

La educación inclusiva: una necesidad en los educandos con discapacidad intelectual en la zona rural

The inclusive educational: research need of children intellectual disability in the rural areas

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RESUMEN: El presente trabajo es el resultado de una investigación centrada en la necesidad de presentar acciones intencionadas hacia una atención con calidad con la participación de agentes, agencias y con la familia, que intervienen en el proceso educativo. Se propone una estrategia didáctica dirigida al docente del nivel primario de la zona rural a partir de la preparación teórica-metodológica que se posea, sistematizadas mediante las consideraciones teóricas e históricas que la sustentan que permitan incorporar a dichos educandos a una vida activa más independiente y con la disposición de responder con calidad a las exigencias de la sociedad cubana.

Palabras clave: Educación inclusiva; Discapacidad intelectual; Nivel primario; Docente; Familia

ABSTRACT: This paper is the result of research focused on the need to implement intentional actions aimed at providing quality attention, with the participation of agents, agencies, and the family involved in the educational process. A didactic strategy is proposed for primary-level teachers in rural areas, based on their existing theoretical-methodological preparation. This strategy is systematized through the theoretical and historical considerations that support it, enabling the incorporation of these students into a more independent and active life, while preparing them to respond effectively to the demands of Cuban society.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Intellectual disability; Primary education; Teacher; Family

Introduction

Cuban education aims at the comprehensive and harmonious development of the personality of all students in accordance with the norms and principles of society. For this reason, there is a need to promote and propose, from the very activities carried out by the teacher, actions to provide attention to students with intellectual disabilities who are included in primary schools in rural areas. In other

words, educators must work to achieve the conditions that allow us to meet the genuinely Cuban requirements, focused on the present and on the multiplicity of actions aimed at the improvement of the National Education System.

There are reasons for incorporating into our educational practices all the actions necessary to achieve higher levels of quality. From that moment on, teachers who work with included students must play a fundamental role in their educational development, and it is essential to find a personal balance together with the family and the community. This is necessary to be consistent in carrying out actions for educational attention within an inclusive context for students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities.

Consequently, teachers working in primary schools play a fundamental social role in shaping new generations. Inclusion, as a conceptual and essential category, has been widely used in the field of pedagogical research. It currently faces new challenges regarding the knowledge, skills, and values of teaching staff, and represents a priority concern for the country at all levels of education.

Regarding the role of the teacher in the current context of the Third Improvement Process, they function as the essential link between all the elements involved in the educational process. Particularly in rural areas, their role consists of guiding, improving, and providing quality attention, as well as fostering social relationships both inside and outside the educational institution.

To achieve this purpose, it is essential to change their way of thinking about inclusive attention, with a view to making changes in their practice. This involves creatively applying the knowledge and skills acquired, taking into account the specific contextual situation in which their students develop — especially those who present specific conditions, with emphasis on those with intellectual disabilities who are in inclusive settings in rural primary schools. This can have a significant impact on their learning and their interaction with the social environment.

The Ministry of Education currently focuses its work objectives on contributing to the harmonious and comprehensive development of the student through the acquisition and consolidation of knowledge and skills. It is expected that this will be reflected in progressively higher levels of knowledge, which must be expressed through participation, behavior, habits, values, feelings, ways of thinking and acting, preparing them to face, with increasing independence, the demands of society.

All of this is achieved through the actions of the different factors in the educational environment, promoting their progress through the various educational levels, which allows for their gradual incorporation into society. However, today the focus is on attention to diversity — that is, on all expressions of difference — based on the improvement of the work that ensures the quality of education and the active participation of all those involved in this process.

According to the authors, in the field of primary education, inclusion implies an adaptation of the system to the students. This requires institutional, didactic, and curricular changes on the part of all socializing agents, particularly teachers, and the support of the family and the community. For these reasons, the Ministry of Education in Cuba has undertaken the Third Improvement Process.

In this regard, and to be consistent with the implementation of actions, a flexibilization of the curriculum in its programming at the school level is proposed, with emphasis on the so-called institutional curriculum. This highlights the establishment of strong links with various sectors of the community to enrich and improve the educational offer provided to the student. This is why the linkage between the school and the agencies and agents where the educational institution is located is emphasized.

Based on the above, the following research methods were applied: theoretical, empirical, and mathematical-statistical. The methodological foundation is based on the dialectical-materialist conception and the general philosophical method of the sciences, through which it is possible to reveal the causal, functional, and contradictory relationships related to the preparation of primary school teachers to provide attention to students with intellectual disabilities in rural areas.

This involves the proposal of a strategy for the preparation of teachers to attend to students with intellectual disabilities included in rural primary schools.

Development

In this topic that brings us together regarding inclusion, it is worth noting that it encompasses a set of ideas that guide pedagogy in a particular direction. However, in Cuba today it is addressed as a conception that recognizes the right of all to a quality education, regardless of their particularities or characteristics that condition the variabilities in their development. This promotes their social inclusion under conditions that allow them to enjoy the possibilities it offers and to contribute to its improvement.

Inclusion is a social process aimed at guaranteeing the full and equitable participation of all people, through the recognition of diversity and the elimination of barriers that limit access, permanence, and development in the different spheres of social life. It also guarantees not only access, but equal opportunities, respect, and active participation in all areas: educational, cultural, labor, and community.

On the other hand, an important aspect related to inclusive attention lies in some special educational needs in primary school, including the current concept of intellectual disability. Here, the family, as the first socio-educational institution, is responsible for forming values, norms of behavior, and principles according to their own moral patterns, living conditions, and lifestyles. However, the family and the school do not always have the necessary preparation to face certain stages of children's development. This is particularly relevant in cases of students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities who are in inclusive education settings at the primary level in rural areas.

Since then, other studies conducted on intellectual disability — which was formerly defined as mild mental retardation — have confirmed the influence of social factors on the intellectual functioning of individuals and the need to stimulate thinking and other processes. It is worth noting that they have also contributed works related to educational inclusion and intellectual disability in regular rural schools, notably: Brunot (2019), Arán (2021), and Fernández (2026). Furthermore, the systematization of contributions made by researchers such as Chivás (2022), Ramírez (2024), and De la Cruz (2025) confirms that they have contributed to methodological work and to the need to insist on the preparation of teachers to carry out the inclusion process, both in regular contexts and in rural schools, specifically aimed at teachers who work with included students with intellectual disabilities.

Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that this new approach to intellectual disability is more appropriate and less stigmatizing than the term “mental retardation.” It is conceived from a comprehensive and coherent perspective, taking into account the characteristics of students with this disability. This allows us to provide better pedagogical work for their social integration through all the activities carried out within the curriculum they receive.

For this reason, the term “intellectual disability” proposed by Zurita (1982) is adopted. They state that:

It is a relatively stable condition of development characterized by significant limitations of varying degrees in general intellectual activity and in the acquisition of conceptual, practical, and social learning, as revealed in particular modes of social performance. This requires supports of varying intensity throughout the lives of these individuals. It is also characterized by variability and differences in the expression of functioning, and its onset occurs before the age of 18. The degree of severity is related to the intensity of the supports the person needs. (p. 142)

They further assert that:

For a person to have an intellectual disability, it must be demonstrated that they have limitations in intellectual functioning, as well as limitations in adaptive behavior — that is, in the way they communicate, take care of themselves, perform household skills, use community resources and services, exercise self-determination, take care of their health and safety, apply academic learning, carry out daily activities, enjoy leisure time, and work. (p. 142)

In this way, students face difficulties in their learning process. Nevertheless, regardless of their characteristics, their potentialities are recognized and worked on within the teaching-learning process. Therefore, guidance and preparation for both teachers and families are needed for a better understanding of their situation and to help them find solutions to their problems. Educators must plan activities with concrete actions that allow them to detect, interpret, and channel motivational factors in their dynamic and dialectical relationship with the cognitive.

Although these authors have delved into teacher preparation through research that, in one way or another, contributes to the methodological enrichment of teaching staff in each educational institution, there remain theoretical and methodological elements that require further work. This is the case with inclusive attention for students with intellectual disabilities in rural areas, based on the activities of the institutional curriculum, in order to achieve a quality teaching-learning process.

Taking into account the above and the diagnosis reached through the application of research methods such as interviews, surveys, observation, and the results of tests applied by the Diagnosis and Guidance Center, which corroborate the presence of the issue and support the need for this study and the value of the proposed activities.

The study group consisted of three students, seven teachers, one cycle head, one principal, one methodologist, and two specialists from the school in the municipality where the research was conducted. The characterization of the students and the initial diagnosis revealed that, of the three students (representing 100%), two belong to extended families (66%). It was noted that only in one case do manifestations of overprotection persist, with continuous and excessive care that deprives the child of many necessary activities at this stage of life.

Similarly, the existence of a family showing indifference was observed, as they show no interest in the student's learning, along with irresponsibility in failing to fulfill their maternal duty.

Thus, based on the students' characteristics, it is necessary for teachers to carry out a series of actions to improve their development. These actions are grounded in theoretical and methodological foundations for educational attention to students in inclusive settings, contributing to achieving higher levels of learning development for a solid and independent performance.

In this sense, the teacher is also immersed in a complex training process. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a close link between a deep sensitivity toward the work they perform and the development of a well-organized preparation system that responds to the real needs of the students and enables them to successfully fulfill the task of educating.

For all these reasons, the teacher must be prepared, as their extraordinary role can leave a lasting mark on their students. Teacher preparation cannot overlook these considerations. "The teacher, as a trainer and evaluator of development, is in turn the subject of a complex training process in which methodological conceptions and practices are tested" (Castillo, 2004, p. 38).

For teacher preparation to be effective, it is necessary to meet a series of requirements. Among them, the organization of actions that allow the student to correct or compensate for their educational needs stands out. This stimulates their zone of proximal development, as Vygotsky (1982) emphasized:

In teaching, it is necessary to rely not so much on what the child has already achieved, but on the processes that are developing and those that are still in formation. The differentiation of what is accessible to the child occurs only in collaboration with adults. (p. 300)

This demonstrates, as Vygotsky (1982) stated:

the idea of expanding the zone of proximal development and expanding the child's potential possibilities... This idea, which demonstrates the dialectical nature of the development process... and the analysis of the effectiveness of the pedagogical process... (p. 300)

In this regard, every teacher, in their work and in the strategy they choose, must remember the importance of connecting their work with the educational influence they exert on their students. Only then will they achieve the desired results by fulfilling the purpose and objectives of the educational level, taking into account their social mandate.

It is important to consider that, consequently, the guidelines for the development of the student's personality go beyond the framework of the educational institution, and their influence must extend to other contexts, primarily the home and the community. Therefore, it is appropriate to analyze the peculiarities of teacher preparation to interact with students based on the characteristics they present and the problems affecting their development — particularly in the case of students with intellectual disabilities.

Furthermore, reference is made to the responsibility of each educational institution to ensure continuous preparation on topics related to inclusion, from theoretical and methodological aspects as pedagogical tools, so that teachers can attend to all students and achieve a truly inclusive education. This includes those with intellectual disabilities.

However, to fulfill what has been stated, it is necessary to propose well-structured work strategies. Based on what is expressed in the scientific literature, which addresses numerous definitions of strategy in the educational field, such as those by Suanes and Canet (2002) and Valle (2011), the following elements are analyzed for developing a strategy:

- They pursue defined objectives that can be classified according to their magnitude and scope as general and specific.
- They are organized and designed in stages.
- They are transformative and flexible, provoking changes in the problematic situation that originated them.
- They are concretized in specific areas of human knowledge; in this case, didactics.
- Their conception includes control and feedback mechanisms that enable the evaluation of results to be achieved in the short, medium, or long term.

In conclusion, it is evident that the strategy must retain its humanist, transformative, dynamic, and flexible value, oriented toward fulfilling the objectives for which it was designed, thereby achieving the expected result based on the proposed actions and the identified problem.

In Pedagogy, terms such as educational strategies, teaching strategies, learning strategies, pedagogical strategies, and methodological strategies are used interchangeably as a general system of influences with a transformative and developmental character. However, for the purposes of this research, it is contextualized as a didactic strategy because the work is directed toward varying the methods and procedures used by the actors in different environments: school, community, family, various agencies, and agents interacting in the educational field. The goal is to develop adequate motivation in students who present special educational needs and require support in the conditions in which they are inserted.

According to the Instituto Superior de Ciencias Pedagógicas (ICCP, 2016)

... Network work makes possible the use of various forms of methodological work, improvement, and research, through the creation of centers for human, didactic, organizational, methodological, and new technologies resources. These respond to the needs and demands of students, educators, families, and the community in order to fulfill the purpose and objectives set for each educational level. (p. 7)

The didactic strategy aimed at preparing primary-level teachers for the inclusive attention of students with intellectual disabilities in rural areas conceives this preparation from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint. The teacher is regarded as both subject and object in the assimilation of knowledge and methods for inclusive attention. This strategy seeks to ensure that primary school teachers in rural areas understand that inclusive attention is not separate from the pedagogical process.

The selected sample is intentional and consists of 7 teachers, 1 coordinator, and 1 psychopedagogue from the Carlos Ulloa Arauz Primary School in the municipality of Caimanera.

In the research, different theoretical, empirical, and mathematical-statistical methods were used, with the dialectical-materialist conception and the general philosophical method of science as the methodological foundation. This allows the revelation of causal, functional, and contradictory relationships concerning the preparation of primary-level teachers for inclusive attention to students with intellectual disabilities in rural areas.

In the results of classroom observations regarding the attention provided by teachers to students with intellectual disabilities in rural primary schools, the following was detected:

- Insufficient preparation of primary teachers to contribute to inclusive attention for students with intellectual disabilities.
- The different regulatory documents do not provide sufficient guidance for working with students with intellectual disabilities in rural primary schools.
- The use of methods, procedures, and support resources that promote the development of the different components of the inclusion process is insufficient.
- Limited use of differentiating activities in the planning of class systems to provide attention to students with intellectual disabilities.

The surveys applied to teachers confirmed insufficient knowledge about students with intellectual disabilities. In addition, the available bibliography is limited for providing adequate attention and contributing to their intellectual development.

The interviews conducted showed that:

The preparation teachers possess for inclusive attention to students with intellectual disabilities is insufficient, and they demonstrate limited knowledge regarding:

- The main characteristics manifested in students with intellectual disabilities.
- The different activities to be carried out from the teaching-learning process to contribute to the inclusive attention of students with intellectual disabilities.
- Elements related to inclusion.

The difficulties detected revealed the limited knowledge of primary school teachers about intellectual disability. This justifies the proposal of the strategy with the objective of:

Developing a proposal of actions for the preparation of teachers for inclusive attention to students with intellectual disabilities in rural primary schools.

Actions that teachers should carry out:

- Design activities in the scientific-methodological order for teacher preparation related to the characteristics of students with intellectual disabilities.
- Conduct an analysis of the needs of students with intellectual disabilities and involve all agents in this process.

- Organize workshops on inclusion issues, with emphasis on students with intellectual disabilities, with the participation of all agents involved in the process.
- Monitor the limitations of the inclusion process regarding intellectual disability by conducting a precise diagnosis so that the necessary actions can be included in the institutional project with the participation of all agents and educational agencies.
- Plan the different subject contents based on each student's skills in a dynamic and continuous manner, making appropriate use of available technological resources.
- Coordinate strategies with other specialists to contribute to the development of expression, both in teaching and extracurricular activities, so that the multifactorial, dynamic, and continuous nature is considered.
- Use ICTs in the development of activities to increase student motivation.
- Use didactic resources in activities such as games, songs, rhymes, accessible teaching aids, and participation techniques.
- At all times, use clear, precise, and simple instructions that are demonstrated and carried out by all those involved in the student's educational process.
- Raise awareness among other students about their classmates' situation, emphasizing respect and providing the necessary help through collaborative work that all factors interacting in this process must demand.

Actions that educational agents should carry out:

- Create varied and motivating activities to develop students' skills so that they feel included and not excluded from their group. These activities should be shared with other agencies and agents involved in the educational process.
- Inform the family about the attention given to students with intellectual disabilities so that, from the home, they contribute to their incorporation in all activities. This fulfills the dynamic and continuous character required.
- Systematically evaluate the progress of students and redesign activities according to new needs, which should be shared with all those involved in the process.

The proposed actions form part of the content to be worked on in the different teaching scenarios so that those attending to these students can refine their methods and choose the most appropriate procedures for them. 100% of the actions were socialized in the various meetings held as part of

the methodological work with teachers. This reaffirms the need to reorient, deepen, and systematize preparation work so that an equitable and quality inclusive education can be achieved. From that moment, there was acceptance by the participants regarding the presented actions, which served to enhance their preparation and demonstrate how they should be planned to surpass current pedagogical practice with students in inclusive settings. It was also emphasized how to strengthen them by involving educational agents and agencies, making all of this part of the process to be developed in the institutional educational project based on the diagnosis carried out.

Conclusions

The study conducted and the methods applied reveal difficulties in the preparation of primary-level teachers regarding their linkage with other agencies and agents to achieve inclusive attention for students with intellectual disabilities in rural primary schools. To address the identified problem in the area of inclusion, specific actions were presented with precise content. These actions are suggested for development with teachers and educational agents, with the aim of promoting quality education based on equity and equal opportunities, regardless of students' characteristics. The goal is to foster social inclusion and enable more independent performance.

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