



Analysis of public education policies, inclusion of people with disabilities
Análisis de políticas públicas de educación, inserción a personas con discapacidad

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze the public policies of education and insertion of people with disabilities in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador. The research was based on a mixed methodological approach. The results of the study show that, in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, structural barriers persist, such as insufficient technical and human resources in the District Inclusion Support Units (UDAI), lack of teacher training to apply curricular adaptations, failure to comply with the equivalence table of students with disabilities per classroom and the absence of specific scholarship programs, as well as a weak awareness of the double vulnerability faced by students with disabilities belonging to priority attention groups.

Descriptors: inclusive education; special needs education; persons with disabilities. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

Se presenta como objetivo analizar las políticas públicas de educación, inserción a personas con discapacidad en Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas de Ecuador. La investigación se fundamentó desde un trabajo metodológico mixto. Los resultados del estudio evidencian que, en Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, persisten barreras estructurales como la insuficiencia de recursos técnicos y humanos en las Unidades Distritales de Apoyo a la Inclusión (UDAI), la falta de capacitación docente para aplicar adaptaciones curriculares, el incumplimiento de la tabla de equivalencia de estudiantes con discapacidad por aula y la ausencia de programas específicos de becas, asimismo, se identificó una débil sensibilización sobre la doble vulneración que enfrentan estudiantes con discapacidad pertenecientes a grupos de atención prioritaria.

Descriptores: educación inclusiva; educación especial; personas con discapacidad. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).

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Research articles section



INTRODUCTION

Public policies on education and inclusion of persons with disabilities are a reflection of the commitment of states to guarantee fundamental rights, such as access to education, decent work and full participation in society. These policies, framed in principles of equality and non-discrimination, seek to eliminate the barriers that have historically excluded persons with disabilities from education and employment. However, their implementation faces challenges that go beyond regulations, as they involve cultural, economic and structural aspects that hinder their effectiveness, a documentary review is presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Public policies on education and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Article	Theme	Contributio	Geographical context
Arteaga-Mora & Andocilla-Cabrera (2019)	Educational inclusion for students with disabilities	Analyses the impact of public policies for educational inclusion in the Canton of Milagro between 2007-2017.	Canton Milagro, Ecuador
Arteaga-Moreira et al. (2023)	Sheltered employment for people with disabilities	Examines sheltered employment in the Ecuadorian private sector as a tool for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market.	Ecuador
Arteaga-Ureta et al. (2022)	Social inclusion and socio-economic challenges	It identifies the theoretical and socio-economic challenges faced by people with disabilities in the canton of Pedernales.	Canton Pedernales, Ecuador
Bravo-Gonzalez et al. (2020)	Inclusion in higher education	Analyses Ecuadorian legislation on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher education.	Ecuador
Carrasco-Lara (2024)	Ecuadorian public policies on inclusion	Detailed study of public policies in Ecuador related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.	Ecuador
Cornejo-Zaga et al. (2025)	Public policies on disability in Latin America	Comparative analysis of public policies on disability in different Latin American countries.	Latin America
Imacaña-Núñez & Villacrés-López (2022)	Inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market	Explore the progress and challenges in the labour inclusion of people with disabilities in Ecuador.	Ecuador
Irrazabal-Bohorquez et al. (2023)	Inclusion of hearing-impaired students in higher education	Analyses inclusive processes for students with hearing impairment in higher education institutions.	Ecuador



Meléndez-Rojas (2019)	Public policies and inclusive education in Latin America	Examines how public policies in Latin America ensure access to inclusive quality education for persons with disabilities.	Latin America
Ocampo (2018)	Inclusion and higher education in Ecuador	Case study on the inclusion of people with disabilities at the Catholic University of Santiago de Guayaquil.	Guayaquil, Ecuador
Subía-Cabrera & Proaño-Tamayo (2022)	Legal capacity of persons with disabilities	Analyses the legal capacity of persons with disabilities in Ecuador and its relation to human rights.	Ecuador
Zarpán-Romero (2022)	Public management strategy for inclusion	Proposes public management strategies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the municipality.	Ecuador

Source: Own elaboration.

In the field of education, the right to inclusive education is enshrined in international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which establishes the obligation of States to guarantee an inclusive education system at all levels. In Ecuador, studies such as Arteaga-Mora & Andocilla-Cabrera (2019) show progress in the implementation of public policies for inclusive education, especially at the basic level, but also highlight important limitations, such as the lack of resources, adequate infrastructure and teacher training. These shortcomings not only violate the right to education, but also perpetuate the exclusion of persons with disabilities, limiting their personal and professional development.

At the higher education level, Bravo-González, Córdova-Granda & Ramón-Merchán (2020) analyse how Ecuadorian legislation has incorporated provisions to guarantee the inclusion of students with disabilities in universities. However, in practice, structural and attitudinal barriers persist that make it difficult for these students to access and remain in higher education. This highlights the gap between the legal recognition of rights and their effective exercise, which constitutes a pending debt of the State with this population group.

In the labour sphere, the right to decent work without discrimination is also protected by the CRPD and by national regulations that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market. In Ecuador, sheltered employment, analysed by Arteaga-Moreira, Silva-Briones & Véliz-Vergara (2023), is presented as



a key tool to guarantee this right. However, the authors point out that, although there are legal incentives for hiring people with disabilities, the lack of awareness in the private sector and prejudices towards this population limit its effectiveness, which reflects the need for more comprehensive policies that not only focus on regulations, but also on cultural transformation and the creation of accessible and equitable work environments.

At the regional level, studies such as Meléndez-Rojas (2019) and Cornejo-Zaga et al. (2025) extend the analysis to the Latin American context, where public policies have sought to ensure inclusive quality education and promote labour market insertion. However, these studies also highlight that lack of funding, weak inter-institutional articulation and the absence of a comprehensive approach limit the scope of these policies. This highlights the need for a human rights approach that prioritises the active participation of persons with disabilities in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect them.

On the other hand, Arteaga-Ureta, Mera-Bravo & del-Jesús-Palacios-López's (2022) analysis of socio-economic challenges in the canton of Pedernales shows how structural barriers, such as poverty and lack of opportunities, aggravate the exclusion of persons with disabilities, being complemented by Zarpán-Romero (2022), who proposes public management strategies for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the municipality, highlighting the importance of adapting policies to the specific realities of each territory.

As a consequence of the above, the objective is to analyse the public policies on education and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas in Ecuador.

METHOD

The research was based on a mixed methodological approach, with a qualitative documentary phase and a quantitative phase based on data collection through the application of a survey, in this order:



The analysis of public policies related to inclusive education and care for students with disabilities was carried out through a qualitative-descriptive study, based on a documentary review of regulations, official reports and academic literature, as well as interviews with key actors in the education system in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador, including teachers, managers and families of students with disabilities.

On the other hand, in the quantitative phase, surveys were applied to assess the level of knowledge, perception and issues related to inclusive public policies, the results of which were organised in tables to identify patterns and areas for improvement.

The population surveyed in the quantitative phase consisted of 30 people, distributed as follows: 12 teachers from educational institutions, who provided key information on the implementation of inclusive public policies in the classroom; 10 parents or representatives of students with disabilities, who assessed the perception and knowledge of these policies from the family perspective; 5 officials from state entities, including staff from the District Inclusion Support Unit (UDAI) and the National Council for Disability Equality (CONADIS), responsible for the supervision and implementation of policies; and 3 school managers, who offered their vision on the management and supervision of policies in educational institutions.

Qualitative data were analysed using the legal content analysis technique, while quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

The results of the research are presented:

Table 2. public policy analysis.

Aspect analysed	Description	Issues Identified	Recommendations
District Support Unit for Inclusion (UDAI)	Provides specialised educational care for students with disabilities through a multidisciplinary team.	- Lack of sufficient technical staff. - Not all educational institutions have direct access to UDAI support. - There are only 2 UDAls in Santo Domingo.	- Increase the number of technical staff in the UDAls. - Extend the coverage of the UDAls to more educational institutions.
Curricular Adaptations	Adjustments to the educational curriculum according to the individual needs of students with disabilities.	- Limited implementation due to lack of adequate follow-up. - Lack of teacher training to implement curricular adaptations.	- Train teachers in the creation and implementation of curricular adaptations. - Continuous monitoring of students' progress.
Student Equivalent	Set a maximum number of students with disabilities per classroom (e.g. 1 visually impaired student equals 3 regular students).	- Not met due to overcrowded classrooms. - High student demand makes it difficult to provide adequate attention.	- Ensure compliance with the equivalency table. - Reduce the number of students per classroom to improve attention.
Issuance of Grants	Scholarships as a financial support mechanism for students with disabilities.	- There are no specific scholarships for students with disabilities in basic or secondary education. - The Constitutional Court ordered the creation of a scholarship programme in 2022, but it has not yet been implemented.	- Implement the scholarship programme ordered by the Constitutional Court. - Secure financial resources to fund scholarships.
Double Vulnerability	Being part of a priority attention group (children and adolescents) and having an additional condition (disability).	- Lack of recognition of the double vulnerability by educational institutions and families. - Insufficient priority attention to this group.	- Raise awareness among educational institutions and families about the double violation. - Guarantee the special protection established in article 35 of the Constitution.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 shows that public policies related to educational care for students with disabilities reveal important challenges and areas for improvement:

Firstly, the District Inclusion Support Unit (UDAI), although it plays a fundamental role in providing specialised care through multidisciplinary teams, faces significant limitations, such as insufficient technical staff and lack of coverage in all educational institutions. This is aggravated by the existence of only two UDAls in Santo Domingo, which restricts access to this service. To address these issues, it is



recommended to increase the number of technical staff and expand the coverage of UDAs to more educational institutions.

Regarding curricular adaptations, their implementation is limited due to lack of follow-up and insufficient teacher training. This directly affects the quality of inclusive education. Therefore, it is crucial to train teachers in the creation and implementation of these adaptations, as well as to establish a continuous monitoring system to evaluate students' progress.

The student equivalent, which regulates the maximum number of students with disabilities per classroom, is not met in practice due to overcrowding and high educational demand. This makes it difficult to provide adequate attention to students with disabilities. To solve this problem, it is necessary to ensure compliance with the equivalence table and to reduce the number of students per class.

In relation to the issuing of scholarships, there is an absence of specific programmes for students with disabilities in basic and secondary education, despite the fact that the Constitutional Court ordered the creation of a programme in 2022. The implementation of this programme and the allocation of financial resources are urgent measures to guarantee financial support for this group.

As for the problem of double vulnerability, which affects students who belong to priority attention groups and have a disability, it is not adequately recognised by educational institutions and families. This results in insufficient attention to this group. It is essential to raise awareness of this situation among institutions and families and to guarantee the special protection established in article 35 of the Constitution.



Table 3. Survey results.

Aspect	Results
Public Policy Knowledge	83.33% of respondents know what public policy is.
Knowledge about the UDAI	77.78% are aware of the existence of the UDAI.
Knowledge about Scholarships	Only 16.70% are aware of scholarship programmes for students with disabilities.
Perception of Scholarships	100% of interviewees consider scholarships to be an important mechanism for educational inclusion, but insufficient without an inclusive education system.
Compliance with the Equivalence Table	100% of the interviewees state that it is not met due to overcrowding in the classrooms.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3 presents the results of a survey assessing respondents' knowledge and perceptions of various aspects of public policy and educational inclusion:

Firstly, it is observed that the majority of respondents (83.33%) are aware of what public policies are, which reflects a general level of familiarity with this concept. However, knowledge about more specific aspects, such as the existence of the Comprehensive Care Units (UDAI), decreases slightly to 77.78%. On the other hand, only 16.70% of respondents are aware of scholarship programmes for students with disabilities, which shows a significant information gap in this area.

Despite this, 100% of the participants recognise the relevance of scholarships as a key mechanism to promote educational inclusion, although they consider that these are insufficient if they are not accompanied by an inclusive education system, all respondents agree that the Equivalency table is not met, pointing out that the main obstacle is the excess of students in the classrooms, which highlights an underlying challenge in the education system.

DISCUSSION

In the field of education, Arteaga-Mora & Andocilla-Cabrera (2019) highlight that public policies have enabled progress in the inclusion of students with disabilities at the basic level, but they also point out that the lack of resources, adequate infrastructure and teacher training continues to be a major obstacle. This finding is



in line with the results of this research, which show that the District Inclusion Support Unit (UDAI), in charge of providing specialised attention, faces significant limitations, such as insufficient technical staff and coverage restricted to only two units in Santo Domingo. These shortcomings make it difficult for students with disabilities to access the necessary services, perpetuating inequalities in the education system.

On the other hand, Bravo-González et al. (2020) analyse inclusion in higher education and conclude that, although Ecuadorian legislation has incorporated provisions to guarantee access for students with disabilities, structural and attitudinal barriers persist in practice. This contrast between the regulatory framework and its application is also reflected in the results of this research, where it was identified that curricular adaptations, which are fundamental to guarantee inclusive education, are not implemented effectively due to the lack of teacher training and adequate follow-up, the non-compliance with the equivalence table of students with disabilities per classroom, pointed out both in the literature and in the data obtained, highlights the need to strengthen educational management to guarantee adequate attention.

In the field of employment, Arteaga-Moreira et al. (2023) highlight that sheltered employment is a key tool for the inclusion of people with disabilities in Ecuador. However, the authors warn that the lack of awareness in the private sector and prejudices towards this population limit the effectiveness of these policies. This analysis coincides with the findings of this research, which show that, despite legal incentives, labour inclusion remains a challenge due to the lack of a comprehensive approach that addresses both regulatory and cultural aspects. . The creation of accessible and equitable work environments remains a pending task to guarantee the right to decent work for people with disabilities.

A critical aspect identified in this research is the issue of double vulnerability, which affects students who belong to priority groups and have a disability. On the other hand, Arteaga-Ureta et al. (2022) point out that structural barriers, such as poverty, aggravate the exclusion of people with disabilities, while Zarpán-Romero (2022)



proposes public management strategies that adapt policies to the specific realities of each territory. In this sense, the results of this research confirm that the lack of recognition of the double vulnerability by educational institutions and families results in insufficient attention to this group, which highlights the need to raise awareness among the actors involved and guarantee the special protection established in the Ecuadorian Constitution.

At the regional level, Meléndez-Rojas (2019) & Cornejo-Zaga et al. (2025) extend the analysis to the Latin American context, where public policies have sought to guarantee inclusive quality education and promote labour market insertion. However, both authors agree that lack of funding, weak inter-institutional articulation and the absence of a comprehensive approach limit the scope of these policies. This regional panorama reflects the challenges identified in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, where, despite regulatory advances, significant gaps persist in the implementation of inclusive public policies.

The results of the surveys conducted in this research reveal a significant gap in the knowledge and perception of public policies. Although the majority of respondents have a general knowledge of public policies, only a minority is aware of specific programmes, such as scholarships for students with disabilities, which coincides with Carrasco-Lara (2024), who highlights that the lack of dissemination and awareness of the rights and benefits available to persons with disabilities is a recurrent obstacle in the region.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that, in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, structural barriers persist, such as insufficient technical and human resources in the District Inclusion Support Units (UDAI), lack of teacher training to apply curricular adaptations, non-compliance with the equivalence table of students with disabilities per classroom and the absence of specific scholarship programmes, as well as a weak awareness of the double vulnerability faced by students with disabilities belonging to priority groups. These issues reflect a significant gap between the regulatory framework and its effective implementation, which underlines the need



to strengthen public management.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with persons or institutions involved in research.

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