educational approach is increasingly popular in countries such as the United States and Canada. This way of teaching is based on three fundamental principles, which consist in offering multiple forms of: information, action and expression, and engagement (CAST 2018). By following these principles, UDL offers more opportunities for students with disabilities to express themselves, to motivate themselves, and to develop academically, while




achieving the same effects on other students by taking into account diversity in general (Davies, Schelly, and Spooner 2013). To achieve this, it is necessary to have a proactive attitude instead of a reactive attitude toward the possible needs of students (Bunbury 2018).

The conclusions of this work can serve as a source of reflection to initiate an analytical process with the aim of moving toward a more inclusive university. It is necessary to reflect upon which type of training is offered by universities to their faculty members, the voluntary nature of such training and whether it responds to the real needs of faculty members and students. In addition, this article aims to raise awareness among faculty members about the need to establish and maintain a proper relationship with their students, since it is a critical aspect for their academic success and for the quality of universities. Therefore, this aspect must also be of interest regarding university policies (Thomas 2016). Moreover, by showing the experiences of the participants, we want to demonstrate that traditional approaches, such as special education, must be left behind to give room to strategies based on inclusive education and UDL.

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