The voice of university students with Down syndrome and intellectual disability in inclusive higher education degrees

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Objective

To present the findings of a research study that analysed the perceptions of graduate students of the Promentor Programme (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain), the first inclusive higher education programme in Spain.

Background – Inclusive programmes (ID)

CANADA
University of Alberta´s On Campus Programme

AUSTRALIA
Flinders University Up the Hill project

US
Think College Project

FINLAND
Kampus Programme

IRELAND
Trinity College of Dublin

ISRAEL
Bar – Ilan University

Promentor Programme (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid – Prodis Foundation)

Background – Models of University Inclusive programmes (ID) (Hart et al., 2006)

- Substantially separate model.
- Mixed/hybrid model.
- Inclusive individual support model.

METHOD - Design

Ex post facto prospective research designe

Qualitative approach – Focus Group

ETHICAL ISSUES: a) APA Ethics code; b) Inclusive research

Categories of analysis

1. QUALITY OF LIFE AND TRAINING
2. BARRIERS
3. SUPPORTS RECEIVED
4. LECTURER COMPETENCES

- Booth & Ainscow (2002)
- Echeita (2017)
- UNESCO (2008)
- Schalock & Verdugo (2002)
- AAIDD (2010)

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Research context. The Promentor Programme

- Certificate "Training for Labour Inclusion. Promentor Programme".
- Created in 2004.
- Two-year study programme (120 ECTS) at the UAM School of Teacher Training and Education.
- Each group has 15 students with ID.
- Mixed model.

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First year	Credits ECTS	Second year	Credits ECTS
Communication and customer service	5	Labour relations	5
English I	5	Information management and data treatment	5
Technology for Business I	5	Technology for business II	5
Social Value Development	5	Culture, society and development	5
Business organization	5	English II	5
Professional profiles	5	Emotional development II	5
Motor skills and their relation to sport I	5	Motor skills and their relation to sport II	5
Professional competences	5	Quality of life	5
Applied calculus	5	Practicum	15
Emotional development I	5	End-of-certificate paper	5
Foundations of learning	5		
Neurocognitive fundamentals of learning	5		
Total	60		60

Research participants

- Persons with ID (including DS) who had graduated from the Promentor Programme.

- The total number of participants was 14, split into two groups of n=7 each.

- Participants were divided into 2 discussion groups.

Variable	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Total
Number of participants	7	7	14
Gender			
-Male	2	4	6
-Female	5	3	8
Average age	32	29	31
Graduation class			
-1st to 3rd	1	2	3
-4th to 7th	4	3	7
-8th a 11th	2	2	4
Current occupation			
-Ordinary employment	4	4	8
-Sheltered employment	3	3	6

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Instrument

FOCUS GROUP:

- The research instrument was a list of guiding questions that was drafted according to Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (CAST 2011), including the following accessibility features:

(a) Questions offer an alternative formulation that follows criteria of accessible reading (Freyhoff et al. 1998);

(b) Pictograms are included in order to facilitate visual access to the content;

And (c) a glossary is included in order to clarify any necessary terms. These features took into account the participant characteristics and their diverse abilities and support needs.
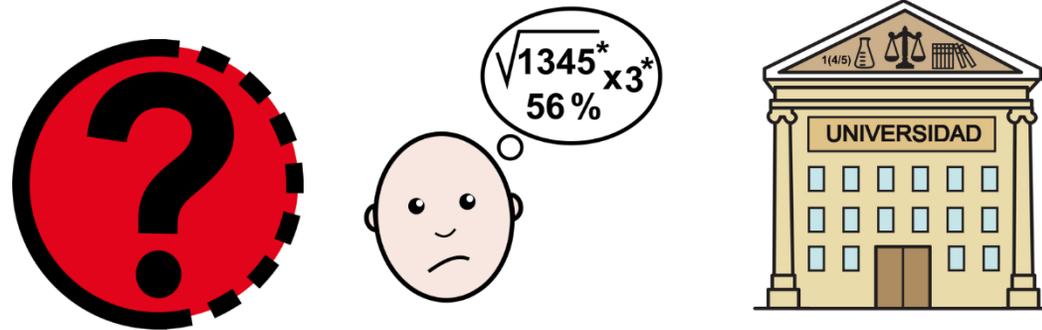
CODIFICATION:

- MAXQDA 18.

Option 1

What were the main <u>barriers</u> you have encountered?

Option 2

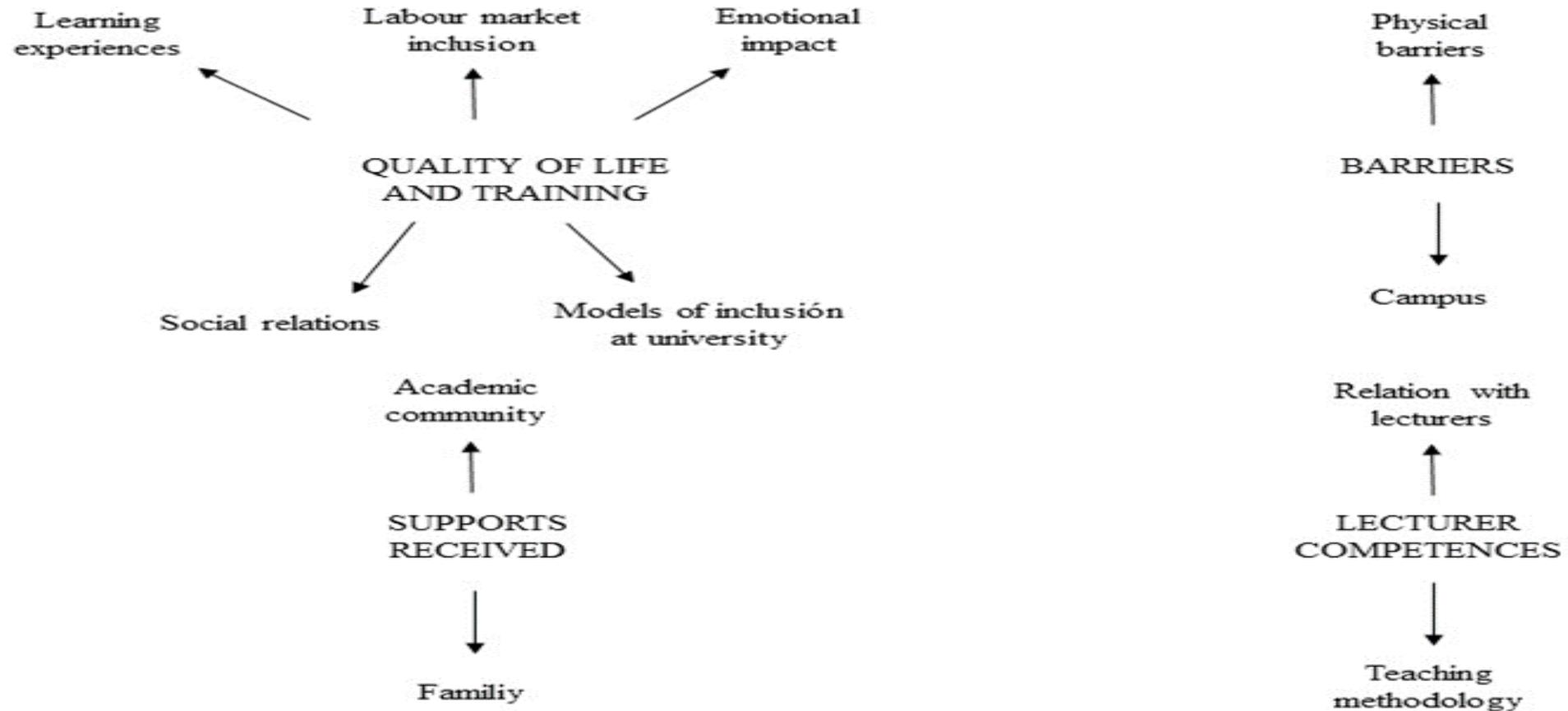*What was the hardest thing for you at the university?*

RESULTS – Contribution frecuency and percentage

Participant	Number of contributions	Percentage
1	58	26,50%
2	36	17,60%
3	34	16,60%
4	28	13,70%
5	9	4,40%
6	20	9,80%
7	19	9,30%
Group 1 Total	*204*	*100%*
8	51	15,60%
9	29	8,90%
10	72	22,10%
11	51	15,60%
12	41	12,60%
13	38	11,70%
14	44	13,50%
Group 2 Total	*326*	*100%*

Generated theory

Learning experiences ← QUALITY OF LIFE AND TRAINING → Labour market inclusion → Emotional impact

QUALITY OF LIFE AND TRAINING → Social relations / Models of inclusión at university

Academic community ← SUPPORTS RECEIVED → Familiy

Physical barriers ← BARRIERS → Campus

Relation with lecturers ← LECTURER COMPETENCES → Teaching methodology

Quality of life and training – Emotional impact

- There was a sense of pride attached to starting higher education: "I was (for my grandparents) the first grandchild attending college" (p. 7).

- Graduation day: "I believe that the project's professionals are the ones who have the best time, and are proud of us" (p. 10).

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Quality of life and training – Learning experiences

- Emotional competence, personal maturity, social skills or the development of moral values.

- "Learn the meaning of empathy, see the common good and not just the good of one single person" (p. 4).

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Quality of life and training – Social relations

- The improvement of social relations is one of the main benefits of college education.

- "In those two years at college I felt valued by lecturers, classmates and other students without disability that studied other courses (…) Playing basketball made me get along with them" (p. 8) .

- "I signed up for a voluntary work experience with seniors and really enjoyed the experience because they tell you stories about the time when they were kids" (p. 11).

Quality of life and training – Models of inclusion at college

- Several participants chose the mixed model.
- "(It's easier to learn) with teachers who have been trained to teach students with disabilities. But this doesn't mean that the modules are less demanding than those for non-ID students" (p. 1).

Quality of life and training – Labour and market inclusion

- One of the key modules in the programme is the Practicum, because of its role in preparing students for entry to the labour market.

- Moreover, participants also claimed that one of the most important contributions of college education is "getting a job" (p. 11).

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Barriers - Campus

- Need to improve cognitive accessibility.

- "It felt like a laberynth" (p. 3).

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Barriers – Physical barriers

- The physical accessibility of the university buildings where they studied was also a recurring concern for participants.

- "(In his group) there were two students with impaired physical mobility; They were able to graduate, they could hardly believe it (given he obstacles they had to face)" (p. 13).

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Supports received – Academic community

- The code with the highest saturation.
- When asked whether they had felt treated by the university differently than other students, the unanimous answer was no.
- "They have seen me just as I am" (p. 13).
- "Obviously it was easier at university. People are much more mature at university than in high school" (p. 2).

Supports received – Family

- Family is connected to an improvement in the students' self-concept, and hence self-esteem.
- "The majority of persons like us are inspired by the idea of studying at university because they want to be just like their siblings, have their same opportunities" (p. 10).

Lecturer competences – Relation with lecturers

- The two groups' collective discourse described a positive relationship with the lecturers of the Promentor Programme.

- "The lecturers accepted me just as I am" (p. 12).

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Lecturer competences – Teaching methodology

- Lecturer methodology was generally perceived as an enabling factor of learning, especially in those classes where students with and without ID learned together about cross-curricular topics such as emotional competence.

- Participants valued student-centred methodologies.

- Sometimes, teaching methodology was mentioned as a barrier to learning, especially whenever they were rigid, monotonous or lecturer-centred.

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DISCUSSION – Inclusive design

- Having 4 students with ID participating in the research team helped to ensure the rigour and effectiveness of the research process.

- The experience of this study is consistent with other research that has attempted to utilize inclusive research designs by incorporating persons with their ID in their respective research groups (Hall 2013; Salmon, García Iriarte and Burns 2017; O´Bren, McConkey and García Iriarte 2014).

DISCUSSION – Discourse

1) Firstly, this study confirms that, from the student´s perspective, university environments are adequate for the education of students with ID at the postsecondary stage.

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DISCUSSION – Discourse

2) As the programmes are implemented, university lecturers should receive training in inclusive education, so that they may utilize teaching methodologies that foster inclusion in their classrooms.

DISCUSSION – Discourse

3) Finally, higher education institutions must take into account the voice of vulnerable groups of students in order to effectively eliminate existing barriers.

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LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Specific university context and programme

Different inclusion models

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