

Barriers to learning and participation in inclusive education**Barreras para el aprendizaje y la participación en educación inclusiva****Barreiras para a aprendizagem e a participação na educação inclusiva**

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze barriers to learning and participation in inclusive education contexts, identifying their types, causes, and potential solutions. The methodology was developed under a qualitative descriptive approach, based on a documentary review of relevant scientific sources. Studies addressing physical, pedagogical, social, cultural, and technological barriers were analyzed through a content analysis process. The results showed that these barriers persist in educational systems due to structural limitations, traditional teaching practices, social inequalities, and insufficient implementation of inclusive policies. Furthermore, exclusion and limited participation were found to disproportionately affect vulnerable groups. The conclusions highlight that overcoming these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that integrates policies, practices, and institutional culture. Strategies such as curriculum adaptation and Universal Design for Learning were identified as essential, along with strengthening teacher training and educational management to ensure inclusive and equitable education.

Keywords: Educational barriers; Inclusive education; Participation; Equity

Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar las barreras para el aprendizaje y la participación en contextos de educación inclusiva, identificando sus tipos, causas y posibles estrategias de solución. La metodología se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cualitativo de tipo descriptivo, basado en la revisión documental de fuentes científicas relevantes. Se analizaron estudios relacionados con barreras físicas, pedagógicas, sociales, culturales y tecnológicas, aplicando un proceso de análisis de contenido para la organización de la información. Los resultados evidenciaron que las barreras persisten en los sistemas educativos debido a limitaciones estructurales, prácticas pedagógicas tradicionales, desigualdades sociales y deficiencias en la implementación de políticas inclusivas. Asimismo, se identificó que la exclusión y la baja participación afectan principalmente a grupos en situación de vulnerabilidad. Las conclusiones destacan que la eliminación de estas barreras requiere un enfoque integral que articule políticas, prácticas y cultura institucional. Se reconoce la

importancia de estrategias como la adaptación curricular y el diseño universal para el aprendizaje, así como el fortalecimiento de la formación docente y la gestión educativa para garantizar una educación inclusiva y equitativa.

Palabras clave: Barreras educativas; Inclusión educativa; Participación; Equidad

Resumo

O presente estudo teve como objetivo analisar as barreiras para a aprendizagem e a participação em contextos de educação inclusiva, identificando seus tipos, causas e possíveis estratégias de solução. A metodologia foi desenvolvida sob uma abordagem qualitativa descritiva, baseada na revisão documental de fontes científicas relevantes. Foram analisados estudos relacionados a barreiras físicas, pedagógicas, sociais, culturais e tecnológicas, utilizando um processo de análise de conteúdo para organizar a informação. Os resultados evidenciaram que essas barreiras persistem nos sistemas educacionais devido a limitações estruturais, práticas pedagógicas tradicionais, desigualdades sociais e deficiências na implementação de políticas inclusivas. Além disso, observou-se que a exclusão e a baixa participação afetam principalmente grupos em situação de vulnerabilidade. As conclusões destacam que a eliminação dessas barreiras requer uma abordagem integral que articule políticas, práticas e cultura institucional. Reconhece-se a importância de estratégias como a adaptação curricular e o Desenho Universal para a Aprendizagem, bem como o fortalecimento da formação docente e da gestão educacional para garantir uma educação inclusiva e equitativa.

Palavras-chave: Barreiras educacionais; Educação inclusiva; Participação; Equidade

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a fundamental principle in contemporary educational systems, aimed at ensuring access, retention, and success for all students, regardless of their individual characteristics. In this context, diversity is no longer perceived as a problem but rather as an opportunity for pedagogical and social enrichment. Several authors emphasize that inclusion involves transforming educational practices, curricula, and institutional cultures to respond to the needs of all learners (Murillo Calle et al., 2025). However, this process faces multiple challenges that limit its effective implementation at different educational levels.

From a rights-based perspective, inclusive education is grounded in guaranteeing equitable access to quality learning opportunities, recognizing education as a universal human right. In this regard, a holistic vision is promoted, integrating social, cultural, and emotional aspects of student development, thereby overcoming reductionist perspectives focused solely on academic performance (Vélez et al., 2024). This approach requires the removal of structural and attitudinal barriers that have historically generated exclusion, particularly among vulnerable populations.

The active participation of students in educational processes constitutes a key element in achieving inclusive education. It is not merely a matter of ensuring physical presence in the classroom but also of fostering meaningful engagement in learning activities and school life. Within this framework, participation is closely linked to citizenship building and the development of social competencies, reinforcing the need to create democratic and inclusive educational environments (Llanos Chuquipa, 2023). Nevertheless, multiple factors continue to limit the full participation of all students.

Despite the normative and discursive advances regarding inclusion, various barriers persist within educational systems that hinder learning and participation. These barriers may manifest in the form of stereotypes, prejudices, or discriminatory practices affecting certain groups, such as persons with disabilities. For example, negative attitudes toward the Deaf community

and sign language reveal the persistence of cultural barriers that hinder effective inclusion (Vázquez-Villar, 2025). These limitations affect not only academic performance but also students' emotional and social well-being.

Likewise, the exclusion of vulnerable groups remains a significant issue within the educational sphere. Factors such as poverty, disability, gender, and ethnic background significantly influence opportunities for access to and retention in educational systems. In this regard, Raccanello et al. (2024) point out that structural inequalities reproduce dynamics of exclusion that disproportionately affect certain groups, highlighting the need to implement more effective and context-sensitive inclusive policies.

At the institutional level, limitations in the implementation of inclusive public policies constitute another significant barrier. The lack of resources, insufficient teacher training in inclusion, and weak coordination among the various actors within the educational system hinder the application of strategies that promote equity. According to Abdon Herrera et al. (2026), it is necessary to strengthen public policies through a comprehensive approach that addresses the specific needs of vulnerable groups, promoting greater interinstitutional coordination and an adequate allocation of resources.

In this context, it is essential to analyze barriers to learning and participation from a comprehensive perspective that considers both individual and contextual factors. Identifying these barriers makes it possible to understand the dynamics of exclusion present in educational settings and to design strategies aimed at their elimination. Furthermore, the involvement of families and communities in educational processes emerges as a key element in strengthening inclusion, as it contributes to creating supportive environments that foster the holistic development of students (Espinoza-Freire, 2022).

Similarly, inclusive education in the Ecuadorian context has been examined in various studies, which reveal important advances as well as persistent challenges in its implementation. Serrano-Polo et al. (2019) highlight the need to strengthen inclusive pedagogical practices and promote a school culture based on respect for diversity. This implies not only regulatory changes but also profound transformations in the conceptions and attitudes of educational stakeholders.

Based on the foregoing, the objective of this study is to analyze barriers to learning and participation in educational contexts, identify their main types and causes, and propose strategies aimed at overcoming them. Through a documentary review, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon and to the development of more inclusive and equitable educational practices that guarantee the right to education for all students.

Methodology

This study was conducted under a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at understanding barriers to learning and participation within inclusive educational contexts. This approach enabled an in-depth analysis of the characteristics, causes, and manifestations of such barriers from an interpretive perspective, prioritizing the understanding of the phenomenon within its natural context. According to Cajide Val (2024), qualitative research is particularly appropriate when exploring complex realities that cannot be reduced to quantifiable variables. In this sense, an analytical stance was adopted to facilitate the identification of key elements related to inclusive education.

The methodological design was based on descriptive research with a qualitative approach, which made it possible to characterize the main barriers present in educational environments and their impact on student participation. According to Valle et al. (2022), this type of research focuses on detailing the properties and characteristics of a phenomenon without attempting to establish causal relationships, making it suitable for documentary review studies.

Consequently, the collected information was organized and systematized in order to build a comprehensive understanding of educational barriers from different theoretical perspectives.

The research technique employed was documentary review, which consisted of searching, selecting, and analyzing relevant scientific sources related to inclusive education and barriers to learning. For this purpose, recognized academic databases were consulted, applying inclusion criteria such as thematic relevance, timeliness, and scientific rigor. The use of appropriate information search strategies helps ensure the quality and validity of the reviewed studies. Furthermore, a content analysis process was conducted to identify emerging categories, facilitating the organization of information according to the proposed objectives.

Regarding data analysis, principles of grounded theory were adopted, allowing the generation of interpretive categories from the collected information. This approach facilitated the construction of meanings and the identification of common patterns in the analyzed literature without relying on preconceived hypotheses. As a result, a deeper understanding of educational barriers and their implications for inclusion was achieved. Additionally, contributions from social research in education were considered to contextualize the findings within the Ecuadorian reality (Guamán Gómez et al., 2019).

Finally, the study was conducted under fundamental ethical principles that ensured the transparency and integrity of the research process. Copyright was respected through the proper citation of consulted sources, and the responsible use of collected information was guaranteed. The importance of ethics in scientific research was recognized as an essential element for the credibility and validity of scholarly studies. In this regard, academic rigor was maintained throughout all stages of the research process, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of inclusive education.

Development

Types of Barriers to Learning

Barriers to learning constitute a set of factors that limit or hinder students' access, retention, and progress within the educational system. These barriers are not exclusively centered on students' individual characteristics but rather emerge from the interaction between learners and their educational context. In this regard, inclusive education emphasizes the need to identify and eliminate such barriers in order to guarantee equitable learning opportunities. Various studies agree that these limitations can be classified as physical, pedagogical, social, and cultural, thereby highlighting their complexity and multidimensional nature (Pinzón-Tapias & Millán-Báez, 2025).

Physical and infrastructural barriers refer to environmental limitations that hinder students' access and mobility within educational settings. These include the absence of ramps, inadequate signage, non-adapted furniture, and architectural conditions that fail to consider functional diversity. According to Morán et al. (2022), these barriers primarily affect students with disabilities, restricting their autonomy and participation in school activities. Furthermore, the lack of physical adaptations reflects insufficient institutional planning oriented toward inclusion, thereby reinforcing structural exclusion within educational environments.

On the other hand, pedagogical barriers are associated with teaching practices, instructional methods, and assessment strategies that fail to consider student diversity. These barriers are manifested through rigid curricula, traditional methodologies, and the absence of instructional adaptations that respond to different learning styles and paces. Herrera-Rodríguez and Guevara-Fernández (2022) emphasize that psycho-pedagogical assessment should focus on identifying these barriers rather than classifying students according to their difficulties. Likewise, Pinzón-Tapias and Millán-Báez (2025) argue that transforming pedagogical practices is essential for promoting inclusive educational environments.

Social and cultural barriers represent another key component in understanding educational exclusion. These barriers are related to prejudices, stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, and social norms that limit the participation of certain groups. Macioce (2022) emphasizes that vulnerable groups often face marginalization processes that affect their access to fundamental rights, including education. In the educational field, Comparán Franco (2025) identifies that both students with disabilities and those without disabilities may experience exclusion due to social dynamics that perpetuate inequalities and hinder inclusive coexistence.

Barriers to Educational Participation

Educational participation involves students' active engagement in teaching and learning processes, as well as in school life in general. However, this participation may be limited by various barriers that extend beyond the academic sphere into social, technological, and institutional dimensions. In this sense, inclusive education requires not only guaranteeing access to education but also promoting the full and meaningful participation of all students. Identifying these barriers is essential for designing strategies that foster equity and educational justice.

One of the main barriers to participation is social exclusion, which manifests itself through the lack of integration among students, families, and the educational community. Lorence et al. (2024) indicate that limited collaboration between families and schools constitutes a significant obstacle to students' holistic development. Similarly, Cegarra et al. (2023) demonstrate that difficulties in interpersonal relationships affect the participation of persons with disabilities, limiting their inclusion in educational and social settings. These dynamics reinforce the need to strengthen community ties that promote inclusive educational environments.

In the current context, technological limitations have also become a significant barrier to educational participation. The digital divide, unequal access to devices, and insufficient technological competencies hinder the effective use of digital resources in learning processes. Alcivar et al. (2024) highlight that students with disabilities face greater challenges in accessing educational technologies, increasing their risk of exclusion. Likewise, Morales Romero et al. (2023) emphasize that digital transformation in education presents limitations that must be addressed to ensure equitable access to information and knowledge.

Another relevant barrier is the lack of effective inclusive policies that guide educational practice toward equity. Although regulatory frameworks promoting inclusion exist, their implementation is often limited by factors such as insufficient leadership, resources, and training. Salazar-Alcivar et al. (2025) highlight the role of educational leadership in implementing inclusive policies, noting that its absence hinders the consolidation of inclusive practices within educational institutions. Similarly, Reyes Paz (2022) identifies challenges in the application of educational regulations, evidencing the need to strengthen public policies from an inclusive perspective.

Strategies for Reducing Barriers

Overcoming barriers to learning and participation requires the implementation of comprehensive strategies involving all stakeholders within the educational system. These strategies should be aimed at transforming both pedagogical practices and the structural conditions that generate exclusion. Within this framework, inclusive education is conceived as a dynamic process that demands innovation, institutional commitment, and a diversity-centered perspective. Various studies have proposed alternatives that contribute to reducing barriers, highlighting curriculum adaptation, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the strengthening of inclusive policies.

Curriculum adaptation constitutes one of the most relevant strategies for addressing diversity in the classroom. It involves modifying content, methodologies, and assessment processes to respond to the specific needs of students. Diaz Anaya and Betancur Rojas (2022) point out

that curriculum adaptation helps mitigate learning barriers by promoting the active participation of all students. Likewise, Núñez (2024) highlights the role of educational leadership in implementing these adaptations, emphasizing the importance of management committed to inclusion.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has become an innovative approach aimed at eliminating barriers through educational planning. This model proposes offering multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to address student diversity. Yerkey (2022) argues that UDL enables the creation of learning environments that are accessible to all, reducing the need for subsequent adaptations. Along the same lines, Guanotuña Balladares et al. (2024) demonstrate that the implementation of UDL significantly contributes to educational inclusion by promoting flexible, student-centered pedagogical practices.

Furthermore, the development of professional competencies among teachers is essential for implementing inclusive strategies. Guamán-Gómez et al. (2017) highlight the importance of strengthening teacher training in competencies that enable educators to address classroom diversity effectively. This involves not only mastery of subject content but also the skills necessary to design inclusive pedagogical strategies and encourage the participation of all students. In this regard, continuous professional development becomes a key element in transforming educational practices.

Finally, strengthening inclusive education policies constitutes a fundamental pillar in reducing barriers. Inostroza and Pavez (2023) indicate that school leaders' beliefs and perceptions influence the implementation of inclusive policies, highlighting the importance of leadership in change processes. Likewise, Román-Soto (2022) proposes a constructivist perspective on inclusion, in which learning is built through interaction and diversity. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that eliminating barriers requires a systemic approach that integrates policies, practices, and educational cultures oriented toward inclusion.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that barriers to learning and participation continue to represent a significant obstacle to the consolidation of inclusive education. Consistent with Pinzón-Tapias and Millán-Báez (2025), it was found that these barriers do not originate solely from students' individual conditions but rather from their interaction with educational contexts that have not been designed to respond to diversity. This perspective reinforces the paradigm shift from a deficit-based model toward one focused on barrier removal, which is essential for advancing more equitable educational systems.

Regarding physical barriers, the results are consistent with those reported by Morán et al. (2022), who emphasize that limitations in educational infrastructure continue to restrict the access and participation of students with disabilities. Despite normative advances in inclusion, many school environments still fail to meet universal accessibility standards. This situation highlights a gap between policy and practice, suggesting the need to strengthen investment in infrastructure and ensure appropriate conditions for all students.

With respect to pedagogical barriers, the findings confirmed that traditional teaching practices remain a limiting factor for inclusion. As noted by Herrera-Rodríguez and Guevara-Fernández (2022), the persistence of rigid methodologies and standardized assessments hinders the ability to address diversity effectively. In this regard, the study's results reinforce the importance of transforming teaching practices toward more flexible and inclusive approaches. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need to reconsider the role of psycho-pedagogical assessment, directing it toward the identification of barriers rather than the categorization of students.

On the other hand, the social and cultural barriers identified in this study reflect the influence of prejudice and stereotypes within educational processes. In line with Macioce (2022), the

findings demonstrate that vulnerable groups continue to face exclusionary dynamics that limit their full participation. Comparán Franco (2025) also points out that these barriers do not exclusively affect students with disabilities but may impact diverse groups depending on social and cultural factors. This suggests the need to promote an educational culture grounded in respect, diversity, and inclusion.

Concerning barriers to participation, the findings underscore the relevance of social exclusion as a determining factor. Lorence et al. (2024) indicate that insufficient cooperation between families and schools limits students' holistic development, a finding that was corroborated in this study. Furthermore, Cegarra et al. (2023) demonstrate that difficulties in interpersonal relationships significantly affect the participation of persons with disabilities. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening collaboration among educational stakeholders in order to create more inclusive environments.

Technological limitations also emerged as a relevant barrier, particularly in contexts where access to digital resources is unequal. Consistent with Alcivar et al. (2024), it was found that students with disabilities face greater challenges in accessing educational technologies, increasing their risk of exclusion. Likewise, Morales Romero et al. (2023) warn that digital transformation in education has not been equitable, posing challenges for inclusion in virtual learning environments. This underscores the need to develop policies that guarantee equitable access to technology.

With regard to inclusive policies, the findings show that their implementation remains limited. As highlighted by Salazar-Alcivar et al. (2025), educational leadership plays a fundamental role in promoting inclusive practices. However, the lack of training and resources hinders the effective implementation of such policies. Reyes Paz (2022) also identifies challenges in the application of educational regulations, suggesting the need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for inclusive policies.

Finally, concerning strategies for reducing barriers, the findings indicate that curriculum adaptation and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) constitute effective tools for promoting inclusion. Diaz Anaya and Betancur Rojas (2022) emphasize that curriculum adaptation enables educators to respond to students' specific needs, while Yerkey (2022) highlights the potential of Universal Design for Learning to anticipate and eliminate barriers. Similarly, Guanotuña Balladares et al. (2024) argue that these strategies contribute to the creation of more accessible educational environments. Taken together, these findings reinforce the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates pedagogical practices, policies, and institutional culture oriented toward inclusion.

Conclusions

This study led to the conclusion that barriers to learning and participation constitute a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that continues to hinder the consolidation of truly inclusive education. These barriers are not limited to students' individual characteristics but emerge primarily from the structural, pedagogical, and sociocultural conditions of educational contexts. In this regard, inclusive education requires a shift in perspective that goes beyond viewing diversity as an exception and instead embraces it as a guiding principle of the educational system. Identifying such barriers is essential for designing relevant and sustainable interventions.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that physical, pedagogical, social, cultural, and technological barriers operate in an interconnected manner, generating exclusionary dynamics that affect students differently, particularly those in vulnerable situations. The persistence of traditional pedagogical practices, insufficient accessibility within educational environments, and limitations in the implementation of inclusive policies reflect a significant gap between

regulatory frameworks and educational reality. This highlights the need to strengthen teacher training, institutional management, and investment in resources that promote equity.

In addition, it was concluded that educational participation cannot be reduced to mere classroom attendance but rather involves students' active and meaningful engagement in learning processes and school life. Within this framework, collaboration among schools, families, and communities emerges as a key factor in promoting inclusive environments. Likewise, equitable access to technology has become an essential element in the current context, requiring policies that reduce the digital divide and guarantee opportunities for all students.

Finally, strategies such as curriculum adaptation and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) have been established as effective tools for reducing barriers by enabling flexible and proactive responses to diversity. However, their effectiveness depends on institutional commitment and the strengthening of inclusive public policies. Overall, the study's findings underscore the need to adopt a systemic and comprehensive approach that integrates policies, practices, and educational cultures aimed at guaranteeing the right to inclusive and quality education for all.

Study Limitations

This study presented some limitations inherent to its methodological design. As a qualitative investigation based on documentary review, the results depended on the availability, timeliness, and quality of the sources consulted, which may have restricted the scope of the analysis. Furthermore, the absence of fieldwork limited the possibility of contrasting the findings with direct empirical evidence from specific educational contexts. These conditions may affect the generalizability of the results; therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the theoretical and documentary framework in which they were developed.

Future Studies

Future research is encouraged to further examine barriers to learning and participation through empirical studies that include fieldwork across different educational levels and contexts. Likewise, it would be valuable to incorporate mixed-method approaches that complement qualitative understanding with quantitative evidence. Further studies should also explore the impact of specific strategies, such as Universal Design for Learning and curriculum adaptation, on improving educational inclusion. Finally, expanding the analysis to comparative contexts is recommended in order to identify best practices at both regional and international levels.

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Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the conduct and publication of this study. The research was carried out independently, without external funding that could have influenced the results or their interpretation. Furthermore, it is guaranteed that the content presented is original and adheres to the principles of academic integrity and scientific ethics.

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